

Wicked Overseers: American Policing and Colonialism

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Abstract

In recent times, several tragic events have brought attention to the relationship between policing and racial/ethnic minorities in the United States. Scholars, activists, and pundits have clamored to explain tensions that have arisen from these police-related deaths. The authors contribute to the discussion by asserting that contemporary policing in America, and its relationship to racial inequality, is only the latest chapter in a broader historical narrative in which the police constitute the front line of a race- and class-stratified social order. In other words, contemporary criminal justice and race struggles are a legacy of *colonialism*. This essay begins with a brief overview of colonialism before turning toward dissecting the contemporary colonial character of policing African American urban ghetto communities in four parts. First, the emergence of ghettos as internal colonies is described. Second, mechanisms are given that propelled the mass entry of police into ghetto spaces, with particular attention given to the war on drugs, broken-windows and order-maintenance policing, and police militarization. Third, the authors explore how contemporary policing acts to manage the colonized through police stops, searches, and other practices. Finally, the relationship between American policing practices and cultural denigration of African Americans is described.

Keywords

police, colonialism, internal colonialism, race, oppression

Repeat it very quickly in a crude voice sample
Overseer, overseer, overseer, overseer
Officer, officer, officer, officer
Yeah, officer from overseer
You need a little clarity? Check the similarity . . .

—KRS-One, “Sound of da Police”

The recent deaths of Philando Castile, Alton Smith, and others as a result of excessive police practices have sparked intense national debate over race and police use of force.¹ Unease, dissatisfaction, anger, and frustration were evident over the disparate policing and incarceration of persons of color, particularly African Americans (Alexander 2010; Tonry 2011). Despite an overall decrease in violent crime, reports indicate that young black males are approximately 21 times more likely to be killed by

the police than young whites (Gabrielson, Jones, and Sagara 2014). Inequalities are further reflected in traffic stops (Alpert, Smith, and Dunham 2004; Carroll and Gonzalez 2014; Engel and Calnon 2004), drug arrests (Goode 2002; Mitchell and Caudy 2015), prison populations (Davis 2003;

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Mauer 2011; Spohn 2000), and the indirect impact on family, friends, and communities (see Alexander 2010; Clear 2007; Pager 2010).

Explanations of these racial disparities have proliferated and generally fall within three categories: *differential involvement*, *differential enforcement*, and some combination thereof (Hindelang 1978). Differential involvement explanations claim that unequal criminal justice outcomes stem from differences in criminal activity between racial/ethnic groups (Piquero and Brame 2008). Recent data, however, suggest that African Americans report similar rates of criminality as whites yet have a greater likelihood of subsequent arrest, conviction, and postrelease challenges (The Sentencing Project 2013). Differential enforcement explanations, on the other hand, tend to link unequal criminal justice exposure and consequences to systemic or structural issues, including selective enforcement, institutional racism, socioeconomic disadvantages, biased assessment instruments, administrative practices, and a lack of effective legal counsel. These systemic issues are said to result from a series of unintended or intended consequences of criminal justice reform in the United States (Murakawa 2014; Weaver 2007).

In the current essay we offer a structural and historical explanation in the differential enforcement tradition. Rather than viewing unequal treatment in criminal justice as a result of racism per se, we argue that such inequality is in part a continuation of the historical process of *colonialism*.² Similar to Gottschalk's (2006) argument that "contemporary penal policy actually has deep historical and institutional roots that predate the 1960s" (p. 4), in the current essay we posit that contemporary American policing, and its relationship to racial inequality, is only the latest chapter in an unremitting narrative in which the police constitute the front line of a race- and class-stratified social order. In other words, this inequality has emerged from the dialectical production and reproduction of colonial logics as part of the broader culture of control (Garland 2001).

In recent decades, scholars have addressed the role of colonialism in crime, crime control, and criminological thought (Agozino 2003, 2004; Saleh-Hanna 2008; Tatum 1994, 2000). From this perspective, colonialism did not end after the age of exploration. Instead, colonialism constitutes an ongoing project of domination that has continued to shape the material circumstances and crime control interactions of marginalized racial/ethnic populations. As explained by Glenn (2015), colonialism "should be seen not as an event but as an ongoing structure" (p. 57). Although late modernity may not

look like a prototypical colonial society, the impact of colonial logics persist. Crime and criminal justice are not immune to its effects.

