Deadly symbiosis

When ghetto and prison meet and mesh

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Abstract

To explain the astounding over-representation of blacks behind bars that has driven mass imprisonment in the United States, one must break out of the 'crime-and-punishment' paradigm to reckon the extra-penological function of the criminal justice system as instrument for the management of dispossessed and dishonored groups. This article places the prison in the *historical sequence of 'peculiar institutions'* that have shouldered the task of defining and confining African Americans, alongside slavery, the Jim Crow regime, and the ghetto. The recent upsurge in black incarceration results from the crisis of the ghetto as device for caste control and the correlative need for a substitute apparatus for the containment of lower-class African Americans. In the post-Civil Rights era, the vestiges of the dark ghetto and the expanding prison system have become linked by a triple relationship of functional equivalency, structural homology, and cultural fusion, spawning a carceral continuum that entraps a population of younger black men rejected by the deregulated wage-labor market. This carceral mesh has been solidified by changes that have reshaped the urban 'Black Belt' of mid-century so as to *make the ghetto more like a prison* and undermined the 'inmate society' residing in U.S. penitentiaries in ways that *make the prison more like a ghetto*. The resulting symbiosis between ghetto and prison not only perpetuates the socioeconomic marginality and symbolic taint of the black subproletariat, feeding the runaway growth of the carceral system. It also plays a pivotal role in the remaking of 'race', the redefinition of the citizenry via the production of a racialized public culture of vilification of criminals, and the construction of a post-Keynesian state that replaces the social-welfare treatment of poverty by its penal management.

Key Words

ghetto • prison • inmate society • racial disproportionality • caste control • race making • post-Keynesian state • African Americans • United States

REFRAMING BLACK HYPER-INCARCERATION

Three brute facts stare the sociologist of racial inequality and imprisonment in America in the face as the new millenium dawns. First, since 1989 and for the first time in national history, African Americans make up a majority of those walking through prison gates every year. Indeed, in four short decades, the ethnic composition of the US inmate population has *reversed*, turning over from 70 percent white at the mid-century point to nearly 70 percent black and Latino today, although ethnic patterns of criminal activity have not been fundamentally altered during that period (LaFree et al., 1992; Sampson and Lauritzen, 1997).

Second, the rate of incarceration for African Americans has soared to astronomical levels unknown in any other society, not even the Soviet Union at the zenith of the Gulag or South Africa during the acme of the violent struggles over apartheid. As of mid-1999, close to 800,000 black men were in custody in federal penitentiaries, state prisons and county jails, a figure corresponding to *one male out of every twenty-one* (4·6 percent) and one out of every nine ages 20 to 34 (11·3 percent). An additional 68,000 black women were locked up, a number higher than the *total* carceral population of any one major western European country (Beck, 2000).[1] Several studies, starting with a series of well-publicized reports by the Sentencing Project, have documented that, on any given day, upwards of one-third of African-American men in their twenties find themselves behind bars, on probation or on parole (Donziger, 1996: 104–5). And, at the core of the formerly industrial cities of the North, this proportion often exceeds two-thirds.

A third trend interpellates the social analyst of race, state, and punishment in the United States: the past two decades have witnessed a swift and steady *deepening of the gap* between the imprisonment rates of blacks and whites (from about one for 5 to one for 8·5), and this rising 'racial disproportionality' can be traced directly to a single federal policy, namely, the War on Drugs launched by Ronald Reagan and expanded by the administrations of George Bush and William Jefferson Clinton. In 10 of the 38 states in which this black-white disparity has grown, African Americans are imprisoned at more than ten times the rate of their compatriots of European origin.[2] The political elite of the country is well placed to take note the phenomenon since the jurisdiction that sports the highest racial gap in the land is none other than the District of Columbia, where blacks were 35 times more likely than whites to be put behind bars in 1994 (Mauer, 1997).

These grim statistics are well-known and agreed among students of crime and justice – though they have been steadfastly ignored or minimized by analysts of urban poverty and policy, who have yet to register the enormously disruptive impact that imprisonment has on low-income black communities, as shown by Miller (1997). What remains in dispute are the causes and mechanisms driving this sudden 'blackening' which has turned the carceral system into one of a few national institutions dominated by African Americans, alongside professional sports and selected sectors of the entertainment industry. Most analysts have focused on trends in crime and endeavored to decompose the source of black over-representation in prison by sorting and sifting through patterns of criminality, bias in arrest, prosecution, and sentencing, and prior criminal records (see Blumstein, 1993, for a model study, and Tonry, 1995: 56–79, for a vigorous and rigorous review). A few have expanded their compass to measure the influence of such non-judicial variables as the size of the black population, the poverty rate, unemployment, inflation, income, value of welfare payments, region, support for

religious fundamentalism, and political party in office (e.g., Lessan, 1991; Yates, 1997; Greenberg and West, 1999). But none of these factors, taken separately or jointly, accounts for the sheer magnitude, rapidity, and timing of the recent racialization of US imprisonment, especially as crime rates have been flat and later declining over that period. For this, it is necessary, first, to take a longer historical view and, second, to break out of the narrow 'crime-and-punishment' paradigm to reckon the extra-penological role of the penal system as instrument for the management of dispossessed and dishonored groups.[3]

In this article, I put forth two interconnected theses, the first *historical*, replacing the carceral institution in the full arc of ethnoracial division and domination in the United States, the second *institutional*, explaining the astounding upsurge in black incarceration in the past three decades as a result of the obsolescence of the ghetto as a device for caste control and the correlative need for a substitute apparatus for keeping (unskilled) African Americans 'in their place', i.e. in a subordinate and confined position in physical, social, and symbolic space. I further argue that, in the post-Civil Rights era, the remnants of the dark ghetto and the fast-expanding carceral system of the United States have become tightly linked by a triple relationship of functional equivalency, structural homology, and cultural fusion. This relationship has spawned a *carceral continuum* that ensnares a supernumerary population of younger black men, who either reject or are rejected by the deregulated low-wage labor market, in a never-ending *circulus* between the two institutions. This carceral mesh has been solidified by two sets of concurrent and interrelated changes: on the one end, sweeping economic and political forces have reshaped the structure and function of the urban 'Black Belt' of mid-century to *make the ghetto more like a prison*. On the other end, the 'inmate society' that inhabited the penitentiary system of the US during the postwar decades has broken down in ways that *make the prison more like a ghetto*. The resulting symbiosis between ghetto and prison not only enforces and perpetuates the socioeconomic marginality and symbolic taint of the urban black subproletariat, feeding the runaway growth of the penal system that has become a major component of the post-Keynesian state. It also plays a pivotal role in the remaking of 'race' and the redefinition of the citizenry via the production of a racialized public culture of vilification of criminals.

A fuller analysis, extending beyond the black ghetto, would reveal that the increasing use of imprisonment to shore up caste division in American society partakes of a broader 'upsizing' of the penal sector of the state which, together with the drastic 'downsizing' of its social welfare sector, aims at imposing desocialized wage labor as a norm of citizenship for the deskilled fractions of the postindustrial working class (Wacquant, 1999a). This emerging *government of poverty* wedding the 'invisible hand' of the deregulated labor market to the 'iron fist' of an intrusive and omnipresent punitive apparatus is anchored, not by a 'prison industrial complex', as political opponents of the policy of mass incarceration maintain (e.g. Davis, 1998), but by a *carceral-assistential complex* which carries out its mission to surveil, train and neutralize the populations recalcitrant or superfluous to the new economic and racial regime according to a gendered division of labor, the men being handled by its penal wing while (their) women and children are managed by a revamped welfare-workfare system designed to buttress casual employment. It is this shift from the social to the penal treatment of poverty and its correlates at the bottom of the class and caste structure, subsequent to the denunciation of the

Fordist-Keynesian social contract, that has brought the prison back to the societal center, counter to the optimistic forecasts of its impending demise by analysts of the criminal justice scene in the early 1970s.

To recognize that the hypertrophic growth of the penal institution is one component of a more comprehensive restructuring of the American state to suit the requirements of neoliberalism is not to negate or even minimize the special office of race in its advent. If the prison offered itself as a viable vehicle of resolving the 'black question' after the crisis of the ghetto – that is, for reformulating it in a way that both *invisibilizes it and reactives it* under new disguises: crime, 'welfare dependency', and the 'underclass' – it is surely because America is the one society that has pushed the market logic of commodification of social relations and state devolution the furthest (Esping-Andersen, 1987; Handler, 1997). But, conversely, if the US far outstrips all advanced nations in the international trend towards the penalization of social insecurity, it is because, just as the dismantling of welfare programs was accelerated by the conflation of blackness and undeservingness in national culture and politics (Gilens, 1999), the 'great confinement' of the rejects of market society, the poor, the mentally ill, the homeless, the jobless and the useless, can be painted as a welcome 'crackdown' on *them*, those dark-skinned criminals issued from a pariah group still considered alien to the national body. Thus, just as the color line inherited from the era of Southern slavery directly determined the mishappen figure of America's 'semi-welfare state' in the formative period of the New Deal (Lieberman, 1998), the handling of the 'underclass' question by the prison system at the close of the 20th century is key to fashioning the visage of the post-Keynesian state in the 21st.

FOUR PECULIAR INSTITUTIONS

To ascertain the pivotal position that the penal apparatus has come to assume within the system of instruments of (re)production of ethnoracial hierarchy in the post-Civil Rights era, it is indispensable to adopt an historical perspective of the *longue durée* so as to situate the prison in the full lineage of institutions which, at each epoch, have carried out the work of race making by drawing and enforcing the peculiar 'color line' that cleaves American society asunder.[4] Put succinctly, the task of *defining, confining, and controling* African Americans in the United States has been successively shouldered by four 'peculiar institutions': slavery, the Jim Crow system, the urban ghetto, and the novel

TABLE 1 The four 'peculiar institutions' and their basis

PECULIAR INSTITUTION	FORM OF LABOR	CORE OF ECONOMY	DOMINANT SOCIAL TYPE
Slavery (1619–1865)	unfree fixed labor	plantation	slave
Jim Crow (South, 1865–1965)	free fixed labor	agrarian and extractive	sharecropper
Ghetto (North, 1915–1968)	free mobile labor	segmented industrial manufacturing	menial worker
Hyperghetto + Prison (1968–)	fixed surplus labor	polarized postindustrial services	welfare recipient & criminal

organizational compound formed by the vestiges of the ghetto and the expanding carceral system, as set out in Table 1.

