

INTRODUCTION TO THE PRINCETON CLASSIC EDITION

BY BRUCE WESTERN

IN THE SUMMER of 2003 I taught an undergraduate criminology class to a group of prisoners at New Jersey State Prison—the site of Gresham Sykes’s *Society of Captives*. The obvious relevance of the case study, its beautiful writing, and classic status all made *Captives* essential reading. The book provoked a lively discussion. Sykes’s survey of the pains of imprisonment resonated with the students’ experience of incarceration. But they were unconvinced that the guards lacked total power as Sykes had claimed. From the students’ perspective, official control was far-reaching indeed. At a deeper level, the class exemplified a key thesis of the book. Organized by the prisoners themselves, the class disrupted boredom and contributed in a small way to the order of prison life. Just as Sykes found five decades earlier, leaders among the prisoners were helping to sustain order in the inmate society.

Sykes’s work captured basic truths about penal confinement, and the field research still rings true. Yet the penal system has changed fundamentally. By the end of the 1990s, a young black man in America was more likely to have a prison record than a bachelor’s degree. And if he had dropped out of high school, he had a better than even chance of going to prison before turning forty. Poor young men—especially African American men—now confront the power of

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the state in the person of the policeman, the parole officer, and the prison guard. When Sykes began his research in 1954, America's prison population was just one-eighth as large as it would be fifty years later. The penal system had not yet gained a central place in American race relations and urban poverty. Still, *The Society of Captives* remains a cornerstone of prison sociology and indispensable for those who would understand the current era of mass incarceration.

These days, we tend to look in free society for the prison's significance. We study the prison's effects on crime rates, or poverty, or family life. Sykes draws us back inside the institution, delving into the internal logic of the prison society. There, he finds that the legitimate use of force by prison officials is an inadequate source of social order. Order, he shows, is produced by a social struggle within prison walls that today is conducted on a greatly enlarged scale. While Sykes redirects our attention to the conditions of penal confinement, he also provides a vivid metaphor for what the ghetto has become. Just as the prison has a burgeoning role in the lives of America's urban poor, so too do a variety of social control agencies. In this context, *Captives* remains invaluable not just for its focus on a correctional facility but for its analysis of a society suffused by official supervision.

Inmate Society and the Limits of Repression

In *The Society of Captives* Sykes identifies, and then resolves, a two-part problem of social order. First, social order is tenuous in captive societies like the prison. Although they recognize the authority of the custodians, the inmates do not feel bound by a moral duty to obey. "In the prison," writes Sykes, "power must be based on something other than internalized morality and the custodians find themselves confronting men who must be forced, bribed, or cajoled into compliance."¹ Second, the vast repressive power of

¹ *The Society of Captives*, hereafter *SOC*, p. 47.

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authorities is inefficient for maintaining order. Besides penal discipline, the everyday tasks of the total institution include cooking, cleaning, and rehabilitation as well. These tasks require at least a little independence. As Sykes observes, “[T]he ability of the officials to physically coerce their captives into the paths of compliance is something of an illusion as far as the day-to-day activities of the prison are concerned.”² The stunted moral authority of the guards combined with the limited efficacy of official violence yield what Sykes memorably describes as the “defects of total power.”

The total power of the guards is defective, but penal harm—“the pains of imprisonment”—remains extensive.³ Although it has discarded corporal punishment and is reasonably habitable, the modern prison corrodes the inmate’s person and sense of moral worth. By losing his freedom, the inmate surrenders the powers that define citizenship in a liberal society.⁴ Deprived of nearly all personal possessions, the inmate also forfeits the markers of biography and individuality. The prisoner loses autonomy as well as individuality because movement and routine are minutely controlled. Regimented line movements, regular head counts, bans on gambling, and dozens of other rules of maximum custody seem unaccountable and gratuitous to the inmates. Prisoners are not just assailed by carceral supervision; threats to personal safety from other inmates make prison life unpredictable. At times these threats take a sexual form. The weak are raped and sometimes recruited into sexual service. The pains of imprisonment can thus extend beyond the inmate’s physical identity to his gender identity too. Sykes’s inventory of the pains of imprisonment closes with a potent existential appraisal:

[H]owever painful these frustrations or deprivations may be in the immediate terms of thwarted goals, discomfort, boredom, and lone-

² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³ *Ibid.*, chapter 4.