The objective of this essay is not to say that the situation remains unchanged from the colonial societies of old. Our current racialized social order, however, is not wholly divorced from the past either. Instead, contemporary society is merely another step in the long march of history. In this spirit, we argue that colonial logics did not disappear when colonies struggled for liberty (indeed, some colonies continue to exist today). Rather, colonialism has transformed over time, with many strategies for stratifying and subjugating marginalized racial populations persisting in one form or another. American criminal justice, particularly the police, has often been on the front line in the deployment of such tactics.

Before detailing the colonial character of contemporary American policing, we begin with a brief overview of colonialism. We then describe the colonial state of contemporary police-minority interactions in four parts. First, the rise of the hyperpoliced *urban ghetto*, one of the most significant contemporary colonial spaces in the United States, is described. Second, policies that increased the *entry* of police into ghettos are elucidated, focusing primarily on the war on drugs, broken-windows policing, and police militarization. Third, we explore the *management* of colonized urban populations through various police practices. Finally, as part of the colonial process, we detail the connection between policing and the *denigration of the colonized and their culture*.

Although colonialism has had tremendous global impacts on numerous populations, describing in detail every impact colonialism has made on criminal justice is beyond the scope of the essay. This work serves as a starting point, focusing specifically on the colonial policing of African Americans. Other analyses should consider the experiences of other racial and ethnic groups across other domains of criminal justice.

COLONIALISM

Colonialism is simultaneously a structure and a process of oppression (Blauner 1969; Glenn 2015; Pinderhughes 2011; Tatum 1994). It traditionally involves the external domination of one group by another through "forced, involuntary entry," resulting in extracting labor and natural resources from the colonized and their lands (Blauner 1969:396; Fanon [1961] 2004; Glenn 2015; Ziltener and

Künzler 2013).³ Examples include the colonial subordination of West Africa and the European domination of North America and South America. Second, colonialism is the imperialist expansion of capitalism sustained by racial ideologies that cast the colonized as mentally, morally, spiritually, culturally, or biologically inferior (DuBois 1915; Lenin 1939; Losurdo 2014). Thus colonization is justified by the colonizers on the grounds that the oppressed are undeserving of the rights and dignities enjoyed by the dominant caste or that such subordination is in the best interests of the colonized (paternalism) (Saleh-Hanna 2008; Tatum 1994). In the domination of a region and people for exploitative purposes, the colonized are cast into a permanent or semipermanent underclass or working class. They provide exploitable labor and, when no longer needed, are discarded. Characteristics such as skin color become associated with class position, generating what Brucato (2014) termed the *color line*, which allows the control of African Americans and divides “the working class along racial lines” (p. 31). Such a link ensures that no matter how high a colonized person rises in prestige, he or she will almost always be of a lower status than the colonizing class composed of white elites and members of the white working classes (status is sustained only as long as the colonized support the colonial order).

Colonialism involves not only the domination of geography and persons but the conquering of symbolic space through (1) the destruction of native culture and (2) the dissemination of the dominant classes’ worldview (Scott 1985). Thus, in the words of Fanon (1961), “the colonized world is a world divided in two” (p. 3). This bifurcation occurs in a manner similar to Gramsci’s (1971) descriptions of governance under hegemony, which operates at two levels: “civil society” and “political society.” Civil society is composed of educational centers, religious organizations, political parties, and other institutions through which hegemonic consciousness is created. Among the exploited, this consciousness instills “a mood of submission and inhibition which considerably eases the task of agents of law and order” (Fanon 1961:3–4). Furthermore, civil society provides the ideological mechanisms that legitimate and justify domination among the colonizers; the colonized are constructed as deserving of their domination in one form or another.