The first three of these institutions, chattel slavery until the Civil War, the Jim Crow regime of racial exclusion operative in the agrarian South from Emancipation to the Civil Rights revolution, and the ghetto in the 20th century Northern industrial city, have, each in its own manner, served two joined yet discordant purposes: to recruit, organize, and extract labor out of African Americans, on the one hand; and to demarcate and ultimately seclude them so that they would not 'contaminate' the surrounding white society that viewed them as as irrevocably inferior and vile because devoid of ethnic honor. These two goals of *labor extraction and social ostracization* of a stigmatized category are in tension with one another inasmuch as to utilize the labor power of a group inevitably entails bringing it into regular intercourse with oneself and thereby invites the blurring or transgression of the boundary separating 'us' from 'them'. Conversely, to immure a group in a separate physical and sociosymbolic space can make it more difficult to draw out and deploy its labor in the most efficient way. When the tension between these two purposes, exploitation and ostracization, mounts to the point where it threatens to undermine either of them, its excess is drained, so to speak, and the institution restabilized, by resort to *physical violence*: the customary use of the lash and ferocious suppression of slave insurrections on the plantation, terroristic vigilantism and mob lynchings in the post-bellum South, and periodic bombings of Negro homes and pogroms against ghetto residents (such as the six-day riot that shook up Chicago in 1919) ensured that blacks kept to their appointed place at each epoch.[5]

But the built-in instabilities of unfree labor and the inherent anomaly of caste partition in a formally democratic and highly individualistic society guaranteed that each 'peculiar institution' would in time be undermined by the weight of its internal contradictions as well as by mounting black resistance and external opposition,[6] to be replaced by its successor regime. At each new stage, however, the apparatus of ethnoracial domination would become less total and less capable of encompassing all segments and all dimensions of the social life of the pariah group. As African Americans differentiated along class lines and acceded to full formal citizenship, the institutional complex charged with keeping them 'separate and unequal' grew more differentiated and diffuse, allowing a burgeoning middle and upper class of professionals and salary earners to *partially* compensate for the negative symbolic capital of blackness by their high-status cultural capital and proximity to centers of political power, while lower-class blacks remained burdened by the triple stigma of 'race', poverty, and putative immorality.[7]

1. Slavery (1619–1865)

From the first years of the colony to the Civil War, slavery was the institution that determined the collective identity and individual life chances of Americans of African parentage. Orlando Patterson (1982: 334 and passim) has rightly insisted that slavery is essentially 'a relation of domination and not a category of legal thought', and, moreover, a relation unusual for the inordinate amounts of material and symbolic violence it entails. In the Americas (as opposed to, say, in the Islamic world, where it served no productive purpose), this violence was channeled to fulfil a definite economic end: to appease the nearly insatiable appetite of the plantation for labor. The forcible importation of Africans and West Indians, and the rearing of their descendants under bondage

(the US enslaved population tripled to reach 4 million in the half-century after the slave trade was cut off in 1808), supplied the unfree and fixed workforce needed to produce the great staples that were the backbone of North America's preindustrial economy, tobacco, rice, sugar, and cotton.

In the early colonial period indentured servitude was economically more advantageous than slavery but, by the second half of the 17th century, the increase in life expectancy, the growth of the tobacco trade, the need to encourage further voluntary immigration and the relative powerlessness of African captives compared to European migrants and native Americans combined to make slaves the preferred source of labor (Morgan, 1975). After the Revolution, human bondage was abolished along the Eastern seaboard and prohibited north and west of the Ohio River, but it spread and solidified throughout the South, as the economic value of slaves rose in concert with the increase in the demand for cotton and the scarcity of labor in the new territories of the Southwest. Once it generalized, slavery transformed all of society, culture, and politics in its image, fostering the concentration of economic and state power in the hands of a small slaveholder class tied to lower-class whites by patronage relations and to their slaves by a paternalistic code and elaborate rituals of submission that reinforced the latter's lack of cultural autonomy and sense of inferiority (Williamson, 1986: 15–27).

Whereas in the early decades of the colony the status of slave and servant were virtually indistinguished – the terms were even used interchangeably – by the 19th century the dichotomous opposition between bondsmen and freemen had been racialized: the militant defense of slavery generated an elaborate ideology justifying the subhuman condition imposed upon blacks by their inferior biological makeup, exemplified by the animalistic traits, in turn childish and bestial, attributed to the archetypal figure of Sambo. In the decades leading to the Civil War, the specter of insurrection and of the abolition of bondage resulted in increased hostility toward manumission, miscegenation, and 'passing' by Negroes, as well as in the generalization of a rigid twofold racial schema, based on the mythology that God had created blacks to be slaves and that one drop of 'Negro blood' made one a Negro – persons of mixed descent were believed to be against nature and fated to physical extinction (Davis, 1992: 41–2). Slavery as a system of unfree labor thus spawned a suffusive racial culture which, in turn, remade bondage into something it was not at its outset: a color-coded institution of ethnoracial division.[8]

2. Jim Crow (South, 1865–1965)

Emancipation posed a double and deadly threat to Southern society: the overthrow of bondage made slaves formally free laborers, which potentially eliminated the cheap and abundant workforce required to run the plantation economy; black access to civil and political rights promised to erode the color line initially drawn to bulwark slavery but since entrenched in both the South and the North of the country. In a first phase, during Reconstruction, the Dixie ruling class promulgated the Black Codes to resolve the first problem by establishing 'forced labor and police laws to get the freedman back to the fields under control' (Woodward, 1971: 250–1). In a second phase, through the 1880s, the white lower classes, pressed by the dislocations wrought by declining farm prices, demographic pressure and capitalist industrialization, joined with the plantation elite to demand the political disenfranchisement and systematic exclusion of former slaves from all major institutions (Wilson, 1980: 57–61): the Jim Crow regime of racial segregation

was born which would hold African Americans in its brutal grip for nearly a century in the Southern states and beyond.[9]

Under this regime, backed by custom and elaborate legal statutes, superexploitative sharecropping arrangements and debt peonage fixed black labor on the land, perpetuating the hegemony of the region's agrarian upper class – and the work discipline of the antebellum plantation: the lash remained in use in Mississipi into the interwar years. The economic opportunities of African Americans were severely restricted not only in the cotton fields but also in the emerging mining and industrial towns of the uplands by limiting their employment to the most dirty and dangerous 'nigger work'. Former slaves and their descendants were prohibited from attending churches and schools with whites (in some states, biracial education was even made unconstitutional). And they were methodically banished from the ballot box thanks to an assortment of residency requirements, poll taxes, literacy tests, 'grandfather clauses' and disqualifying criminal offenses.[10]

Most crucially, the second 'peculiar institution' sharply curtailed social contacts between whites and blacks by relegating the latter to separate residential districts and to the reserved 'colored' section of commercial establishments and public facilities, saloons and movie houses, parks and beaches, trolleys and buses, waiting rooms and bathrooms. Any and all forms of intercourse that might imply social equality between the 'races' and, worse yet, provide an occasion for sexual contact across the color line were rigorously forbidden and zealously surveiled, and any infringement, real or imagined, savagely repressed. The hysterical dread of 'racial degeneracy' believed to ensue from mixing, and justified by the self-evident query 'Would you want your sister to marry a nigger?' (Dollard, 1937: 62), climaxed in periodic explosions of mob violence, beatings, whippings, and rioting against blacks who failed to 'stay in their place' and display proper caste deference. In the last two decades of the 19th century, some 2,060 African Americans were lynched, one third of them after being accused of sexual assault or mere improprieties towards white women (Williamson, 1982: 292). These veritable carnivals of caste rage, during which the bodies of 'bad niggah' were ritually desecrated by burning, mutilation, and public exhibition, were fanned by the press, tacitly supported by the churches, and encouraged by the complicity of the forces of order and immunity from the authorities. African Americans could hardly turn to the courts for protection since the latter openly put the law of caste above the rule of law: lynchings were perpetrated by lower-class 'rednecks' but with the consent and approval of white 'quality ', for, as a Mississippi gentleman put it, 'race is greater than law now and then, and protection of women transcends all law, human and divine' (cited by McMillen, 1990: 240).

3. The ghetto (North, 1914–1968)

The very ferocity of Jim Crow on both the labor and the ostracization fronts sowed the seeds of its eventual ruin, for blacks fled the South by the millions as soon as the opportunity came. Three forces combined to rouse them to desert Dixie and rally to the surging metropolitan centers of the Midwest and Northeast in the half-century following the outbreak of World War I. The first was the economic crisis of cotton agriculture caused by the boll weevil and later by mechanization, as well as arrested urbanization in the South due to the industrial underdevelopment of the region (Fligstein, 1981). The second was the booming demand for unskilled and semiskilled labor in the steel mills,

packinghouses, factories and railroads of the North, as the war cut off immigration from Europe and employers sent their recruiting agents scurrying through the South to entice African Americans to come work for them (Marks, 1989). But economic push and pull factors merely set conditions of possibility: the trigger of the Great Migration that transformed the black community from a landless peasantry to an industrial proletariat, and with it the visage of American society *in toto*, was the irrepressible will to escape the indignities of caste and its attendant material degradation, truncated life horizon, and rampant violence – the outmigration of blacks was heaviest in those counties of the Deep South where lynchings were most frequent (Tolnay and Beck, 1992). These indignities were made all the more intolerable by the ongoing incorporation of 'white ethnics' into national institutions and by the paradoxical role that the US played on the world stage as champion of those very freedoms which it denied Negros at home. The trek up to Chicago, Detroit, New York and Philadelphia was thus undertaken by Southern blacks not only to 'better their condition' but also to board the 'train of freedom' (to recall the title of a well-known poem by Langston Hughes) on a journey filled with biblical imagery and political import (Grossman, 1989: esp. 16–37): it was a race-conscious gesture of collective defiance and self-affirmation.[11]

Yankee life did offer salutory relief from the harsh grip of Southern caste domination and significantly expand the life chances of the former sharecroppers, but it did not turn out to be the 'promised land' of racial equality, economic security, and full citizenship for which migrants yearned. For, in the Northern metropolis, African Americans came upon yet another device designed to allow white society to exploit their labor power while keeping them confined to a separate *Lebensraum*: the ghetto. As the Negro population rose, so did the animosity of whites towards a group they viewed as 'physically and mentally unfit', 'unsanitary', 'entirely irresponsible', and therefore 'undesirable as neighbors', in the terms reported to the 1920 Chicago Commission on Race Relations (cited in Spear, 1967: 22). Patterns of ethnoracial discrimination and segregation that had hitherto been inconsistent and informal hardened in housing, schools, and public accomodations such as parks, playgrounds and beaches. They were extended to the polity, where the promotion of a small cadre of black politicians handpicked by party leaders served to rein in the community's votes to the benefit of the white-controlled city machine (Katznelson, 1976: 83–5). They were systematized in the economy, where a 'job ceiling' set conjointly by white employers and unions kept African Americans trapped in the lower reaches of the occupational structure, disproportionately concentrated in semi-skilled, manual, and servant work that made them especially vulnerable to business downturns (Drake and Cayton, 1945: 223–35; Wilson, 1980: 71–6). And, when they tried to breach the color bar, for instance by attempting to settle outside of their reserved perimeter in violation of restrictive covenants, blacks were assaulted on the streets by white 'athletic clubs' and their houses bombed by so-called 'neighborhood improvement societies'. They had no choice but to take refuge in the secluded territory of the Black Belt and to try to build in it a self-sustaining nexus of institutions that would both shield them from white rule and procure the needs of the castaway community: a 'Black Metropolis' lodged 'in the womb of the white', yet hermetically sealed from it (Drake and Cayton, 1945: 80).[12]

This 'black city within the white', as black scholars from DuBois and Frazier to Oliver Cox and Kenneth Clark have consistently characterized the ghetto (Wacquant, 1998a),

discharged the same two basic functions that slavery and the Jim Crow system had performed earlier, namely, to harness the labor of African Americans while cloistering their tainted bodies, so as to avert both the specter of 'social equality' and the odium of 'miscegenation' that would inevitably result in loss of ethnic honor for whites. But it differed from the preceding 'peculiar institutions' in that, by granting them a measure of organizational autonomy, the urban Black Belt enabled African Americans to fully develop their own social and symbolic forms and thereby accumulate the group capacities needed to escalate the fight against continued caste subordination.[13] For the ghetto in full-fledged form is, by its very makeup, a *double-edged sociospatial formation*: it operates as an instrument of *exclusion* from the standpoint of the dominant group; yet it also offers the subordinate group partial *protection* and a platform for succor and solidarity in the very movement whereby it sequesters it.

