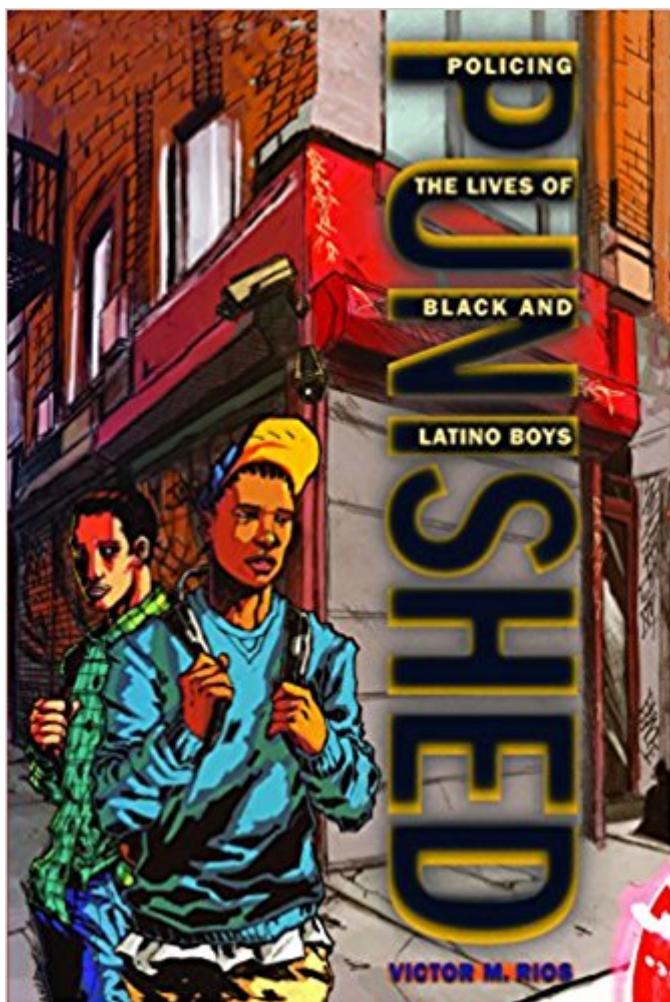


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# Punished: Policing The Lives Of Black And Latino Boys (New Perspectives In Crime, Deviance, And Law)



## **Synopsis**

Honorable Mention, 2014 Eduardo Bonilla-Silva Outstanding Book Award, presented by the Society for the Study of Social Problems Honorable Mention, 2013 Outstanding Book Award, presented by the Inequality, Poverty, and Mobility Section of the American Sociological Association 2013 Oliver Cromwell Cox Book Award, presented by the Racial and Ethnic Minorities Section of the American Sociological Association 2012 Best Book Award, Latino/a Sociology Section, presented by the American Sociological Association 2012 Finalist, C. Wright Mills Book Award presented by the Study of Social Problems Victor Rios grew up in the ghetto of Oakland, California in the 1980s and 90s. A former gang member and juvenile delinquent, Rios managed to escape the bleak outcome of many of his friends and earned a PhD at Berkeley and returned to his hometown to study how inner city young Latino and African American boys develop their sense of self in the midst of crime and intense policing. Punished examines the difficult lives of these young men, who now face punitive policies in their schools, communities, and a world where they are constantly policed and stigmatized. Rios followed a group of forty delinquent Black and Latino boys for three years. These boys found themselves in a vicious cycle, caught in a spiral of punishment and incarceration as they were harassed, profiled, watched, and disciplined at young ages, even before they had committed any crimes, eventually leading many of them to fulfill the destiny expected of them. But beyond a fatalistic account of these marginalized young men, Rios finds that the very system that criminalizes them and limits their opportunities, sparks resistance and a raised consciousness that motivates some to transform their lives and become productive citizens. Ultimately, he argues that by understanding the lives of the young men who are criminalized and pipelined through the criminal justice system, we can begin to develop empathic solutions which support these young men in their development and to eliminate the culture of punishment that has become an overbearing part of their everyday lives.

## **Book Information**

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## Customer Reviews

In this compelling sociological narrative, Rios describes the problems facing black and Latino youth as they come of age. A former gang member who went on to earn a Ph.D. at Berkeley, Rios returned to his old Oakland neighborhood to shadow 40 young men as they dealt with poverty, violence, and institutionalized racism. As he recounts their life stories, Rios deftly balances analysis with vivid anecdotes about uninterested educators, struggling parents, police brutality, and gang victimization. From elementary school on, teachers and law enforcement mark these boys as "dangerous" or "difficult," and harshly punish them for petty infractions. Once they accumulate "negative credentials," the young men are subject to increased surveillance and are consequently more likely to end up in prison. Rios terms this criminalization "the youth control complex," and explains how it systematically deprives boys of their dignity and their ability to succeed at school or in the job market. He examines how the culture of punishment pushes young men into the very criminality that the punishment is meant to deter, and makes a compelling argument that better financed social programs and positive reinforcement could make all the difference. (July)