The political society consists of institutions that rely on coercion to control behaviors, such as the government, police, and military (Kiros 1985). The

political society is thus concerned with the management of the colonized population. According to Fanon (1961), “In colonial region . . . the proximity and frequent, direct intervention by the police and the military ensure the colonized are kept under close scrutiny, and contained by rifle butts and napalm” (p. 4). Gramsci (1971) argued that “these two levels correspond on one hand to the function of ‘hegemony’ which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand that of ‘direct domination’ or command exercised through the state and the ‘juridical government’” (p. 12). Thus civil and political society are mutually supportive. Colonized populations are “re-educated” into colonial society and, when resistance is given; institutions of formal social control, such as the police, ensure compliance through force and coercion (Tatum 1994).

Although colonialism is typically envisioned as the invasion and subsequent domination of indigenous peoples by outsiders, scholars have also argued that colonialism can occur between populations occupying the same geography. The concept of *internal colonialism* emerged in the 1960s and 1970s from the African American civil rights and black nationalist movements as an attempt to explain contemporary forms of racial domination (Allen 1969, 2005; Blauner 1969; Pinderhughes 2010, 2011). For these scholars and activists, colonialism did not end after the West finished claiming foreign land and people for its own. Even after occupation began to wane and chattel slavery was abolished, other forms of spatial and economic exclusion of racial/ethnic underclasses persisted, even *within* Western or westernized nations. In other words, the logics of colonialism persisted.⁴

Throughout the history of colonial expansion and domination, the police have been instrumental in securing and maintaining order. Much as the police become “class-biased” by operating as “the ‘neutral’ enforcers of class-biased law,” the police become race biased as they manage colonial populations (Harring 1983:103). In this way, “the law fundamentally structures police action” (Herbert 1998:352) and the police “do the dirty work for the larger system” (Blauner 1969:404). Thus, “the government and its laws protect the interest of the colonizers. The prosecution of injustices against the native receive little governmental support and the native learns that he should expect nothing from the colonizer’s justice system” (Tatum 1994:36). In each historical era of colonialism, the police (and military) act as frontline enforcers of laws that represent the interests of the dominant classes that adopt a particular racial character in American society

(Brucato 2014). This enforcement contributes to broader economic, social, cultural, political, and *spatial* forms of domination endemic to colonialism. In a contemporary colonial society such as the United States, such efforts have taken the form of slave patrols, the enforcement of segregative laws such as the black codes and Jim Crow laws, and, as will be argued here, the war on drugs, broken-windows and zero-tolerance policing, and police militarization. To fully understand the colonial implications of contemporary policing, it is first necessary to describe the rise of one of the most significant internal colonies today: the urban ghetto.

POLICING THE COLONIZED

Creating a Colony: The Rise of the Urban Ghetto

Throughout the history of racial oppression in America, spatial restrictions have been instrumental. Under chattel slavery, African lands were invaded and its people were captured and shipped across the Atlantic to be traded. These slaves were subsequently confined to plantations, houses, and other spaces of servitude. After emancipation, sharecropping and/or debt-peonage were used to lock freed slaves into servitude to white elite-owned land. Black codes and vagrancy laws controlled the movements of freed slaves and provided ready-made justifications for incarcerating such persons. These forms of confinement, however, were more prominently featured in the American South. In the North before the 1900s, “blacks and whites [often] lived side by side in American cities” (Massey and Denton 1993:17). The particular spatial dislocation of African Americans in urban cities predominantly occurred in the twentieth century as more blacks fled to cities to escape the circumstances of the rural South (Alexander 2010; Massey and Denton 1993). The period between 1910 and 1970 saw “less rigid de facto segregation in urban internal colonies” (Pinderhughes 2011:252).

As African Americans transitioned into urban spaces, the black working class expanded, particularly in the “industrial production and service sectors,” with some expansion of the African American petty bourgeoisie (Pinderhughes 2011:252). At the same time, unemployment intensified among African Americans (Pinderhughes 2011). With few exceptions, the result was the creation of a large working class and surplus population that was still categorically subordinated under the auspices of racial inferiority.