   Specifying the workings of the ghetto as mechanism of ethnoracial closure and control makes readily visible its *structural and functional kinship with the prison*: the ghetto is a manner of 'ethnoracial prison' in that it encloses a stigmatized population which evolves within it its distinctive organizations and culture, while the prison functions as a 'judicial ghetto' relegating individuals disgraced by criminal conviction to a secluded space harboring the parallel social relations and cultural norms that make up the 'society of captives'.[14] This kinship explains why, when the ghetto was rendered inoperative in the sixties by economic restructuring that made African-American labor expendable and mass protest that finally won blacks the vote, the carceral institution offered itself as a substitute apparatus for enforcing the shifting color line and containing the segments of the African-American community devoid of economic utility and political pull. The coupling of the transformed core of the urban Black Belt, or hyperghetto, and the fast-expanding carceral system that together compose America's fourth 'peculiar institution' was fortified by two concurrent series of changes that have tended to 'prisonize' the ghetto and to 'ghettoize' the prison. The next two sections examine each of these trends in turn.

FROM COMMUNAL GHETTO TO HYPERGHETTO: HOW THE GHETTO BECAME MORE LIKE A PRISON

The *fin-de-siècle* hyperghetto presents four main characteristics that differentiate it sharply from the communal ghetto of the Fordist-Keynesian era and converge to render its social structure and cultural climate more akin to those of the prison. I consider each in turn by drawing a schematic contrast between the mid-century 'Bronzeville' depicted by St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton (1945) in *Black Metropolis* and the South Side of Chicago as I observed it some forty years later through fieldwork, official statistics, and survey data.

1. Class segregation overlays racial segregation

The dark ghetto of mid-century held within itself a full complement of classes, for the simple reason that even the black bourgeoisie was barred from escaping its cramped and compact perimeter while a majority of adults were gainfully employed in a gamut of occupations. True, from the 1920s onward, Chicago's South Side featured clearly demarcated subdivisions stratified by class, with the small elite of doctors, lawyers, teachers,

and businessmen residing in the stabler and more desirable neighborhoods adjacent to white districts at the southern end, while the families of laborers and domestic workers massed themselves in areas of blight, crime and dissolution towards the northern end (Frazier, 1932). But the social distance between the classes was limited by physical propinquity and extensive family ties; the black bourgeoisie's economic power rested on supplying goods and services to its lower-class brethens; and all 'brown' residents of the city were united in their common rejection of caste subordination and abiding concern to 'advance the race', despite its internecine divisions and the mutual panning of 'big Negroes' and 'riff-raff' (Drake and Cayton, 1945: 716–28). As a result, the postwar ghetto was *integrated both socially and structurally* – even the 'shadies' who earned their living from such illicit trades as the 'numbers game', liquor sale, prostitution and other *risqué* recreation, were entwined with the different classes.

Today's black bourgeoisie still lives under strict segregation and its life chances continue to be curtailed by its geographic and symbolic contiguity with the African-American (sub)proletariat (Patillo-McCoy, 1999). Nonetheless, it has gained considerable physical distance from the heart of the ghetto by establishing satellite black neighborhoods at its periphery inside the city and in the suburbs.[15] Its economic basis has shifted from the direct servicing of the black community to the state, with employment in public bureaucracies accounting for most of the growth of professional, managerial and technical positions held by African Americans over the past thirty years. The genealogical ties of the black bourgeoisie to the black poor have also grown more remote and less dense. What is more, the historic center of the Black Belt has experienced massive depopulation and deproletarianization, such that a large majority of its residents are no longer employed: two-thirds of the adults in Bronzeville did not hold a job in 1980, compared to fewer than half thirty years earlier (cf. Table 2); and three out of every four households were headed by women, while the official poverty rate hovered near the 50 percent mark.

This marked lowering and homogenization of the social composition of the ghetto

TABLE 2 The changing class structure of Chicago's South Side, 1950–1980 *

	1950		1980	
	TOTAL	%	TOTAL	%
Proprietors, managers, professional & technical	5,270	3.3	2,225	3.2
Clerical, sales	10,271	6.4	5,169	7.5
Operative, laborers, craftsmen	42,372	26.7	6,301	9.3
Private household and service workers	25,182	15.8	5,203	7.5
Total employed adults	83,095	52.2	18,898	27.5
Adults not employed	75,982	47.8	50,148	72.5
Total adult population	159,077	100	69,046	100

* Comprising the three community areas of Grand Boulevard, Oakland, and Washington Park; adults are persons 15 and over for 1950, 18 and over for 1980.

Source: Chicago Fact Book Consortium, *Local Community Fact Book*, Chicago, Center for the Study of Family and Community, 1955, and Chicago Review Press, 1985.

makes it akin to the monotonous class recruitment of the carceral institution, dominated as the latter is by the most precarious fractions of the urban proletariat of the unemployed, the casually employed, and the uneducated. Fully 36 percent of the half-million detainees housed by US jails in 1991 were jobless at the time of their arrest and another 15 percent worked only part-time or irregularly. One-half had not finished high school and two-thirds earned less than a thousand dollars a month that year; in addition, every other inmate had been raised in a home receiving welfare and a paltry 16 percent were married (Harlow, 1998). Residents of the hyperghetto and clients of the carceral institution thus present germane profiles in economic marginality and social dis-integration.

2. Loss of a positive economic function

The transformed class structure of the hyperghetto is a direct product of its evolving position in the new urban political economy ushered by post-Fordism. We have seen that, from the Great Migration of the interwar years to the 1960s, the dark ghetto served a positive economic function as reservoir of cheap and pliable labor for the city's factories. During that period, it was 'directly exploited by outside economic interests, and it provide[d] a dumping ground for the human residuals created by economic change. These economic conditions [we]re stabilized by transfer payments that preserve[d] the ghetto in a poverty that recreate[d] itself from generation to generation', ensuring the ready availability of a low-cost workforce (Fusfeld and Bates, 1982: 236). By the 1970s, this was no longer true as the engine of the metropolitan economy passed from manufacturing to business and knowledge-based services, and factories relocated from the central city to the mushrooming industrial parks of the suburbs and exurbs, as well as to anti-union states in the South and to foreign countries.

Between 1954 and 1982, the number of manufacturing establishments in Chicago plunged from 10,288 to 5,203, while the number of production workers sank from nearly half a million to a mere 172,000. The demand for black labor plummeted accordingly, rocking the entire black class structure (Wacquant, 1989: 510–11), given that half of all employed African Americans in Chicago were blue-collar wage earners at the close of World War II. Just as mechanization had enabled Southern agriculture to dispense with black labor a generation earlier, 'automation and suburban relocation created a crisis of tragic dimension for unskilled black workers' in the North, as 'for the first time in American history, the African American was no longer needed in the economic system' of the metropolis (Rifkin, 1995: 79; also Sugrue, 1995: 125–52). The effects of technological upgrading and postindustrialization were intensified by (1) unflinching residential segregation, (2) the breakdown of public schools, and (3) the renewal of working-class immigration from Latin America and Asia to consign the vast majority of uneducated blacks to economic redundancy. At best, the hyperghetto now serves the *negative economic function of storage of a surplus population* devoid of market utility, in which respect it also increasingly resembles the prison system.

3. State institutions of social control replace communal institutions

The organizations that formed the framework of everyday life and anchored the strategies of reproduction of urban blacks in the 1950s were group-based and group-specific establishments created and run by African Americans. The black press, churches, lodges and fraternal orders, social clubs and political (sub)machine knit together a dense array

of resources and sociability that supported their quest for ethnic pride and group uplift. To its 200,000 members, the five hundred religious congregations that dotted the South Side were not only places of worship and entertainment but also a potent vehicle for individual and collective mobility within the specific order of the ghetto that cut across class lines and strengthened ingrown social control, even as black proletarians chaffed in endless 'protest against the alleged cupidity and hypocrisy of church functionaries and devotees' (Drake and Cayton, 1945: 710–11, 650).

In the economic realm also, African Americans could seek or sustain the illusion of autonomy and advancement. Now, Negro entreprise was small scale and commercially weak, the three most numerous types of black-owned firms being beauty parlors, grocery stores and barber shops. But the popular 'doctrine of the 'Double-Duty Dollar', according to which buying from black concerns would 'advance the race' (Drake and Cayton, 1945: 430–1, 438–9), promised a path to economic independence from whites, and the 'numbers game' seemed to prove that one could indeed erect a self-sustaining economy within Black Metropolis. With some 500 stations employing 5,000 and paying yearly wages in excess of a million dollars for three daily drawings, the 'policy racket' was at once big business, a fixture of group fellowship, and a popular cult. Protected by criss-crossing ties and kickbacks to court officials, the police, and politicians, the 'policy kings' were regarded as 'Race Leaders, patrons of charity, and pioneers in the establishment of legitimate business' (Drake and Cayton, 1945: 486; also Light, 1977).

By the 1980s, the organizational ecology of the ghetto had been radically altered by the generalized devolution of public institutions and commercial establishments in the urban core as well as by the cumulative demise of black associations caused by the confluence of market withdrawal and state retrenchment (Wacquant, 1998a). The physical infrastructure and business base of the South Side had been decimated, with thousands of boarded-up stores and abandoned buildings rotting away along deserted boulevards strewn with debris and garbage. Arguably the most potent component of the communal ghetto, the church lost its capacity to energize and organize social life on the South Side. Storefront operations closed in the hundreds and the congregations that have endured either battle for sheer survival or battle local residents: in the early 1990s, on 63rd Street near Stony Island Avenue, the Apostolic Church of God, lavishly financed and patronized by an expatriate black bourgeoisie, was engaged in a trench war with the surrounding poor population which viewed it as an invader, so that the church had to fence itself up and hire a phalanx of security guards to enable its members to come into the neighborhood and attend its three services on Sunday.[16] Similarly, the black press has grown outside of the ghetto but virtually disappeared within it as a vector of public opinion: there were five black weeklies in Bronzeville when World War II broke out; forty years later, the *Chicago Defender* alone remains in existence and then, only as a pale shadow of its former glorious self – it is sparsely distributed even at the heart of the South Side whereas an estimated 100,000 read it and everyone discussed it fervently in the 1940s.[17]

The vacuum created by the crumbling of the ghetto's indigenous organizations has been filled by *state bureaucracies of social control*, themselves largely staffed by the new black middle class whose expansion hinges, not on its capacity to service its community, but on its willingness to assume the vexing role of *custodian* of the black urban sub-proletariat on behalf of white society. By the 1980s, the institutions that set the tone of

daily life and determined the fate of most residents on Chicago's South Side were (1) astringent and humiliating welfare programs, bolstered and replaced by 'workfare' after 1996, designed to restrict access to the public aid rolls and push recipients into the low-wage labor market; (2) decrepit public housing that subjected its tenants and the surrounding population to extraordinary levels of criminal insecurity, infrastructural blight and official scorn (its management was so derelict that the Chicago Housing Authority had to put under federal receivership); (3) permanently failing public health and public schools operating with resources, standards, and results worthy of Third World countries; and (4), not least, the police, the courts, and on-the-ground extensions of the penal system such as probation officers, parole agents, and 'snitches', recruited by the thousands by law enforcement agencies, often under threat of criminal prosecution, to extend the mesh of state surveillance and capture deep into the hyperghetto (Miller, 1997: 102–3).[18]

4. Loss of 'buffering function' and the depacification of everyday life

Along with its economic function of labor pool and the extensive organizational nexus it supported, the ghetto lost its capacity to buffer its residents from external forces. It is no longer Janus-faced, offering a sheltered space for collective sustenance and self-affirmation in the face of hostility and exclusion, as in the heyday of the Fordist-Keynesian era. Rather, it has devolved into a one-dimensional machinery for naked relegation, a human warehouse wherein are discarded those segments of urban society deemed disreputable, derelict, and dangerous. And, with the conjoint contraction of the wage-labor market and the welfare state in the context of unflinching segregation, it has become saturated with economic, social, and physical insecurity (Massey and Denton, 1993; Krivo and Peterson, 1996). Pandemic levels of crime – gunfire and assaults have become habitual, with homicide rates topping 100 for 100,000 at the core of the South Side in 1990 – have further depressed the local economy and ruptured the social fabric. The depacification of everyday life, shrinking of networks, and informalization of survival strategies have combined to give social relations in the hyperghetto a distinct carceral cast (Kotlowitz, 1991; Jones and Newman, 1997; Wacquant, 1998b): fear and danger pervade public space; interpersonal relations are riven with suspicion and distrust, feeding mutual avoidance and retraction into one's private defended space; resort to violence is the prevalent means for upholding respect, regulating encounters, and controling territory; and relations with official authorities are suffused with animosity and diffidence – patterns familiar to students of social order in the contemporary US prison (e.g., Carroll, 1974; Jacobs, 1977; Irwin, 1980).