⁴ In this introduction I refer to prisoners as men. Over 90 percent of prison inmates in the United States are men, but more importantly, pris-

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liness, they carry a more profound hurt as a set of threats or attacks which are directed against the very foundations of the prisoner's being. The individual's picture of himself as a person of value—as a morally acceptable, adult male who can present some claim to merit in his material achievements and his inner strength—begins to waver and grow dim.⁵

The pains of imprisonment form the uneven bedrock on which the social order of the prison must be built. Each character in the inmate social structure—revealed by the local argot—responds differently. For the *rats* and the *center men*, the pains of imprisonment are relieved by betraying other inmates and siding with prison officials. The *gorillas* and *merchants* exploit their fellow inmates either through violence or commerce in contraband. The sexually predatory *wolf*, the rebellious *ball buster* and the impulsively violent *tough* all add to the volatility of prison life. But those who trade in violence retain a little masculinity, and thus some personal vitality, in a society of strict control.

Social cohesion among the prisoners is fostered by the *real man*. The real man embodies values of manhood and integrity. Self-controlled, taciturn, and aloof, the real men of New Jersey State Prison show fortitude by “pulling their own time.” The real man, Sykes writes, recovers his integrity in the face of severe privation, “for the real man regains his autonomy, in a sense, by denying the custodians' power to strip him of his ability to control himself.”⁶ The dignified endurance of the real man exemplifies inmate decorum. Respected by all, the real man stifles conflict with the guards and builds cohesion among inmates.

In their wide discretion to apply force and enforce rules, guards also play a crucial role in keeping the peace. Guards in an orderly unit seek out the real men to make small

ons are deeply gendered institutions, and much of Sykes's analysis stems from his focus on a men's facility.

⁵ *SOC*, p. 79.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

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trades, turning a blind eye to minor disobedience to secure cooperation in other areas. This petty corruption originates in the structure of the captive society, where there are few rewards in the everyday routines of the prisoners. For order to prevail, guards must moderate their reliance on coercion and inmates must actively cooperate in their own incarceration.

The balance between guard and inmate can certainly be found in the captive society, but Sykes shows that it is inherently unstable. In the years before he visited New Jersey State Prison, riots had disrupted the daily routine. Hostages were taken and property was damaged. The riots, says Sykes, were a response to a repressive phase in prison management. Escalating repression was itself an effort to reverse the lax discipline of the previous decade. The tightening up of prison routines severely reduced the informal power of the inmates, who rebelled in return. As Sykes observed, "The effort of the custodians to 'tighten up' the prison undermines the cohesive forces at work in the inmate population and it is these forces which play a critical part in keeping the society of the prison on an even keel."⁷ Prison officials clamped down on the inmates' informal social order, jeopardizing the leadership of the real men, who eschewed conflict and violence. The gorillas and toughs seized the reins, and order succumbed to chaos. The analysis of acute conflict provides the clearest evidence for Sykes's theory of social order: conflict was controlled not by official repression but by the active cooperation of those prisoners oriented to social cohesion. The informal order of the prisoners was temporary, however. Inmate self-governance threatened the control of authorities, so periods of order sometimes gave way to increased discipline and riotous reaction.

In one hundred and thirty short pages, Sykes provided a penetrating and wide-ranging analysis of the captive soci-

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

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ety. Later studies would either view the prison from below, as a criminological problem, or from above, as a problem in public administration.⁸ *Captives* remains original by seeking the sources of prison society in the perspectives of guards and inmates, and the interaction between them. These interactions reveal Sykes's prison as a negative space consisting of refusal and denial, in which carceral pain is everywhere, in which privileges can be lost, but few rewards are earned. In this setting, social order is fragile, sustained by petty corruption that must remain hidden from free society and official acknowledgement.

This analysis of the prison social system fast became a classic work. Sykes was plain-spoken, rejecting the obscure language that clouded postwar sociology. His elegant prose examined the informal basis of the prison's social order, the internal stratification of inmate society, and the precarious balance between guards and inmates—themes that echoed through prison field studies in the decades after *Captives* was published.⁹ Not just emulated, the book also set the terms of key debates about the links between society and the prison and the role of prison officials in the maintenance of order.

Society and the Guards: Two Debates over *Captives*

Captives stimulated two debates that remain important as we try to understand the great changes in the American penal system over the last thirty years. Some writers charged that the prison was substantially a product of the society in which it was embedded and not the autonomous social system that Sykes described. Others claimed that the

⁸ John Irwin's *The Felon* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970) exemplifies the criminological approach. John Dilulio's *Governing Prisons* (New York: Free Press, 1987) takes the public administration perspective.