In addition to employment exclusion or lowered status within the division of labor, other mechanisms of economic suppression were at work. For example, during the early to mid-1990s, while the federal government actively promoted home ownership among white Americans, it also systematically excluded racial and ethnic minorities from such initiatives and devalued their properties through practices such as “redlining” (Massey and Denton 1993:51). As landed property has historically been one of the best mechanisms of wealth accumulation, these practices crippled the ability of many African Americans to generate and maintain wealth—vital for both geographic and social mobility. Combined with pushes to make suburban housing an affordable option for whites and black petty bourgeoisie seeking upward mobility by the Federal Housing Administration in the 1940s and 1950s, whites and well-to-do blacks were able to flee urban centers (Massey and Denton 1993; Pinderhughes 2011). This left many poor and working-class racial and ethnic minorities, particularly working blacks, hamstrung in concentrated urban centers losing value (and status) by the day.

During this process, however, “most cities were not completely stripped of their middle and upper classes” (Massey and Denton 1993:55). Many businesses, city services, and other institutions were still bound to inner city areas “by large capital investments, spatially immobile facilities, and long-standing traditions” (Massey and Denton 1993:55). When confronted with an increasingly (and systematically) impoverished black population within these spaces, wealthy elites and government officials turned to “redevelopment,” urban renewal, or gentrification: the reclamation of urban areas for middle- and upper-class activities and living. Policy initiatives, such as the housing acts of 1949 and 1954 enacted by Congress, gave funding and momentum toward these initiatives provided that they also created housing for the displaced. Public housing was born. In other words, these pushes, and others, have affected poor African Americans by reducing opportunities for social mobility and confining them to unfavorable geographic locations that “become progressively isolated—geographically, socially, and economically—from the rest of society” (Massey and Denton 1993:2).

In this manner, contemporary urban areas reflect demarcated space on the basis of occupational status and the separation of low-income populations from the well-to-do (Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom 2001). The state plays a key role in establishing and maintaining these geographies

through property protections, zoning laws, housing policies, and capital investment (Blomley 1994). Such maneuvers are strikingly similar to the forced reallocations of populations under prototypical colonial rule.

None of this, however, is to say that these changes affected African Americans alone. Poor whites and other racial/ethnic minorities have also been affected by the creation of the ghetto (Websdale 2001). Considering that most ghettos, however, possess a disproportionate concentration of African Americans, the situation appears racially skewed (Websdale 2001). The ghetto thus emerged as an internal colonial space because of how both racism and the political economy have acted to systematically marginalize African Americans into poor (and often crime-ridden) locations. The establishment of the urban ghetto subsequently gave rise to conditions that justified the “forced, involuntary entry” of the police into these spaces (Blauner 1969:396).

Entry into the Colonies

As African Americans were disproportionately displaced into urban ghettos, a connection formed in the public mind between ghetto residents and crime, which inextricably linked perceptions of danger to skin color other forms of expression present among ghetto residents (e.g., clothing, dance, music, graffiti art) (Weaver 2007). Ghettos were increasingly becoming places of not just crime but *black* crime. Criminal justice became the intervention of choice—an intervention that involves the direct and indirect control of urban denizens but does little to address the root structural causes of the misery that spawns crime. In fact, the policing of these spaces appears to have only exacerbated the problems confronting African Americans in urban ghettos (Alexander 2010; Murakawa 2014).

When contemporary African American ghettos were fully established in the 1980s, President Reagan declared the war on drugs. The central concern for the Reagan administration and others was the ascendance of crack cocaine as the next big drug “epidemic.” Crack was cast as an antecedent to many current and future problems in America. Experts prophesied about an impending societal descent at the hands of crack babies and super-predators (Murakawa 2014).

The war on drugs *drastically* increased police presence and power in the internal colonies. The policy mandated drastic increases in police presence throughout many urban areas. Although the heavy policing of these districts was billed as a

response to upticks in urban crime (Lea and Young 1984; Miller 2015; Weaver 2007), much of the legitimacy of this campaign was propelled by moral panics (Becker 1963; Cohen 1972; Kappeler and Potter 2005).⁵ Ghetto spaces were constructed as terrifying abodes of black urban decay. Crime and victimization were said to run rampant. In addition, paternalistic rhetoric and imagery were deployed that cast poor urban denizens as incapable of resolving the problems wrought by crack. Criminal justice intervention was thus deemed necessary. Throughout the history of colonialism, paternalism has been instrumental in legitimating the imposition of control (Losurdo 2014; Saleh-Hanna 2008).