Two examples illustrate well this increasing conformance of the hyperghetto to the carceral model. The first is the *'prisonization' of public housing*, as well as retirement homes, single-room occupancy hostels, homeless shelters, and other establishments for collective living, which have come to look and feel just like houses of detention.[19] 'Projects' have been fenced up, their perimeter placed under beefed-up security patrols and authoritarian controls, including identification-card checks, signing in, electronic monitoring, police infiltration, 'random searches, segregation, curfews, and resident counts – all familiar procedures of efficient prison management' (Miller, 1997: 101). Over the past decade, the Chicago Housing Authority has deployed its own police force and even sought to institute its own 'misdemeanor court' to try misbehaving tenants

on the premises. Residents of the Robert Taylor Homes, at the epicenter of the South Side, have been subjected to video surveillance and required to bear special ID cards as well as pass through metal detectors, undergo patdown searches, and report all visitors to a housing officer in the lobby (Venkatesh, 2000: 123–30). In 1994, the CHA launched massive paramilitary sweeps under the code name 'Operation Clean Sweep,' involving pred-dawn surprise searches of buildings leading to mass arrests in violation of basic constitutional rights quite similar to the periodic 'shakedowns' intended to rid prison wards of shanks and other contraband. As one elderly resident of a District of Columbia project being put under such quasi-penal supervision observed: 'It's as though the children in here are being prepared for incarceration, so when they put them in a real lock-down situation, they'll be used to being hemmed in' (cited by Miller, 1997: 101).

Public schools in the hyperghetto have similarly deteriorated to the point where they operate in the manner of *institutions of confinement* whose primary mission is not to educate but to ensure 'custody and control' – to borrow the motto of many departments of corrections. Like the prison system, their recruitment is severely skewed along class and ethnoracial lines: 75 percent of the pupils of Chicago's establishments come from families living under the official poverty line and nine of every ten are black or Latino. Like inmates, these children are herded into decaying and overcrowded facilities built like bunkers, where undertrained and underpaid teachers, hampered by a shocking penury of equipment and supplies – many schools have no photocopying machines, library, science laboratory, or even functioning bathrooms, and use textbooks that are thirty-year-old rejects from suburban schools – strive to regulate conduct so as to maintain order and minimize violent incidents. The physical plant of most establishments resembles fortresses, complete with concertina wire on outside fences, bricked up windows, heavy locks on iron doors, metal detectors at the gates and hallways patroled by armed guards who conduct spot checks and body searches between buildings. Over the years, essential educational programs have been cut to divert funds for more weapons scanners, cameras, emergency telephones, sign-in desks, and security personnel, whose duty is to repel unwanted intruders from the outside and hem students inside the school's walls.[20] Indeed, it appears that the main purpose of these school is simply to 'neutralize' youth considered unworthy and unruly by holding them under lock for the day so that, at minimum, they do not engage in street crime. Certainly, it is hard to maintain that educating them is a priority when half of the city's high schools place in the bottom 1 percent of establishments nationwide on the American College Test and two thirds of ghetto students fail to complete their cursus while those who do graduate read on average at the 8th grade level (Chicago Tribune, 1992: 12–3). At any rate, the carceral atmosphere of schools and the constant presence of armed guards in uniform in the lobbies, corridors, cafeteria, and playground of their establishment habituates the children of the hyperghetto to the demeanor, tactics, and interactive style of the correctional officers many of them are bound to encounter shortly after their school days are over.

FROM 'BIG HOUSE' TO WAREHOUSE:
HOW THE PRISON BECAME MORE LIKE A GHETTO

The two decades following the climax of the Civil Rights movement not only witnessed a sea change in the function, structure and texture of the dark ghetto in the postindustrial metropolis. The racial and class backlash that reconfigured the city also ushered a sweeping transformation in the purpose and social organization of the carceral institution. Summarily put, the 'Big House' that embodied the correctional ideal of melioristic treatment and community reintegration of inmates[21] gave way to a race-divided and violence-ridden 'warehouse' geared solely to neutralizing social rejects by sequestering them physically from society – in the way that a classical ghetto wards off the threat of defilement posed by the presence of a dishonored group by encaging it within its walls, but in an ambience resonant with the fragmentation, dread, and despair of the post-Fordist hyperghetto. With the explosive growth of the incarcerated population leading to rampant overcrowding, the rise in the proportion of inmates serving long sentences, the spread of ethnically-based gangs, the flood of drug offenders and especially of young offenders deeply rooted in the informal economy and oppositional culture of the street, the 'inmate society' depicted in the classic prison research of the postwar decades foundered, as John Irwin (1990: vi) observes in his 1990 preface to *The Felon*:

> There is no longer a single, overarching convict culture or social organization, as there tended to be twenty years ago when *The Felon* was written. Most prisoners restrict their association to a few other prisoners and withdraw from prison public life. A minority associates with gangs, gamble, buy and sell contraband commodities, and engage in prison homosexual behavior. If they do so, however, they must act 'tough' and be willing to live by the new code, that is, be ready to meet threats of violence with violence.

It is not easy to characterize the changes which have remade the American prison in the image of the ghetto over the past three decades, not only because of the 'astonishing diversity' of establishments and regimes across levels of the carceral system and the different states (Morris, 1995: 228), but also because we have remarkably little on-the-ground data on social and cultural life inside the contemporary penitentiary. Sociologists have deserted the institution – with a firm push from corrections administrations that have grown increasingly closed and secretive – just as it was ascending to the front line of the instruments for the regulation of poverty and race. With the partial exception of women's facilities, field studies based on direct observation have virtually disappeared, as research on imprisonment shifted from close-up accounts of the internal order of the prison, its hierarchies, values, and mores, to distant analyses of incarceration rates, the dynamics and cost-effectiveness of penal management, sentencing, and fear of crime based primarily on official statistics, administrative reports, litigation findings, and large-scale surveys (DiIulio, 1991; Simon, 2000).[22] Nonetheless, one can provisionally single out five tendencies that fortify the structural and functional meshing of ghetto and prison in the large (post)industrial states that have put the United States on the path to mass imprisonment.

1. The racial division of everything

The relatively stable set of positions and expectations defined primarily in terms of criminal statuses and prison conduct that used to organize the inmate world has been

replaced by a chaotic and conflictual setting wherein 'racial division has primacy over all particular identities and influences all aspects of life' (Irwin, 1990: v; also Carroll, 1982; Johnson, 1996; Hassine, 1999: 71–8). The ward, tier, cell and bed-bunk to which one is assigned; access to food, telephone, television, visitation and in-house programs; one's associations and protections, which in turn determine the probability of being the victim or perpetrator of violence: all are set by one's ethnic community of provenance. Elective loyalty to inmates as a generic class, with the possibility of remaining non-aligned, has been superseded by forced and exclusive loyalty to one's 'race' defined in rigid, caste-like manner, with no in-between and no position of neutrality – just as within the urban ghetto. And the central axis of stratification inside the 'pen' has shifted from the vertical cleavage *between prisoners and guards*, marked by the proscription to 'rat on a con', exploit other inmates, and 'talk to a screw', to horizontal cleavages *among prisoners* between blacks, Latinos, and whites (with Asians most often assimilated to whites and Middle Easterners given a choice of voluntary affiliation).

In Sykes's (1958) classic account, the 'argot roles' that compose the social structure and cultural fabric of the prison are all *specific to the carceral cosmos*: 'rats' and 'center men' are defined as such because they betray the core value of solidarity among inmates by violating the ban on communication with custodians; 'merchants' peddle goods in the illicit economy of the establishment while 'gorillas' prey on weak inmates to acquire cigarettes, food, clothing, and deference; similarly, 'wolfs', 'punks' and 'fags' are descriptors of sexual scripts adopted behind bars. Finally 'ball busters' and 'real men' are categories defined by the type of intercourse they maintain with guards: defiant and hopeless, the former give 'screws' a hard time while the latter 'pull their own time' without displaying either subservience or aggression. In John Irwin's (1990) portrait of the social organization of convicts in California prisons in the 1960s, the inmate subculture is not a response to prison deprivation but an import from the street. Yet it is the criminal identities of 'thief', 'convict' and 'square' that nonetheless predominate behind bars. In today's warehouse prison, by contrast, racial affiliation has become the 'master status trait' (Hughes, 1945) that submerges all other markers and governs all relations and spaces, from the cells and the hallways to the dining hall, the commissary and the yard.[23]

To be sure, American prisons, both North and South, have always been strictly segregated along ethnoracial lines. But these lines used to *crosscut and stabilize* penitentiary demarcations as the social worlds of black and white inmates ran parallel to each other in 'separate but equal' fashion, so to speak (Jacobs, 1983: 75–6). In the aftermath of the black mobilization of the 1960s and the rapid 'darkening' of the imprisoned population, racial cleavages have grown to *undercut and supplant* carceral ones. And the perennial pattern of separation and avoidance that characterized race relations in the postwar years has been amplified by open hostility and aggression, particularly through the agency of gangs.

2. The 'code of the street' overwhelms the 'convict code'

Along with racial division, the predatory culture of the street, centered on hypermasculinist notions of honor, toughness, and coolness has entered into and transfigured the social structure and culture of jails and prisons. The 'convict code', rooted in solidarity among inmates and antagonism towards guards (Sykes and Messinger, 1960), has in

effect been swamped by the 'code of the street' (Anderson, 1998), with its ardent impera-
tive of individual 'respect' secured through the militant display and actualization of
readiness to mete out physical violence. Accordingly, 'the old 'hero' of the prison world
– the 'right guy' – has been replaced by outlaws and gang members. These two types
have raised toughness and mercilessness to the top of prisoners' value systems' (Irwin,
1990: vii). Ethnically-based street gangs and 'supergangs', such as the Disciplines, El
Rukn, Vice Lords, and Latin Kings in Illinois, the Mexican Mafia, Black Guerrilla
Family, and Aryan Brotherhood in California, and the Netas in New York City, have
taken over the illicit economy of the prison and destabilized the entire social system of
inmates, forcing the latter to shift from 'doing your own time' to 'doing gang time'. They
have even precipitated a thorough restructuring of the administration of large-scale
prison systems, from Illinois to California to Texas (Jacobs, 1977: 137–74; Irwin, 1980:
186–92; Martin and Ekland-Olson, 1987).