⁹ The classic status of *Captives* is discussed by Jonathan Simon, "The 'Society of Captives' in the Era of Hyper-Incarceration," *Theoretical Criminology*, Vol. 4, 2000, pp. 285–308, and Michael Reisig, "The Champion, Contender, and Challenger: Top-Ranked Books in Prison Studies," *Prison Journal*, Vol. 81, 2001, pp. 389–407.

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disciplinary role of prison staff and managers is far more central than Sykes suggested.

Sykes's prison is in many ways a self-contained social system. The book's title conveys a world operating within prison walls, a "society" following its own tempo and dynamics. In the first few pages, the prison is offered as a microcosm, a "small-scale society," which can offer deeper understanding of racial divisions, employment, and ultimately totalitarianism.¹⁰ The powerful internal dynamic grows from the pains of imprisonment. The roles that inmates adopted and the relations between guards and inmates were responses to systemic discomforts and deprivations.

Sykes's emphasis on the internal sources of prison society contrasts with the view of prison shaped by the social forces of free society. In *The Prison Community* (1940), the forerunner to *Captives* published eighteen years earlier, Donald Clemmer argued that the prison's social hierarchy reflected the social status of inmates before their incarceration. Clemmer's field observation and survey analysis of a midwestern prison revealed three rough groups: an elite, a middle class, and a lower class of "hoosiers," whose inferiority left them barely aware of their collective identity. These groups were less distinct, Clemmer argued, than in free society where social interaction promoted group cohesion.¹¹ Twelve years after the publication of *Captives*, John Irwin, writing *The Felon* (1970), also saw the inmate's status before incarceration as affecting his place in the prison pecking order. Whereas Clemmer appealed to social class, Irwin related the inmate's identity and behavior to his membership in a criminal subculture. The felon's incarceration is just one stage in a lifetime of deviance, and the subculture prepares him for prison time.¹² Just as the felon is rooted in

¹⁰ *SOC*, p. xxxii.

¹¹ Donald Clemmer, *The Prison Community*, 1940; reprint, New York: Rinehart, 1958, pp. 107–109.

¹² *The Felon*, p. 63.

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his subculture, so too does Irwin's prison inherit the oppositional norms and social solidarities of the subculture of career criminals.

Several years later, James Jacobs's *Stateville* (1977) added to the list of societal influences on the prison by focusing on the prison managers. Jacobs described how Stateville Penitentiary in Illinois coped with the expansion of rehabilitative programming as technocracy burgeoned in society as a whole in the decade after World War II. The authoritarian regime of Stateville crumbled through the 1960s, as institutional power was challenged inside the facility and out. Jacobs's analysis shifts attention from the inmate social structure to the historical and institutional influences on prison administration.¹³

By emphasizing regimes of prison administration, Jacobs foreshadowed a second debate, over the influence of staff and managers on the quality of prison life. John DiIulio in *Governing Prisons* (1987) forcefully challenged the project of prison sociology by arguing for the decisive impact of prison officials—not inmates—on the quality of prison life. In a jab, not just at Sykes but at Irwin and Jacobs too, DiIulio argued that prison officials are the government behind the walls and “are neither the pawns of inmate society nor captives of broader sociopolitical developments.”¹⁴ DiIulio claimed that the quality of prison life would improve with a bureaucratized, paramilitary style of prison management which maintains order through strict control. Tough discipline of this bureaucratized kind would not only preserve order, but promote rehabilitation too. DiIulio's penal discipline relies little on trust in inmates or their capacity for cooperation or self-organization that Sykes highlights. The stark contrast between Sykes and DiIulio can be seen in their analyses of prison riots. Whereas riots for Sykes resulted from tightening control and displacing the real men

¹³ James B. Jacobs, *Stateville: The Penitentiary in Mass Society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

¹⁴ *Governing Prisons*, p. 6.

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from the inmate leadership, prison riots for DiIulio were due to insufficient official discipline.

Evidence for these competing theories is mixed. For example, Mark Colvin provides a detailed analysis of the 1980 riot at the Penitentiary of New Mexico. The riot—which caused millions of dollars in property damage and left thirty-three dead—was preceded by the growing role in prison life of younger, more violent inmates. Conflict between inmates and guards was precipitated by a shift in prison management from a “remunerative compliance structure” to a “coercive compliance structure.”¹⁵ These trends paralleled the emergence of disorder in New Jersey in the early 1950s. Against this analysis, Bert Useem and his colleagues studied over a dozen prison riots in the 1970s and 1980s. These comparative case studies showed that a breakdown in the administrative order—signaled by escalating violence and escapes—anticipated collective violence in prisons.¹⁶ Sykes’s analysis is often contrasted with theories of administrative breakdown, but there is certainly common ground. For both approaches, the legitimacy of officials among inmates—what Sykes would probably distinguish as the “validity” of the custodial regime—is the main ingredient for order. Coercion alone is not enough.