Coinciding with the development of the war on drugs was the emergence of a new paradigm in policing that primarily targeted urban ghettos: broken-windows policing. Stated simply, the theory posits that incivilities and disorder crimes—panhandling, public drunkenness, and so on—create perceptions that areas are in decline and unsafe (Kelling and Wilson 1982). People would subsequently hide in their homes and withdraw from social life, resulting in the weakening of community social bonds and reductions in supervision. The erosion of such social ties and community monitoring would in turn produce increases in serious crime. Kelling and Wilson (1982) thus argued that communities and police must work together to address the symptoms of disorder to prevent worse crimes from emerging. The broken-windows thesis was first applied in New York City, where Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and his police commissioner, William Bratton, emphasized the enforcement of routine minor incivilities and disorder as a means of establishing informal social control and reestablishing control of communities.⁶ The broken-windows thesis was used to justify the entry of police into urban ghettos as a means of rebuilding communities.

In the atmosphere produced by broken windows, zero-tolerance approaches became prevalent in combatting drug- and gun-related criminal activity (Newburn and Jones 2007). Zero-tolerance policies are a rhetorical device used to signal the uncompromising action by the state against criminal activity, emphasizing the need for “crime control” over “due process” (Newburn and Jones 2007). Broken-windows theory and zero-tolerance policies together represent a paternalistic notion that communities cannot take care of themselves, and thus police are needed to civilize these spaces.

The notions of disrepair, broken communities, and moral deprivation through the crack epidemic

were powerful messages that, for many politicians and members of the general public, justified and even necessitated intervention in the ghetto. In the process, urban ghettos have become synonymous with war zones in the public imagination. The police are viewed as soldiers on the front line against disorder, becoming increasingly militarized as a result of the war on drugs, the expansion of criminal justice following the Crime Omnibus Act of 1990, and the changes to American policing in the wake of the events of 9/11 (Kappeler and Kraska 2015; Kraska 2001; Kraska and Kappeler 1997; Murakawa 2014). Many departments began to deploy more aggressive tactics and adopt military equipment and technology (Kraska 2007; Kraska and Kappeler 1997). Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) units proliferated (Kraska 2001). As a result, contemporary urban ghettos resemble military occupation zones. Once forced entry into a colonial space is established, the police then turn toward sustained management of the colonized is necessary to keep the colonized contained and surveilled within designated areas. In the next section we detail police policies and practices that manage urban ghettos.

Managing the Colonized

The primary role of police in internal colonies is to control the movements and activities of colonial populations for the benefit of colonizers, similar to Gramsci's descriptions of the role of political society. The management practices rising from war on drug, broken windows, and police militarization policies have resulted in considerable control of minority populations. As alluded to previously, research indicates the application of aggressive policing (stemming primarily from the war on drugs and broken-windows policing) is disproportionately felt in minority communities (Alexander 2010; Meares 2015). Considering that offending rates between races do not mirror criminal justice involvement, the imposition of criminal justice control may not necessarily be a response to black crime per se but may reflect an ideological desire to control black behavior more generally.

Routine police practices—such as traffic stops, stop-and-frisks, and others—are key mechanisms for controlling racial and ethnic minorities. For instance, the number of minorities stopped and frisked in New York City rose considerably with the introduction of broken-windows policing. In a report by the Office of the New York State Attorney General (1999), African Americans constituted 50

percent of all persons stopped yet make up only 15 percent of the population. Furthermore, nearly two-thirds of stops conducted by the street crimes units involved stopping African Americans.

Walking is not the only activity that exposes minority populations to police scrutiny. Racial and ethnic minorities are also disproportionately subjected to traffic stops and vehicle searches. Research on police traffic stops reveals that blacks and Hispanics are more likely than whites to be stopped and searched by the police (Alpert, MacDonald, and Dunham 2005; Engel and Calnon 2004; Epps, Maynard-Moody, and Haider-Markel 2014; Rojek, Rosenfeld, and Decker 2012). Epps et al. (2014) found that African American men are “by far the most likely to be stopped for investigatory reasons” (p. 66) and that stops of African Americans are most prevalent in suburban areas, where they are perceived as out of place. Furthermore, the study revealed that blacks are handcuffed and arrested at higher rates than whites. The authors argued that these stops are a product of discriminatory institutional practices that “grow from and reproduce negative racial stereotypes” (p. 12). The persistent exposure to stops by the police leads to experience of continual harassment (Brunson and Miller 2006).