Together with the compositional changes of the prison's clientele, the rising tide of
drugs circulating *sub rosa*, and the consolidation of racially-based gangs, the eclipse of the
old inmate structure of power has resulted in increased levels of interpersonal and group
brutality.[24] So that 'what was once a repressive but comparatively safe 'Big House' is now
often an unstable and violent social jungle' (Johnson, 1996: 133) in which social inter-
course is infected with the same disruption, aggression, and unpredictability as in the
hyperghetto. Today's prisoners 'complain about the increased fragmentation and disorga-
nization that they now experience. Life in prison is no longer organized but instead is
viewed as capricious and dangerous' (Hunt et al., 1993: 407). Those who return behind
bars after spending extended periods outside invariably find that they do not recognize
'the joint' and that they can no longer get along with their fellow inmates due to the pre-
vailing anomie.[25] When my best friend and informant from Chicago's South Side,
Ashante, was sent to serve a six-year sentence in a low-security facility in downstate Illi-
nois after having 'stayed clean' on the outside for a decade following a stint of eight years
at Stateville penitentiary, he promptly requested a transfer to a maximum-security prison:
he was dismayed by the arrogance and unruliness of 'young punks' from the streets of
Chicago who ignored the old convict code, disrespected inmates with extensive prison
seniority, and sought confrontation at every turn. Ashante knew well that, by moving to
Stateville or Pontiac, he would endure a much more restrictive regimen in a more dreary
physical setting with access to fewer programs, but he believed that a more predictable
environment ruled by the norms of the 'inmate society' of old made for a less risky
sojourn.[26] The increased entropy and commotion that characterizes prison life today
explains that 'it is not uncommon to find ten percent of the population of large prison
in protective custody' (Morris, 1995: 248). It accounts also for the proliferation of 'super-
max' penitentiaries across the country as authorities strive to restore order by relegating
'the worst of the worst', inmates in special facilities where they are kept in near-total lock-
down under detention regimes so austere that they are indistinguishable from torture in
the light of international human rights covenants (King, 1999).

3. Purging the undesirables

The 'Big House' of the postwar decades was animated by a consequentialist theory of
punishment that sought to resocialize inmates so as to lower the probability of re-offense

once they returned society, of which they were expected to become law-abiding if not productive members. Following the official repudiation of the philosophy of rehabilitation in the 1970s (Allen, 1981), today's prison has for sole purpose to *neutralize* offenders – and individuals thought to be likely to violate the law, such as parolees – both *materially*, by removing them physically into an institutional enclave, and *symbolically*, by drawing a hard and fast line between criminals and law-abiding citizens. The 'law-and-order' paradigm that has achieved undivided hegemony in crime and justice policy over the past two decades jettisons any notion of prevention and proportionality in favor of direct appeals to popular resentment through measures that dramatize the fear and loathing of crime viewed as the abhorrent conduct of defective individuals.[27] 'Such appeals to resentment', writes Hirsch (1999: 676), 'reflect an ideology of purging "undesirables" from the body politic' in which incarceration is essentially a means for social and moral excommunication. That makes the mission of today's prison identical to that of the classical ghetto, whose *raison d'être* was precisely to quarantine a polluting group from the urban body.

When the prison is used as an implement for social and cultural purging, like the ghetto, it no longer points beyond itself; it turns into a self-contained contraption which fulfils its function, and thus justifies itself, by its mere existence. And its inhabitants learn to live in the here-and-now, bathed in the concentrate of violence and hopelessness brewing within the walls. In his autobiographical description of the changing social structure and culture of a maximum-security facility in Pennsylvania over the past sixteen years, inmate Victor Hassine (1999: 41) captures well the devolution of the Big House, pointing to eventual reentry into society, into a Warehouse leading nowhere but to a wall of despair:

> Through this gradual process of deterioration, Graterford the prison became Graterford the ghetto, a place where men forgot about courts of law or the difference between right and wrong because they were too busy thinking about living, dying, or worse. Reform, rehabilitation, and redemption do not exist in a ghetto. There is only survival of the fittest. Crime, punishment, and accountability are of little significance when men are living in a lawless society where their actions are restrained only by the presence of concrete and steel walls. Where a prison in any real or abstract sense might promote the greater good, once it becomes a ghetto it can do nothing but promise violent upheaval.

4. The proto-racialization of judicial stigma

The contemporary prison can be further likened to the ghetto in that, in the revanchist penal climate of the past two decades, the stigma of penal conviction has been prolonged, diffused, and reframed in ways that assimilate it to an ethnoracial stigma attached *ad aeternitum* to the body of its bearer. In other liberal-democratic societies, the status dishonor and civic disabilities of being a prisoner are temporary and limited: they affect offenders while they are being processed by the criminal justice system and typically wear off upon coming out of prison or shortly thereafter; to ensure this, laws and administrative rules set strict conditions and limits to the use and diffusion of criminal justice information. Not so in the United States, where, on the contrary, (1) convicts are subjected to ever-longer and broader post-detention forms of social control and symbolic branding that durably set them apart from the rest of the population; (2) the criminal

files of individual inmates are readily accessible and actively disseminated by the authorities; (3) a naturalizing discourse suffused with genetic phraseology and animalistic imagery has swamped public representations of crime in the media, politics, and significant segments of scholarship.

All but two states require *postprison supervision* of offenders and 80 percent of all persons released from state penitentiaries are freed under conditional or community release; the average term spent on parole has also increased steadily over the past two decades to surpass 23 months in 1996 – nearly equal to the average prison term served of 25 months (Petersilia, 1999). At the same time, parole services have become entirely focused on the administrative enforcement of safety and security, to the near-total neglect of job training, housing assistance, and substance abuse treatment, even though official records indicate that over three- fourths of inmates suffer from psychotropic dependency. With fully 54 percent of offenders failing to complete their term of parole in 1997 (compared to 27 percent in 1984), and parole violators making up a third of all persons admitted in state penitentiaries every year (two-thirds in California), parole has become an appendage of the prison which operates mainly to extend the social and symbolic incapacities of incarceration beyond its walls. With the advent of the Internet, corrections administrations in many states, among them Illinois, Florida, and Texas, have put their entire inmate data bases on line, further stretching the perimeter of penal infamy by making it possible for anyone to delve into the 'rap sheet' of prisoners via the World Wide Web, and for employers and landlords to discriminate more broadly against ex-convicts in complete legality (Wacquant, 1999a: 76–7).[28]

This general movement towards longer and more encompassing post-detention measures of criminal justice supervision finds an extreme instantiation in the management of sex offenders under the regime of 'Megan's Laws' voted in 1996 by federal and state governments in a mad rush to appease displaced popular ire over child abuse. These laws mandate that authorities not only keep a registry of all (ex-)sex offenders in their jurisdiction, for periods extending up to life, but also notify the public of their whereabouts via mailings, posters, media announcements and CD-Roms containing the files of ex-offenders coded by geographic area (Martin, 1996), thus making permanent and highly visible the blemish attached to their conviction. In Louisiana, for instance, the (ex-)sex offender himself must notify in writing his landlord, neighbors, and the director of the local school and municipal parks of his penal status; he must also post warnings of his presence in a community newspaper within thirty days of his arrival. The law further authorizes 'all forms of public notification ', including posters, handbills, and bumper stickers – a judge can even request that the offender wear 'a distinctive garb' that will readily identify him as a sex offender (Cooper, 1998), in the manner of the yellow star or hat donned by Jews in the principalities of Medieval Europe and Hitler's Germany. Upon release of this information, former sex offenders have been routinely insulted, publicly humiliated, harassed and attacked; many have lost their jobs and been forced to relocate to escape the open hostility of their neighbors; a few have reacted by committing suicide. Reinforced by the systematic media (mis)representation of sex offenders as congenital perverts whose behavior cannot be prevented or corrected, Megan's Laws send the unmistakable message, 'once an offender, always an offender',[29] turning judicial stigma into negative symbolic capital

that cannot be shed and will therefore weigh on its bearer for life, like the stain of 'race' construed as a dishonoring form of denegated ethnicity.

The resurgence and popularity of genetic pseudo-explanations of crime is another indicator of the bent towards the compulsive *racialization of criminals*, whose counterpart is the elective *ethnicization of crime victims*, who have recently been fabricated into a quasi-ethnic group (Best, 1997), complete with its distinctive idiom, insignia, pageantry, and official organizations that mobilize to demand 'affirmative action' from the state on behalf of their members. One illustration from among a myriad: the compendium on crime edited by James Q. Wilson and Joan Petersilia, in which 'twenty-eight leading experts look at the most pressing problem of our time' (according to the book's front cover blurb), opens with two long chapters that review 'Criminogenic Traits' and 'Biomedical Factors in Crime' (Herrnstein, 1995; Brennan et al., 1995). For Richard Herrnstein (1995: 40, 41, 62, 56–7, 58), a renowned Harvard psychologist and co-author, with ultraright-wing ideologue Charles Murray, of the infamous treatise in scholarly racism, *The Bell Curve*, serious crimes are not culturally or historically defined but *male in se*, 'crimes that are wrong in themselves'. Now, 'it would be an overstatement to say "once a criminal always a criminal", but it would be closer to the truth [sic] than to deny the evidence of a unifying and long-enduring pattern of encounters with the law for most serious offenders'. This pattern cannot be explained by 'accidents, situations, and social forces', as these only 'modulate the criminogenic factors' of low intelligence, antisocial personality and male chromosomes.[30] The genetic roots of crime are further confirmed by the fact that offenders are 'disproportionately nonectomorphic mesomorphs' (chunky and muscular with large bones) and sport 'lower heart rates', 'lower nervous system responsiveness to sudden stimuli', and 'atypical patterns [of] brain waves'. Herrnstein regrets that research has turned up 'only weak association between male hormones and criminal behavior or antisociality' but he promptly consoles himself by asserting that the Y chromosome elevates criminal behavior in 'supermales' and 'increases the risk of criminal incarceration by a factor of about ten' – based on the fact that the proportion of XYY male prisoners is ten times that in the general population.[31] Interestingly enough, Herrnstein does not discuss ethnoracial differences in criminality and, in his conclusion, he even disingenuously disavows – on feigned epistemological grounds – any effort to 'frame questions about behavior in terms of causes' (although he has repeatedly turned correlation into causation in this very chapter). But it requires little effort to infer from his argumentation that, 'just as night follows day', the hyper-incarceration of blacks must be caused in part by their innate criminal propensity, given what he calls 'a scientific consensus that criminal and antisocial behavior can have genetic roots' (Herrnstein, 1995: 62, 58).[32]

5. Bifurcated socioracial patterning of carceral recruitment and authority

Today's prison further resembles the ghetto for the simple reason that an overwhelming majority of its occupants originate from the racialized core of the country's major cities, and returns there upon release, only to be soon caught again in the police dragnet to be sent away for another, longer sojourn behind bars in a self-perpetuating cycle of escalating socioeconomic marginality and legal incapacitation. To take but one example, in the late 1980s, three of every four inmates serving a sentence in the prisons of the entire state of New York came from only *seven* black and Latino neighborhoods of New York

City, which also happen to be the poorest areas of the metropolis, chief among them Harlem, the South Bronx, East New York, and Brownsville (Ellis, 1993). Every year these segregated and dispossessed districts furnished a fresh contingent of 25,000-odd inmates while 23,000 ex-convicts were discharged, most of them on parole, right back in these devastated areas. A conservative estimate, given a statewide felony recidivism rate of 47 percent, is that within a year, some 15,000 of them found their way back 'upstate' and under lock.[33] The fact that 46 percent of the inmates of New York state prisons issue from neighborhoods served by the 16 worst public schools of the city (Davidson, 1997: 38) ensures that their clientele will be duly replenished for years to come.

The contemporary prison system and the ghetto not only display a similarly skewed recruitment and composition in terms of class and caste. The former also duplicates the authority structure characteristic of the latter in that it places a population of poor blacks under the direct supervision of whites – albeit, in this case, lower-class whites. In the communal ghetto of the postwar, black residents chaffed under the rule of white landlords, white employers, white unions, white social workers and white policemen (Clark, 1965). Likewise, at century's end, the convicts of New York City, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Cleveland, Detroit and Chicago, who are overwhelming African-American, serve their sentence in establishments staffed by officers who are overwhelmingly white (see Figure 1). In Illinois, for instance, two-thirds of the state's 41,000 inmates are blacks who live under the watch of a 8,400 uniformed force that is 84 percent white. With the proliferation of detention facilities in rural areas, perversely, the economic stability and social welfare of lower-class whites from the declining hinterland has come to hinge on the continued socioeconomic marginality and penal restraint of ever-larger numbers of subproletarian blacks from the urban core.