Captives in the Era of the Prison Boom

The two debates surrounding *Captives*—over societal influences on the prison and the orderly effects of penal discipline—acquire special significance in the time of the prison boom. By 2004, the American penal population included more than 2.1 million inmates, a sevenfold increase from 1970. The U.S. incarceration rate had become the highest in the world, exceeding in recent years the rates of its close ri-

¹⁵ Mark Colvin, *The Penitentiary in Crisis: From Accommodation to Riot in New Mexico*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.

¹⁶ Bert Useem and Peter Kimball, *States of Siege: U.S. Prison Riots, 1971–1986*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, and Bert Useem, Camille Graham Camp, and George M. Camp, *Resolution of Prison Riots: Strategies and Policies*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

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vals, Russia and South Africa. The astonishing growth of the U.S. penal system through the 1980s and the 1990s transformed the contours of American criminal justice. The prison of the early 2000s had become a warehouse for poor young men, embedding the prison deeply in the social inequalities of free society. The prison boom was infused with a politics of discipline that sought order through legitimate violence, not in the informal bases of social cohesion that Sykes emphasized.

The punitive politics driving the prison boom produced a change in the scale of imprisonment and a change in philosophy too. The necessity of custody overwhelmed ambitions for rehabilitation. To be sure, the corrective function of incarceration was always precarious. In the 1950s, decades before the punitive turn in criminal justice policy, Sykes found little practical commitment to rehabilitation. Voicing skepticism that would later broaden into a policy consensus by the 1970s, Sykes observed that

the advocates of confinement as a method of achieving rehabilitation of the criminal have often found themselves in the position of calling for an operation where the target of the scalpel remains unknown.¹⁷

Prison officials too, Sykes reported, were fighting more of a holding action that attempted to minimize harm rather than ensure reform.¹⁸

Though the rehabilitative ideal was often diluted in practice, its institutional reality was inscribed in the procedures and agencies for criminal processing. Specific theories of rehabilitation differed, but the guiding principle was one of individualized treatment that gave wide discretion to criminal justice officials. The agencies of probation and parole, the discretionary system of indeterminate sentencing, the juvenile justice system erected on a jurisprudence of dimin-

¹⁷ *SOC*, p. 11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

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ished capacity were all inspired by the goal of rehabilitation.¹⁹ Inside the prison, a multitude of behavioral, educational, and vocational programs were introduced to set offenders on the path to criminal desistance. David Garland described the rehabilitative project of modern corrections as “penal welfarism,” placing the prison alongside public schools, social insurance, and antipoverty policy as one of a number of society’s efforts to restore social membership to its fallen citizens.²⁰

The punitive turn repudiated penal welfarism, however, and produced more stringent conditions of imprisonment. In 1974, Robert Martinson reported on a comprehensive review of prison rehabilitation programs. In considering the question “what works?” he found the answer was “nothing much,” a view later endorsed by the National Research Council.²¹ Through the 1980s and 1990s, skepticism about rehabilitation blossomed and school and treatment programs were curtailed. Prison gyms and classrooms made room for new housing units. So-called shock incarceration programs, like boot camps, took in first-time and juvenile offenders. These and many other developments in the conditions of penal confinement have extended the control of the guards and reduced interaction among inmates.

For Malcolm Feeley and Jonathan Simon, these innovations in criminal supervision aimed to corral and control problem populations rather than reform individual offenders. Prison wardens under this new penology were charged more with warehousing inmates than rehabilitation.²² Mark

¹⁹ David Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience*, rev. ed., New York: Aldine DeGruyter, 2002.

²⁰ David Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

²¹ Robert Martinson, “What Works? Questions and Answers about Prison Reform,” *The Public Interest*, Spring 1974, pp. 22–54; Lee Sechrest, Susan O. White, and Elizabeth D. Brown, eds., *The Rehabilitation of Criminal Offenders: Problems and Prospects*, Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1979.