"Rios provides numerous conceptual innovations, noted below in italics, that should soon find their way into all of our introductory, deviance, and race/ethnicity texts.... A book bristling with insight."-Robert Garot, *American Journal of Sociology* "This analysis gives great context to the lives of career criminals." Rios' work suggests that people drop out, commit crimes, and adapt themselves to a "fugitive life" because they are unable to find an institution that grants them the acknowledgment and dignity that they are systematically denied." -Du Bois Review "With *Punished*, Rios joins an expanding cadre of social scientists who lament the directions that juvenile justice has taken in the United States in recent decades. He argues that in an era when the United States has achieved world-record levels of incarceration, of young people as well as adults, the widespread adoption of severe, hastily adopted get-tough-on-crime policies of the 1980s and 1990s has gone hand in hand with the vilification and persecution of black and Latino youths." -Peter Monaghan, *The Chronicle Review* "Accessible, engaging and thought provoking, *Punished* presents unique data

and compelling analytical insights, opening what should prove to be a fruitful line of research. For this reason and other reasons this important book is a worthwhile read for anyone within or outside the academy who is looking to understand the punitive turn in American society from the perspective of those who are most heavily policed, punished and criminalized. -Social Forces "This is a well overdue and important contribution to our understanding of urban street youth and gangs. Rios turns the table on traditional gang researchers by showing how the process of criminalization and the youth control complex is biased against young boys of color." -Diego Vigil, author of *The Projects: Gang and Non-Gang Families in East Los Angeles* "Rios's book is a valuable contribution to the field because it is an interdisciplinary work that addresses fundamental and ongoing concepts of juvenile delinquency and gang participation." -Madeleine Novich, *Criminal Law and Criminal Justice Book Review*

Based on three years of research with 40 Black and Latino boys in Oakland, California, Victor Rios provides just the right blend of the boys' personal stories, his own critical analysis (and perspective as a former gang member from this community), and social science theory. He illuminates the processes of punitive social control that are taking place nation-wide, but focuses on the specific political-economic context of Oakland. His central claim is that the "youth control complex" systematically criminalizes young people; police harassment, while pervasive, is only part of the youth control complex. Families, schools, businesses, community centers, and probation officers, even while they are trying to help young people, are integrated into a web of punishment. As I read, I was caught up in the stories of the young men and gained new insight into their daily lives and struggles. Rios doesn't romanticize their lives or excuse their bad behavior, but he does show how limited their options are and how their efforts to turn their lives around are often undermined by the same individuals and institutions that are telling them to change. He shows that seemingly self-destructive behavior makes sense once we understand that the teens are striving for dignity, even when they know it will result in a loss of freedom. While all of the boys understand the processes of criminalization that enmesh them, some of them become activists protesting police brutality and mass incarceration. Rios ends on a hopeful note, calling for a "youth support complex" to nurture the great potential of the young people in our society who currently face not only enormous odds against them but also a system that is actively pushing them into criminality.

Rios offers a valuable collection of stories of the Black and Latino/a youth in the Oakland area. *Punished* is the story of his graduate work, shadowing students who were at high risk, criminalized

and paroled. His dissection and illustration of the criminalization of colored and minority youth is well researched and very well written. This is an easy read and often hard to put down.

Short read but definitely something to be read! RIO's creates understanding & introduces so many concepts and factors that explain so much what these kids are up against. It's a shame society blames them instead of proactively helping in beneficial way to reduce bias the media, schools, law enforcement, & suburbanites believe about these young kids. It was all incredible, heart-breaking and uplifting to hear about the experiences these deal with daily

Great book! Gives a different perspective of punitive practices towards our youth. These practices are not always implemented as a result of a behavior, on the contrary, many our youth in inner-city's are treated as criminals unwarrantedly. I used this book a great deal in a thesis paper for graduate school on the topic of punitive practices towards our youth--great resource!

"Punished" is written beautifully! This study, conducted by author Victor M. Rios, focuses on the institutional injustices faced by Black and Latino male youth. Although, as a minority, I was already aware of such injustices, Rios' work provided me with the vocabulary necessary to further comprehend "the system." Overall, my opinions were changed. I once dubbed my low-achieving, male peers as lazy wanna-be delinquents. After reading "Punished," I realized these boys are not to blame. There are so many outer forces prohibiting these boys from realizing their full potential. Everyone should give this book a read! It'll definitely teach you something new.

A compelling story which needed to be told. I especially value that this book was written by an academic who is person of color who has experienced the over policing/under policing contradiction that is endemic in inner city communities, rather than by a well meaning "white anthropologist" researcher. Excellent book.

I would recommend to anyone who wants to know about how young Latinos and African Americans get criminalized and victimized through the structural and mainstream institutions.

Excellent read on a very important subject.

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