The convergent changes that have 'prisonized' the ghetto and 'ghettoized' the prison in the aftermath of the Civil Rights revolution suggest that the inordinate and mounting over-representation of blacks behind bars does not stem simply from the discriminatory targeting of specific penal policies such as the War on Drugs, as proposed by Tonry (1995), or from the sheer destabilizing effects of the increased penetration of ghetto neighborhoods by the penal state, as Miller argues (1997). Not that these two factors are not at work, for clearly they are deeply involved in the hyper-incarceration of African Americans. But they fail to capture the precise nature and the full magnitude of the transformations that have interlocked the prison and the (hyper)ghetto via a relation of *functional equivalency* (they serve one and the same purpose, the coercive confinement of a stigmatized population) and *structural homology* (they comprise and comfort the same type of social relations and authority pattern) to form a *single institutional mesh* suited to fulfil anew the mission historically imparted to America's 'peculiar institutions'.

The thesis of the structural-functional coupling of the remnants of the ghetto with the carceral system is supported by *the timing of racial transition*: with a lag of about a dozen years, the 'blackening' of the carceral population has followed closely on the heels of the demise of the Black Belt as a viable instrument of caste containment in the urban-industrial settting, just as, a century earlier, the sudden penal repression of African Americans had helped to shore up 'the walls of white supremacy as the South moved from an era of racial bondage to one of racial caste' (Oshinsky, 1996: 57). It is also verified by the *geographic patterning* of racial disproportionality and its evolution: outside
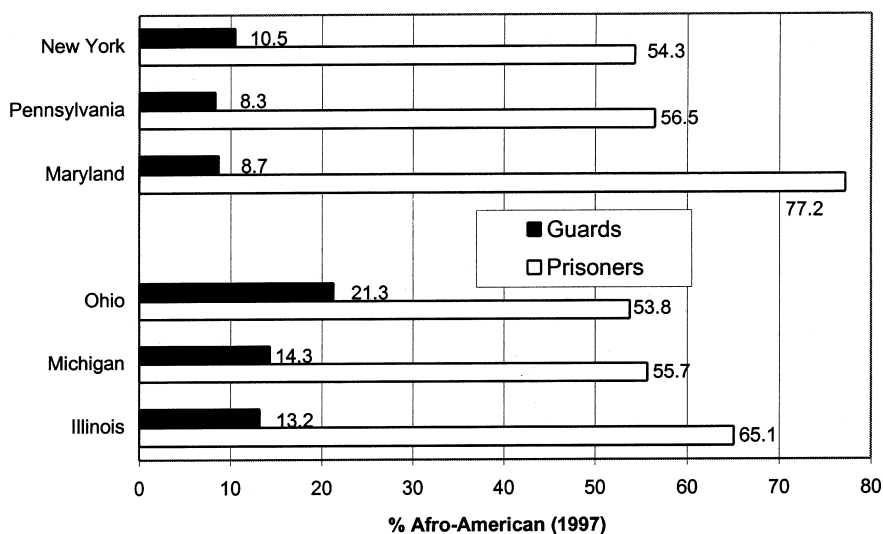
•Figure 1 **Black prisoners guarded by white correctional officers**
Source: Camp and Camp (1998: pp. 13 and 130)

of the South – which for obvious historical reasons requires a separate analysis – the black-white gap in incarceration is more pronounced and has increased faster in those states of the Midwest and Northeast that are the historic cradle of the Northern ghetto (Mauer, 1997).

The intertwining of the urban Black Belt and the carceral system is further evidenced, and in turn powerfully abetted, by the *fusion of ghetto and prison culture*, as vividly expressed in the lyrics of 'gangsta rap' singers and hip hop artists (Cross, 1993), in graffitti and tattooing (Phillips, 1999: 152–67), and in the dissemination, to the urban core and beyond, of language, dress, and interaction patterns innovated inside of jails and penitentiaries. The advent of hyper-incarceration for lower-class blacks and Latinos has in effect rendered moot the classic dispute, among scholars of imprisonment, between the 'deprivation thesis,' canonized by Gresham Sykes, and the 'importation thesis,' proposed in response by John Irwin and Donald Cressey. This alternative has been transcended by the melting of street and carceral symbolism, with the resulting mix being *re-exported* to the ghetto and diffused throughout society via the commercial circuits catering to the teenage consumer market, professional sports, and even the mainstream media.[34] Witness the widespread adolescent fashion of baggy pants worn with the crotch down to mid-thigh and the resurgent popularity of body art featuring prison themes and icons – more often than not unbeknownst to those who wear them.

HOW PRISON IS REMAKING 'RACE' AND RESHAPING THE CITIZENRY

I indicated earlier that slavery, the Jim Crow system and the ghetto are 'race making' institutions, which is to say that they do not simply *process* an ethnoracial division that would somehow exist outside of and independently from them. Rather, each *produces*

(or co-produces) this division (anew) out of inherited demarcations and disparities of group power and inscribes it at every epoch in a distinctive constellation of material and symbolic forms.[35] And all have consistently *racialized* the arbitrary boundary setting African Americans apart from all others in the United States by actively denying its cultural origin in history, ascribing it instead to the fictitious necessity of biology.

The highly particular conception of 'race' that America has invented, virtually unique in the world for its rigidity and consequentiality, is a direct outcome of the momentous collision between slavery and democracy as modes of organization of social life *after* bondage had been established as the major form of labor conscription and control in a underpopulated colony home to a precapitalist system of production (Fields, 1982). The Jim Crow regime reworked the racialized boundary between slave and free into a rigid caste separation between 'whites' and 'Negros' – comprising all persons of known African ancestry, no matter how minimal – that infected every crevice of the postbellum social system in the South (Powdermaker, 1939). The ghetto, in turn, imprinted this dichotomy onto the spatial makeup and institutional schemas of the industrial metropolis. So much so that, in the wake of the 'urban riots' of the 1960s, which in truth were uprisings against intersecting caste and class subordination, 'urban' and black became near-synonymous in policy making as well as everyday parlance. And the 'crisis' of the city came to stand for the enduring contradiction between the individualistic and competitive tenor of American life, on the one hand, and the continued seclusion of African Americans from it, on the other.[36]

As a new century dawns, it is up to the fourth 'peculiar institution' born of the adjoining of the hyperghetto with the carceral system to remould the social meaning and significance of 'race' in accordance with the dictates of the deregulated economy and the post-Keynesian state. Now, the penal apparatus has long served as an accessory to ethnoracial domination by helping to stabilize a regime under attack or bridge the hiatus between successive regimes: thus the 'Black Codes' of Reconstruction served to keep African-American labor in place following the demise of slavery while the criminalization of civil rights protests in the South in the 1950s aimed to retard the agony of Jim Crow. But the role of the carceral institution today is different in that, for the first time in US history, it has been elevated to the rank of main machine for 'race making'.

Among the manifold effects of the wedding of ghetto and prison into an extended carceral mesh, perhaps the most consequential is the practical revivification and *official solidification of the centuries-old association of blackness with criminality* and devious violence. Along with the return of Lombroso-style mythologies about criminal atavism and the wide diffusion of bestial metaphors in the journalistic and political field (where mentions of 'superpredators', 'wolf-packs', 'animals' and the like are commonplace), the massive over-incarceration of blacks has supplied a powerful common-sense warrant for 'using color as a proxy for dangerousness' (Kennedy, 1997: 136). In recent years, the courts have consistently authorized the police to employ race as 'a negative signal of increased risk of criminality' and legal scholars have rushed to endorse it as 'a rational adaptation to the demographics of crime', made salient and verified, as it were, by the blackening of the prison population, even though such practice entails major inconsistencies from the standpoint of constitutional law (Kennedy, 1997: 143, 146). Throughout the urban criminal justice system, the formula 'Young + Black + Male' is now openly equated with 'probable cause' justifying the arrest, questioning,

bodily search and detention of millions of African-American males every year (Gaynes, 1993).

In the era of racially targetted 'law-and-order' policies and their socio-logical pendant, racially skewed mass imprisonment, the reigning public image of the criminal is not just that of 'a *monstruum* – a being whose features are inherently different from ours' (Melossi 2000: 311), but that of a *black* monster, as young African-American men from the 'inner city' have come to personify the explosive mix of moral degeneracy and mayhem.[37] The conflation of blackness and crime in collective representation and government policy (the other side of this equation being the conflation of blackness and welfare) thus re-activates 'race' by giving a legitimate outlet to the expression of anti-black animus in the form of the public vituperation of criminals and prisoners. As writer John Edgar Wideman (1995: 504) points out,

> It's respectable to tar and feather criminals, to advocate locking them up and throwing away the key. It's not racist to be against crime, even though the archetypal criminal in the media and the public imagination almost always wears 'Willie' Horton's face. Gradually, 'urban' and 'ghetto' have become code words for terrible places where only blacks reside. Prison is rapidly being re-lexified in the same segregated fashion.

Indeed, when 'to be a man of color of a certain economic class and milieu is equivalent in the public eye to being a criminal', being processed by the penal system is tantamount to being made black, and 'doing time' behind bars is at the same time 'marking race' (Wideman, 1995: 505).[38]

A second major effect of the penalization of the 'race question' via the hypertrophic expansion of the prison system has been to thoroughly *depoliticize* it. For reframing the problems posed by the maintenance of ethnoracial division in the wake of the ghetto's demise as issues of law enforcement automatically delegitimates any attempt at collective resistance and redress. Established organizations of civic voice for African Americans cannot confront head on the crisis of hyperincarceration in their community for fear that this would seem to validate the very conflation of blackness and crime in public perception that fuels this crisis. Thus the courteous silence of the NAACP, the Urban League, the Black Congressional Caucus, and black churches on the topic, even as the penal tutelage of African Americans has escalated to heights experienced by no other group in history, even under the most repressive authoritarian regimes and in Soviet-style societies. This reticence is further reinforced by the fact, noted long ago by W.E.B. DuBois, that the tenuous position of the black bourgeoisie in the socioracial hierarchy rests critically on its ability to distance itself from its unruly lower-class brethen: to offset the symbolic disability of blackness, middle-class African Americans must forcefully communicate to whites that they have 'absolutely no sympathy and no known connections with any black man who has committed a crime' (DuBois cited in Christianson, 1998: 228).

Even riots, the last weapon of protest left to an urban subproletariat spurned by a political system thoroughly dominated by the white suburban electorate and corporations, have been rendered purposeless by mass penal confinement. It is commonly believed that 'race riots' in the United States crested in the 1960s and then vanished, save for anomalous outbursts such as in Miami in 1980 and Los Angeles in 1992. In reality, the ghetto uprisings of 1963–1968 have been succeeded by a rolling *wave of*

upheavals inside of prisons, from Attica and Soledad to facilities throughout Michigan, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Illinois, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania, among others (Morris, 1995: 248–9; Useem and Kimball, 1989). But, by moving from the open stage of the streets to the closed perimeter of penitentiaries, these outbursts differed from their predecessors of the 1960s in three important ways. First, ghetto riots were highly visible and, through the media, interpellated the highest authorities in the land. Carceral riots, on the contrary, were never conspicuous to start with (unless they caused major destruction), and they have rapidly grown less and less perceptible to the point of virtually *disappearing* from the public scene.[39] Next, they have received *administrative* responses from within the correctional bureaucracy in lieu of political responses from without, and these responses have only compounded the problem: the approach of the state to inmate belligerence in the 1950s was to 'intensify the therapeutic thrust in prisons' (Rotman, 1995: 189); thirty years later, it is to intensify the drive to 'classify, separate, and isolate' (Irwin, 1980: 228), to toughen discipline, routinize the use of 'lockdown', and to multiply 'special housing units' and 'supermax' facilities. A third difference between the uproarious ghetto riots of decades past and the diffuse, muffled, carceral riots that have replaced them is that they typically pit, not blacks against whites, but *one subordinate ethnic group against another*, such as blacks versus Mexicans, thereby further diminishing the likelihood that they will receive a broad sociopolitical interpretation connecting them to the transformed ethnoracial order on the outside.[40] By entombing poor blacks in the concrete walls of the prison, then, the penal state has effectively smothered and silenced subproletarian revolt.