²² Malcolm Feeley and Jonathan Simon, “The New Penology: Notes on the Emerging Strategy of Corrections and Its Implications,” *Criminology*,

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Fleisher's ethnography of Lompoc federal prison describes life under the new penology, in which the driving mission is to incapacitate dangerous and incorrigible offenders. Though the threat of official reprisal is often close at hand, Fleisher emphasizes how seasoned officers resolve conflict by negotiation rather than by "hid[ing] behind the formal discipline system."²³ Guards are told to "follow policy," but this is an admonition to avoid arbitrary violence, rather than to slavishly follow prison rules. Federal prison of the mid-1980s was more tightly organized than state prison of the 1950s, but Sykes's informal sources of social order clearly endure, even under the new penology.²⁴

The custodial imperative of the new penology reached its apex with the emergence of supermax prisons in the 1980s. In the 1950s, solitary confinement was reserved as a disciplinary measure, an additional layer of punishment in New Jersey's toughest prison. Today, this most punitive form of incarceration has taken over entire institutions. Termed "supermax," these highest-security prisons are institutions of solitary confinement in which inmates spend twenty-three hours of every day isolated in their cells. Extinguishing all the social interaction at the core of *Captives*, the supermax unit nevertheless houses a social system that tells us much about the dynamics of mass imprisonment. Lorna Rhodes's ethnography of supermax confinement in Washington State, for example, studies not the patterns of interaction among inmates (there are virtually none), but the technologies of confinement, the work of custody staff in maintaining extreme forms of isolation, and the interpreta-

Vol. 30, 1992, pp. 449–474. DiIulio's *Governing Prisons* is seen by Feeley and Simon as a managerial manifesto for the new penology.

²³ Mark Fleisher, *Warehousing Violence*, Newbury Park: Sage, 1989.

²⁴ Other recent field studies of state and federal prisons also describe the negotiated and informal bases of social order: Ann Chih Lin, *Reform in the Making*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, chapter 2; Dana M. Britton, *At Work in the Iron Cage*, New York: New York University Press, 2003.

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tive work of prisoners in a deeply asocial setting.²⁵ Even here, where total power might appear less defective than in the prison of the 1950s, Rhodes joins Sykes by observing that coercion alone cannot be the primary method of sustaining order. She writes that

custody is where the constraints of prison meet the inmate's will, but sheer force is not the primary method. Administrators sometimes say that the inmates are really in control of the institution. "We just steer them," said one.²⁶

Without the inmate's (often minimal) cooperation—which is purchased with some negotiation even in supermax confinement—the prison becomes more violent and dangerous.

In Sykes's time, the prison was an exotic institution that brought into focus rarefied aspects of social life. The self-contained prison society that Sykes described was justified by the low incarceration rates in the fifty years before mass imprisonment. By the 2000s, when imprisonment had become a normal part of the young adulthood of African American men with little schooling, researchers began examining the so-called collateral consequences—the social impact—of the prison in poor urban communities.

Though researchers had previously followed inmates outside the prison gates in search of rehabilitation or recidivism, the new research focuses on incarceration's effects on economic opportunity and families. For example, Donald Braman's ethnography of the poor African American neighborhoods of Washington, D.C., examines how the stigma of incarceration affects prison inmates and their relatives. Braman reports that incarceration largely shields inmates from stigma, while families left in free society must manage

²⁵ Lorna A. Rhodes, *Total Confinement: Madness and Reason in the Maximum Security Prison*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

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the shame of imprisonment.²⁷ Anne Nurse's field research focused on young Californian inmates in their role as fathers separated from wives, girlfriends, and children. In many cases these young men were weakly tied to their children, poorly prepared for fatherhood, and confronted by a hostile web of gender relations.²⁸ Labor market researchers have begun to study the effects of incarceration on the economic well-being of ex-prisoners. Men released from prison have little access to primary sector jobs and are instead relegated to the secondary labor market of irregular work, low pay, and stagnant wage growth. Devah Pager's field experiments showed that employers overwhelmingly prefer job applicants with clean records over ex-felons, even in the best-case scenario in which ex-felons are clean-cut, well-spoken, educated, and possessing a decent work history.²⁹

For this research on the social consequences of incarceration, the prison society extends beyond the correctional facility and into poor neighborhoods. In the era of mass incarceration the prison is not detached from society. It is instead part of the institutional landscape traversed by the urban poor as they move through the life course, to look for work, and form families. Going beyond the earlier prison sociology that saw the stamp of society on the prison, research on collateral consequences shows how the prison is stamped on society, on the lived experience of urban poverty. From this perspective, the prison in the era of mass incarceration has become part of a uniquely American system of social inequality.