Beyond routine police practices, research on drug interdiction efforts similarly reveals racial bias. Beckett, Nyrop, and Pflingst (2006) examined Seattle's drug arrests, finding that 64 percent of those arrested for delivering drugs (methamphetamine, ecstasy, powder cocaine, and heroin) were black despite whites' being the majority of those who deliver methamphetamine, ecstasy, powder cocaine, and heroin in Seattle. The authors suggested that it is difficult to explain these findings in race-neutral terms. Instead, actions of the Seattle Police Department appear shaped by racial cues (Correll et al. 2002; Sampson and Raudenbush 2004). Two-thirds of persons incarcerated in state prison for drug offenses are African American or Latino, a disparity largely attributed to law enforcement practices (Beckett et al. 2006).

The police also make use of civil injunctions to control black bodies within urban ghettos “through mechanisms of criminalization” that “draw heavily from the broken windows theory of policing” (Muñiz 2015:37).⁷ Many police departments now conduct broad sweeps in inner-city neighborhoods using loose criteria to identify persons as gang members. Gang units tend to view gangs as low-income, inner-city, minority youths, who sport urban cultural garb and are lumped together through simple stereotypes and treated suspiciously (Muñiz

2015; Stewart 1998). Many white youth in similar socioeconomic and status positions often do not receive such labels. “No white supremacist groups,” Muñiz (2015) pointed out, “have gang injunctions [either]” (p. 46). Klein (2004) found that gang officers’ perceptions of gangs often did not match research findings, noting that the police “portrayed gangs as violent criminal enterprise, fundamentally different from other social groups and divorced from local community problems” (p. 43). These sweeps consist of indiscriminate stopping and questioning of local residents to compile lists of known gang members (Bass 2001; Durán 2013). Once identified as a gang member, an individual is subject to enhanced penalties and civil injunctions.

Police management practices are increasingly present in schools in which there are strong links between race/ethnicity and poverty and school-level punishment policies (see Irwin, Davidson, and Hall-Sanchez 2013). Kupchik and Ward (2014) found that metal detectors are more common in schools serving large numbers of youth of color, exposing these students to practices that divert them into the criminal justice system for misbehavior. They also found that exclusionary policies are more common in poor elementary and middle schools. The expansion of zero-tolerance policies in schools is the natural extension of the extensive arrests of young black children. In 2011 there were more than 75,000 arrests of black children for disorder crimes such as curfew violations, loitering, and vandalism (Murakawa 2014).

Many of the day-to-day police practices are shaped within the context of militarization. For instance, although SWAT units were originally limited to active shooter, barricaded subject, and hostage situations, Kraska and Kappler (1997) found that 76 percent of paramilitary activity involved narcotics work, including serving warrants and routine patrol. The militarization of the police also contributes to the management of riots and protests through forceful pacification demonstrated in the police actions the deaths of Michael Brown and Freddie Gray (Bergesen and Herman 1998; Dahlke 1952; Olzak, Shanahan, and McEneaney 1996; Websdale 2001). In fact, protests and riots are the most likely events to trigger police marching down the streets donning combat boots, urban camouflage, riot shields, and assault rifles while riding astride all-terrain vehicles. Similar to historical labor riots, police are used to quell unrest while leaving root causes of such furor unaddressed—they *pacify* (Harring 1983; Kienscherf 2014; Websdale 2001; Zinn 2005). Ideologically, state violence is constructed as necessary to restore

order, whereas riotous violence is portrayed as dangerous and in need of suppression by tear gas and batons (Agozino 2003; Brucato 2014; Weaver 2007). Furthermore, the overwhelming police presence in urban areas and their racially disparate operations are part of the systemic issues that *generate* such protests and revolts (Kienscherf 2014). Dialectically, control creates its own resistance.