By assuming a central role in the post-Keynesian government of race and poverty, at the crossroads of the deregulated low-wage labor market, a revamped 'welfare-workfare' apparatus designed to support casual employment, and the vestiges of the ghetto, the overgrown carceral system of the United States has become a major engine of symbolic production in its own right.[41] It is not only the preeminent institution for signifying and enforcing blackness, much as slavery was during the first three centuries of US history. Just as bondage effected the 'social death' of imported African captives and their descendants on American soil (Patterson, 1982), *mass incarceration also induces the civic death* of those it ensnares by extruding them from the social compact. Today's inmates are thus the target of a threefold movement of exclusionary closure:

1. Prisoners are denied access to valued *cultural capital*: just as university credentials are becoming a prerequisite for employment in the (semi-)protected sector of the labor market, inmates have been expelled from higher education by being made ineligible for Pell Grants, starting with drug offenders in 1988, continuing with convicts sentenced to death or lifelong imprisonment without the possibility of parole in 1992, and ending with all remaining state and federal prisoners in 1994. This expulsion was voted by Congress for the sole purpose of accentuating the symbolic divide between criminals and 'law-abiding citizens' in spite of overwhelming evidence that prison educational programs drastically cut recidivism as well as help to maintain carceral order (Page, 2000).
2. Prisoners are systematically excluded from *social redistribution* and public aid in an age when work insecurity makes access to such programs more vital than ever for those dwelling in the lower regions of social space. Laws deny welfare payments, veterans

benefits and food stamps to anyone in detention for more than 60 days. The Work Opportunity and Personal Responsibility Act of 1996 further banishes most ex-convicts from Medicaid, public housing, Section 8 vouchers, and related forms of assistance. In spring of 1998, President Clinton denounced as intolerable 'fraud and abuse' perpetrated against 'working families' who 'play by the rules' the fact that some prisoners (or their households) continued to get public payments due to lax bureaucratic enforcement of these prohibitions. And he proudly launched 'unprecedented federal, state, and local co-operation as well as new, innovative incentive programs' using the latest 'high-tech tools to weed out any inmate' who still received benefits (Clinton, 1998), including the disbursement of bounties to counties who promptly turn in identifying information on their jail detainees to the Social Security administration.

3. Convicts are banned from *political participation* via 'criminal disenfranchisement' practiced on a scale and with a vigor unimagined in any other country. All but four members of the Union deny the vote to mentally competent adults held in detention facilities; 39 states forbid convicts placed on probation from exercising their political rights and 32 states also interdict parolees. In 14 states, ex-felons are barred from voting even when they are no longer under criminal justice supervision – *for life* in ten of these states. The result is that nearly 4 million Americans have temporarily or permanently lost the ability to cast a ballot, including 1.47 million who are not behind bars and another 1.39 million who served their sentence in full (Fellner and Mauer, 1998). A mere quarter of a century after acceding to full voting rights, one black man in seven nationwide is banned from the electoral booth through penal disenfranchisement and seven states permanently deny the vote to more than one fourth of their black male residents.

Through this *triple exclusion*, the prison, and the criminal justice system more broadly, contribute to the ongoing *reconstruction of the 'imagined community' of Americans* around the polar opposition between praiseworthy 'working families'- implicitly white, suburban, and deserving – and the despicable 'underclass' of criminals, loafers, and leeches, a two-headed antisocial hydra personified by the dissolute teenage 'welfare mother' on the female side and the dangerous street 'gang banger' on the male side – by definition dark-skinned, urban, and undeserving. The former are exalted as the living incarnation of genuine American values, self-control, deferred gratification, subservience of life to labor;[42] the latter is vituperated as the loathsome embodiment of their abject desecration, the 'dark side' of the 'American dream' of affluence and opportunity for all believed to flow from morality anchored in conjugality and work. And the line that divides them is increasingly being drawn, materially and symbolically, by the prison.

On the other side of that line lies an institutional setting unlike any other. Building on his celebrated analyses of Ancient Greece, classical historian Moses Finley (1968) has introduced a fruitful distinction between 'societies with slaves' and 'genuine slave societies'. In the former, slavery is but one of several modes of labor control and the division between slave and free is neither impermeable nor axial to the entire social order. In the latter, enslaved labor is epicentral to both economic production and class structure, and the slave-master relation provides the pattern after which all other social relations are built or distorted, such that no corner of culture, society and self is left untouched by it. The astronomical overrepresentation of blacks in houses of penal

confinement and the increasingly tight meshing of the hyperghetto with the carceral system suggests that, owing to America's adoption of mass incarceration as a queer social policy designed to discipline the poor and contain the dishonored, lower-class African Americans now dwell, not in a society with prisons as their white compatriots do, but in *the first genuine prison society* of history.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 Because males compose over 93 percent of the US state and federal prison population and 89 percent of jail inmates, and because the disciplining of women from the lower class and caste continues to operate primarily through the agencies of the social arm of the American state (namely, welfare and workfare), this article focuses solely on men. But a full-fledged analysis of the distinct causes and consequences of the astonishing growth in the imprisonment of black (and Hispanic) women is urgently needed, among other reasons because the penal confinement of women has immensely deleterious effects on their children (Hagan and Dinovitzer, 1999).

2 It must be stressed, moreover, that this increase in 'racial disproportionality' is notably underestimated since the category 'whites' comprises a significant and growing number of Latinos, as the latter's share of the total inmate population increases over time (and the more so in states that have led the march to mass incarceration, such as Texas, California and Florida).

3 In this, I follow the exhortation of Georg Rusche (1933: 11) in a short but pointed article that sums up the intention of his and Kirchheimer's classic *Punishment and Social Structure*: 'The bond, transparent or not, that is supposed to exist between crime and punishment. . . must be broken. Punishment is neither a simple consequence of crime, nor the reverse side of crime, nor a mere means which is determined by the end to be achieved. Punishment must be understood as a social phenomenon freed from both its juristic concept and its social ends', that is, its official mission of crime control, so that it may be replaced in the complete system of strategies, including social policies, aimed at regulating the poor. But I do *not* follow Rusche in (1) postulating a *direct* link between brute economic forces and penal policy; (2) reducing economic forces to the sole state of the *labor market*, and still less the supply of labor; (3) limiting the control function of the prison to lower *classes*, as distinct from other subordinate categories (ethnic or national, for instance); and (4) omitting the ramifying *symbolic* effects that the penal system exercises by

drawing, dramatizing, and enforcing group boundaries. Indeed, in the case of black Americans, the symbolic function of the carceral system is paramount. For a terse application of this approach to the penal containment of immigrants in the European Union today, see Wacquant (1999b).

4 Two features of America's *racial exceptionalism* must be noted briefly here: the United States is the only nation in the world to define as 'black' all persons with *any* recognized African *ancestry*, creating a rigid black/white division between two mutually exclusive communities; second, within the United States, the 'one-drop rule' and the principle of hypodescent (whereby the offspring of any mixed couple are automatically assigned to the inferior category, here blacks, irrespective of their phenotype, upbringing, and other social properties) are applied solely to African Americans, making them the only U.S. ethnic group that cannot merge into white society through intermarriage. This highly peculiar conception of 'blackness' arose in the American South to protect the institution of slavery and later served to solidify the Jim Crown system of segregation (Davis, 1992).

5 Thus also the central place of violence in the black American collective experience and imagination, from Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany to Ralph Ellison, Bayard Rustin and Malcolm X (Levine, 1977; Takaki, 1993; Broderick and Meier, 1965).

6 The 'inherent instability of the slave relation' has been demonstrated by Patterson (1982: 336) and that of unfree labor by Kolchin (1987: 359); the congenital incompatibility of caste separation and democracy is the fulcrum of Gunnar Myrdal's (1944) classic analysis of the 'American dilemma' of race (which, *pace* Myrdal, is *not* a value conflict amenable to moral resolution but a structural disjuncture between principles of social vision and vision, maintained or overturned by relations of power).

7 This historical schema should not be read as an ineluctable forward march towards ethnoracial equality. Each new phase of racial domination entailed retrogression as well as progress. And, while it is true that there has been a kind of 'civilizing' of racial domination (in Norbert Elias's sense of the term), it remains that each regime has to be evaluated in light of the institutional possibilities it harbors, not simply by contrast to its predecessor(s).

8 The interaction of slavery and race, and how each transformed the other across the three broad 'generations' of slaves during the 17th and 18th century, the 'charters generations', the 'plantation generations', and the 'revolutionary generations', is well depicted by Ira Berlin (1998).

9 This regime was supported and abetted by the federal government, which acted as a powerful engine for the national legitimation and diffusion of exclusionary racial practices and patterns in the half-century preceding the Civil Rights Act of 1964: every major federal institution, from the US civil service and public employment exchanges to public housing and the armed forces, engaged in the systematic discrimination and ostracization of blacks (King, 1995).

10 In Mississippi, 'the list of disqualifying offenses – which included arson, bigamy, fraud, and petty theft, but not murder, rape, or grand larceny – was tailored, in the opinion of the state supreme court, to bar blacks, a "patient, docile people . . . given rather to furtive offenses than to the robust crimes of the whites"'' (McMillen, 1990: 43).

11 As an uprooted people, African Americans have always migrated in search of improved economic opportunities and a less oppressive racial climate. Before World War I, their peregrinations took them throughout the South as well as to the frontier states of the West, in a quest for land as fount of material security. The Great Migration redirected these population streams towards the urban North and amplified them by linking them to industrial wage employment. With the onset of mass imprisonment, lower-class blacks are being forcibly 'migrated' back to the declining rural areas where most state and federal prisons are located.

12 The New Deal helped this parallel city coalesce by (1) further stimulating outmigration from the South via agricultural programs that excluded black farmers and farm laborers; (2) extending public aid to jobless African Americans living in the Northern metropolis (half of Chicago's Negro families were on relief in 1940); and (3) building up its physical infrastructure through public works and the massing of social housing projects in the segregated urban core, while refusing to guarantee loans to blacks seeking residence in white neighborhoods. After the Second World War, federal housing, lending, and transportation policies conspired to keep blacks firmly hemmed in the ghetto.

13 The urbanization of blacks accelerated the 'melting' of mulattos and Negros into a single overarching African-American identity. It also supplied the impetus for the gestation and growth of the gamut of organizations that took up the struggle for racial equality on the national stage, from the gradualist Urban League and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to the militant Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters to the secessionist Universal Negro Improvement Association of Marcus Garvey.

14 A fuller discussion of the homologies between ghetto and prison as institutions of forced confinement of dishonored categories is in Wacquant (2000: 382–5).

15 It is not so much that the black middle class *moved out* of the 'inner city,' as argued by Wilson (1987); rather, it has *grown* outside of the historic core of the ghetto after its heyday. For the black bourgeoisie was miniscule at the mid-century point, and as early as the 1930s it had already established outposts beyond the perimeter of Bronzeville, as Drake and Cayton (1945: 384) point out.

16 On Christmas night of 1988, I attended mass at a Baptist church near the Robert Taylor Homes, the single largest concentration of public housing in Chicago (and, for that matter, in the United States) with a population of some 15,000. Participation was so sparse (about sixty people) that members of the audience had to join the choir impromptu to allow it to wade through its piteous repertoire. The atmosphere upon leaving the cavernous building was one of disaffection and depression. A few months later, the ramshackle structure was boarded up and, by the following Christmas, it had been razed and its lot left vacant.