In this context, *The Society of Captives* acquires a new significance, not only as a study of prison life, but as an ac-

²⁷ Donald Braman, *Doing Time on the Outside: Incarceration and Family Life in Urban America*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002. See also the field study by Megan Comfort, "In the Tube at San Quentin: The Secondary Prisonization of Women Visiting Inmates," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Vol. 32, 2003, pp. 77–107.

²⁸ Anne Nurse, *Fatherhood Arrested: Parenting from Within the Juvenile Justice System*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002.

²⁹ Devah Pager, "The Mark of a Criminal Record," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 108, 2003, pp. 937–975.

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count of society in which repression is the official strategy for maintaining social order. In Sykes's New Jersey State Prison, repression was organized by prison authorities. In poor inner-city communities in the era of the prison boom, a massive experiment is being deployed in the use of punitive social policy. The prison is just part of a broader effort that also involves enlarged urban police forces, probation and parole agencies, foster care, juvenile justice systems, welfare agencies, and immigration courts. Like the penal system, these other public agencies for the poor rely more on proscription and penalties, and have contributed to the expansion of the penal system. Here we might borrow Loïc Wacquant's "prisonization of the ghetto" to describe the saturation of ghetto life with the formal social control agencies of the state.³⁰

In the case of the prisonized ghetto, Sykes reminds us of the defects of total power. For Sykes, a sustainable social order cannot be coerced from above, and must instead promote the local sources of social cohesion. This was the role played by the real men in New Jersey State Prison of the 1950s. If the theory can be generalized, it suggests that intensive policing, incarceration, and the myriad other forms of social control will have only limited effect in the modern ghetto. Indeed, urban sociologists share with Sykes an emphasis on the local social capital that shapes safety and stability in urban neighborhoods. For Mitchell Duneier, these are the sidewalk vendors that form part of the street life of lower Manhattan. For Sudhir Venkatesh, the corporatized street gangs of Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago provide economic support and public safety for local residents. Resembling the real men of New Jersey State Prison, Elijah Anderson's old heads modeled decent and nonviolent behavior in Philadelphia's ghetto neighborhoods. For the urban criminology of Robert Sampson, social order springs from the

³⁰ Loïc Wacquant, "The New 'Peculiar Institution': On the Prison as Surrogate Ghetto," *Theoretical Criminology*, Vol. 4, 2000, pp. 377–389.

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collective efficacy of neighbors willing to help out in emergencies.³¹ In each of these cases, the social order of cities is found in informal social organization.

Sykes enlivens this work by showing how the informal and indigenous sources of social order are threatened by the expansion of official control. If today's inner city can be likened to Sykes's society of captives, the repressive path to social order risks displacing the local web of social relations that might otherwise promote cohesion. Indeed, the contemporary ghetto—short of jobs and soaked with official supervision—is a negative space like the prison. This is a community of chronic shortage that presents more sanctions than rewards. In this context, Sykes argues, the social order that does emerge is profoundly unstable. Finding its place in the cracks and corners of the negative space—perhaps in the fragile networks of street vendors or gang members—social order remains vulnerable to official efforts at social control. Enduring social stability, it seems, must await the development of a positive space, a real economy of incentives and rewards.

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Writing in the 1950s, Sykes was unsentimental about prisoners' potential for violence, but more worried about the state's vastly greater capacity for repression. Having returned from war in Europe, writing in the shadow of Nuremberg, and under the canopy of the Cold War, Sykes knew that the specter of totalitarianism was not far away. The pains of imprisonment, he observed, annihilate the person by dissolving individuality and autonomy. In its repressive phase the prison demands accountability. Extraordi-

³¹ Mitchell Duneier, *Sidewalk*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999; Sudhir Venkatesh, *American Project: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Ghetto*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000; Elijah Anderson, *Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990; and Robert J. Sampson, Stephen Raudenbush, and Felton Earls, "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multi-level Study of Collective Efficacy," *Science*, No. 277, 1997, pp. 918–924.

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nary acts of will and self-restraint are needed to avoid further punishment under these conditions of exact control and scrutiny. Here, Sykes puts the basic paradox of imprisonment better than most: you cannot promote free will—acting with self-control and foresight—by extinguishing it. In the era of mass incarceration, whole communities are engulfed by this paradox. When the pains of imprisonment are felt not just inside the prison but also in its penumbra, the society of captives is perhaps broader than we ever imagined.