17 The *Chicago Defender*'s role a 'race paper' has been partially taken up by *The Call*, the official organ of the Nation of Islam, but the latter's circulation is but a fraction of its predecessor's and its impact incomparably smaller.

18 For detailed accounts of the gross and systematic dysfunctioning of these institutions and their impact on residents of Chicago's hyperghetto, see, respectively, Abraham (1992) on public health, Venkatesh (2000) on public housing, Ayers (1997) on the juvenile court, *Chicago Tribune* (1992) on public schools, and Conroy (2000) and

Amnesty International (1999) on the police (including reports of more than a decade of rampant torture at Area 2 station on the South Side, involving mock executions, 'Palestinian hangings', electric shocks with cattle prods, burnings with radiators and asphyxiation with plastic bags, in addition to the usual pattern of brutality, unjustified shootings and cover-ups, and the detention and interrogation of children in custody).

19 See the account of Gerstel et al. (1996) on homeless shelters and the vivid description of Chicago's 'SRO Death Row' by Klinenberg (1999: 269–72). Parallels between prison culture and the management of the Armory, New York's biggest homeless shelter, are suggested by Dordick (1997: 126-49)

20 In 1992, the Division of School Safety of the New York City Board of Education had a budget of 73 million dollars, a fleet of ninety vehicles, and over 3,200 uniformed security officers, which made it the ninth largest police force in the country, just ahead of that of Miami. In 1968, this division did not exist. John Devine (1996: 80–2) notes that lower-tier principals now have as one of their major concerns the management of this 'paramilitary force [which] has taken on an independent existence with its own organization and procedures, language, rules, equipment, dresssing rooms, uniforms, vans, and lines of authority'.

21 One must be careful not to romantizice the carceral past: even in the heyday of rehabilitation (corresponding to the full maturation of the Fordist economy and Keynesian state), the prison did not much rehabilitate, owing to the abiding 'priority given to institutional order, discipline, and security' (Rotman, 1995: 295). But the ideal of treatment, the intervention of therapeutic professionals, and the deployment of rehabilitative routines did improve conditions of detention and reduce arbitrariness, cruelty, and lawlessness behind bars. What is more, extensive 'programming' helped achieve internal stability and instilled a forward-looking outlook among inmates.

22 Note the parallel with social research on the ghetto: the field studies of the sixties, focusing on ghetto *institutions* seen at ground level from the insider's point of view, disappeared by the 1970s to be replaced a decade later by survey-based research on the 'underclass', i.e., *population aggregates* constructed from afar and from above via the manipulation of quantitative indicators. Note also that the disappearance of the inmate society from social science partakes at a cognitive level of a distinctively US policy of 'invisibilization' of social problems and problem populations (the same technique is now being applied to welfare recipients). By contrast, ethnographic research on the prison is alive and productive in Europe, especially England and France.

23 The caste-like organization of the Warehouse extends to the management of relations with the outside. At the San Quentin prison near San Francisco, whenever a black (or Latino) inmate is assaulted inside the facility, all African-American (Latino) inmates from that housing unit are automatically barred from visitation and the women who are thus refused entry to see them learn to think of themselves in such categorical terms in their dealings with the prison (personal communication from Megan Comfort, based on ongoing field work in 'the Tube', the enclosed area where prison visitors wait for their visit).

24 'The activities of these violent groups who, in the pursuit of loot, sex, and revenge,

will attack any outsider have *completely unraveled any remnants of the old codes of honor* and tip networks that formerly helped to maintain order. In a limited, closed space, such as a prison, threats or attacks like those posed by these groups cannot be ignored. Prisoners must be ready to protect themselves or get out of the way. Those who have chosen to continue to circulate in public, with few exceptions, have formed or joined a clique or gang for their own protection. Consequently, violence-oriented groups dominate many, if not most, large men's prisons' (Irwin, 1980: 192, emphasis added).

25 See, for instance, Hassine (1999: 41–2) first-hand account of the conflict between 'new inmates vs. old heads' in the ghettoized 'prison subcultures' marked by 'their disrespect for authority, drug addition, illiteracy, and welfare mentality', in short, 'all the evils of the decaying American inner city'.

26 The same reasoning applies in big-city jails, which have become so disrupted, violent, and punitive that many detainees hasten to plead guilty in order to be 'sent to state' right away: 'Better do a year in state [prison] than three months in this hell of a jail' is how several detainees at LA's Men's Central Jail put it to me in summer of 1998.

27 'Three Strikes and You're Out', which mandates the lifelong incarceration of offenders at the edge of their criminal career in response to double recidivism, epitomizes this approach to 'vengeance as public policy' (Shichor and Sechrest, 1996) in its disregard for proportionality and penological efficacy, as well as in its unabashed use of a catchy baseball metaphor that likens crime fighting to a kind of sport.

28 Florida is at the vanguard of the trend to diffuse the criminal justice files of prisoners over the Internet 'in the interest of public safety.' The 'Corrections Offender Network' rubric of its prison administration allows one to run searches by name, race, sex, identifiers (Social Security, passport or alien number, driver's licence) and offense category. It provides not only the usual personal data (name and aliases, birth date, hair and eye color, height and weight, 'scars, marks, and tattoos' with their exact description and location) and criminal justice information (current offense date, offense type, sentence date, case number and prison sentence length, plus an abrievated incarceration history), but also a full-size color picture and the date of release as well as the current address for former inmates out on parole. This site received some 300,000 visits during its first year of operation.

29 As indicated by the disappearance of the term '*ex*-sex offender' in legal, political, and even scholarly discourse, which makes sex crimes the act of a particular *species* of individual, rather than a particular type of legally proscribed *conduct*.

30 'Inasmuch as criminal behavior is associated with [inferior] intelligence and [antisocial] personality, and inasmuch as personality and intelligence have genetic influences on them, then *it follows logically, as night follows day, that criminal behavior has genetic ingredients*' (Herrnstein, 1995: 55, emphasis added). The conceptual sleight-of-hand here lies both in the predicates (that intelligence and antisocial personality, inasmuch as they are themselves coherent variables, are genetically determined), in the vagueness of the terms 'influences' and 'ingredients', and in the locution 'inasmuch as' . . .

31 Not a single source is cited for this rather stunning statistic, despite superabundant notes and references throughout the chapter.

32 This is reaffirmed in the companion article by Brennan et al. (1995: 87–8), who sum up their findings thus: 'Criminal behavior in parents increases the likelihood of nonviolent crime in the offspring. This relationship is due, in part, to genetic transmission of criminogenic characteristics. This genetic effect is stronger for females and is especially important for recidivistic crime'. They also report that perinatal factors (delivery complications), frontal lobe dysfunction, and reduced cerebrospinal serotonin fluid levels are associated with violent crime while EEG slow alpha activity correlates with property crimes! For an up-to-date compendium of gene-based theories of crime and their resurgent popularity in mainstream US criminology, read Ellis and Walsh (1997).

33 It is revealing that these data should come from a survey of the geographic provenance of prisoners carried out by inmates themselves: they sensed at ground level what prison activist and scholar Eddie Ellis (1993: 2; also 1998) calls the 'relation of symbiosis' emerging between the ghetto and the carceral system, even as government officials and social scientists were oblivious or indifferent to it.

34 Hardly a week goes by without the *New York Times* featuring one or several articles reporting on some aspect of prison unrelated to crime control attesting to the seeping out and normalization of carceral culture: e.g. 'Accessories for the Big House: Corrections Officers Survey the Options for Keeping Inmates in Line' (in the Sunday magazine); 'In Jailhouse Chic, an Anti-Style Turns into a Style Itself' (Fashion rubric); 'Rooms Available in Gated Community: $20 a Day'(Society's Journal); 'Using Internet Links from Behind Bars' (Society); 'A Hard-Case Study Approach to Executive Training' (seminars on communication techniques for executives held inside of Attica, in the Business Section); 'Confined in Prisons, Literature Breaks Out' (in Arts and Ideas) (14 May, 13 June, 10 July, 1, 23 and 26 August, 2000 respectively).

35 That 'race' as a social principle of vision and division (to invoke Pierre Bourdieu's notion) is *made* and therefore contested, as are all social entities, does not mean that it is *eo ipso* infinitely malleable, endowed with a 'fluency', 'inherent instability' and even 'volatility' that would allow it to be reconfigured anew at every historical turn (as argued by Berlin, 1998: 1–3). The welcome emphasis on contention, resistance and change that has been the hallmark of recent populist, 'bottom up' approaches to the historiography and sociology of ethnoracial domination should not blind us to the fact that the ductility and durability of 'race' is highly variable across epochs and societies, depending, precisely, on the nature and workings of the extant 'peculiar institutions' that produce and reproduce it in each particular setting.

36 Two indicators suffice to spotlight the enduring ostracization of African Americans in US society. They are the only group to be 'hypersegregated', with spatial isolation shifting from the macro-level of state and county to the micro-level of municipality and neighborhood so as to minimize contacts with whites throughout the century (Massey and Denton, 1993; Massey and Hajnal, 1995). They remain barred from exogamy to a degree unknown to any other community, notwithstanding the recent growth of so-called multiracial families, with fewer than 3 percent of black women marrying out compared to a majority of Hispanic and Asian women (DaCosta, 2000).

37 Thus the commercial success, based on prurient fascination, of the autobiographical account of the well-named Los Angeles gang member, Monster Kody (Shakur, 1993).

38 Teresa Gowan (2000) reports that white ex-convicts forced to settle in inner-city St. Louis to be close to parole agencies upon being released from Missouri prisons complain that the criminal justice system 'turning them into blacks'.

39 So much so that they escape even the attention of prison scholars: two days before the conference at which this paper was presented, a race riot pitting some 200 black and Latino inmates broke out at California's high-tech Pelican Bay prison (a maximum-security facility reputed as 'the nation's most-secure' and notorious for being a 'war zone' between African Americans and whites), during which guards killed one prisoner and seriously wounded twelve others. It took 120 correctional officers a full half-hour to quell the frenzied mélée, despite the use of tear gas, pepper spray, rubber and wooden bullets and two dozen rounds from Ruger Mini-14 rifles. The next day, authorities placed all 33 prisons in the state on security alert ('Guards Kill Prisoner in Brawl at Pelican Bay', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 24 February 2000; 'Inmate Dies and 12 Are Hurt as Riot Erupts in California Prison', *New York Times*, 24 February 2000; 'State Puts all Prisons on Security Alert: Authorities are on Lookout for Signs of Racial Tension after Riot Ended in Shooting Death of an Inmate at Pelican Bay', *Los Angeles Times*, 25 February 2000). None of the participants to the conference mentioned this disturbance, the single most violent in California prisons in two decades, during the two days of discussions.

40 This is not to say, of course, that all prison upheavals are caused by racial conflict. The typical carceral riot involves a range and mix of grievances, from inadequate food and medical care to arbitrary and repressive management to idleness and lack of rehabilitative programs. But racial divisions and tensions are always a propitious backdrop, if not a major causal factor, of violent incidents, real or perceived, inside of U.S. detention houses (in summer of 1998, the word among detainees of the Los Angeles County Jail was that some facilities had to be avoided at all costs because they witnessed 'a race riot every day').

41 The argument that follows is influenced by Garland's (1991: 219) neo-Durkheimian explication of 'penality as a set of signifying practices' that 'help produce subjectivities, forms of authority and social relations' at large.

42 As when Albert Gore, Jr., declared in his prime-time speech at the Democratic Convention on 20 August of 2000: 'In the name of all the working families who are the strength and soul of America, I accept your nomination for President of the United States', indicating that non-working families and detached individuals, being unfit to be included in the act of political delegation, are not and need not be concerned by the election. The Vice-President uttered the locution 'working families' a record nine times in only 52 minutes and every major speaker that night invoked it repeatedly.

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