The aggressive and militarized policing of drug activity also provides an exploitive funding stream for municipal governments and police departments. The Institute of Justice reported that U.S. treasury and the justice departments forfeited more than \$5 billion largely through narcotic warrants and arrests (Carpenter et al. 2015). Narcotic seizures and forfeitures are just one form whereby police departments exploit the underclasses, especially minorities, through monetary dispossession. Zero-tolerance policing models also lead to the exacerbation of fines and outstanding warrants that contribute to local government coffers. In Ferguson, Missouri, the municipal court issued 32,975 arrest warrants in 2013, despite the city’s population of only 21,000 residents (U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division 2015). Ninety-two percent of these warrants were issued to African Americans, who were 68 percent less likely than others to have their court cases dismissed. The City of Ferguson (2014) accumulated \$2.4 million in revenue from court fees and fines in 2013. The practice of accumulating revenue through fines and fees is related to the carceral state expanding by enforcing civil and administrative laws (Beckett and Murakawa 2012). Law enforcement are now bringing criminal charges on administrative issues such as failing to carry immigration documents, as is the case in Arizona due to Senate Bill 1070. Another common form of administrative violation is warrants’ being sought for nonpayment of financial obligations such as child support. The extensive use of warrants as a means for enforcing civil or administrative violations provides police with additional opportunities to stop, question, and frisk minorities and to expand carceral control in minority communities (Beckett and Murakawa 2012; U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division 2015). The practices of revenue generation through seizures, forfeitures, fines, and warrants exploits the economically vulnerable and especially harms African American populations (Alexander 2010; Beckett and Murakawa 2012; Goffman 2009; Murakawa 2014). Districts affected by such practices are essentially subjected to resource extraction, a prototypical objective of colonial domination.

Police departments also deploy military technologies, originally developed to monitor insurgents in war, to track high-risk offenders in U.S. communities (Ferguson 2012). Furthermore, more than 150 police departments use predictive policing technology to concentrate policing strategies in high-risk neighborhoods that often mirror minority neighborhoods. Harcourt (2015) explained how risk assessment tools have largely quantified risk as prior criminal history or contact, and both have become a proxy for race. Ferguson (2012) argued that predictive policing software turns individuals unknown to the police into possible suspects who need to be investigated to justify reasonable suspicion and thus potentially increases the use of stop-and-frisk incidents or aggressive questioning.

Aggressive police practices and the associated overenforcement give rise to an adversarial model of policing in which racial profiling, pretextual stops, unlawful searches and arrests, botched raids, and excessive force incidents proliferate as a means to maintain control and spatially exclude colonial populations. The overpolicing of the colonial space is further enhanced by the underenforcement of laws in these communities, reflected by slower response times to emergency calls within these areas (Klinger 1997; Smith and Klein 1984) and a general irreverence toward black residents' concerns (Mastrofski, Reisig, and McCluskey 2002; Weitzer 1999). These practices are rooted in police departments' failure to offer black communities the model of nonadversarial and dignified policing often enjoyed by whites (Brown 2005). The conclusion emerges that the police exist not to *serve* these communities but to control and contain them. They *manage* black populations and places.

CULTURAL DEVALUATION AND SUBJUGATION

Within the descriptions of police entry and management of colonized populations and spaces is an undercurrent of language and imagery that promotes racialized ideologies that legitimate or necessitate law enforcement intervention to (1) "protect" middle classes, whites, and various elites from the threats posed by ghetto denizens and (2) "save" such urban residents from themselves. Amidst the spatial, economic, and political segregation that coincided with the creation of contemporary urban ghettos, ghettos themselves were problematized as dens of racialized criminality. Like many colonized populations, urban denizens found their culture—their artwork, music, clothing

style, and so on—labeled as degenerate and dangerous (Bogazianos 2011; Ferrell 1993).

When broken-windows policing emerged, connections between African Americans, ghettos, and crime were exacerbated through the use of terms such as *decency* and *civility*, which ran rampant in academic descriptions and political rhetoric (Harcourt 2001; Herbert 2001; Kelling and Wilson 1982; Meares 2015). These terms became code words for racial and class statuses (Harcourt 2001). The situation "was clear to poor New Yorkers and especially people of color and many immigrants that these norms expressed particular middle-class, white, often suburban interests, ambitions, and identities" (Smith 2001:70). Whiteness becomes the metric by which all behavior is judged, and minority behaviors that do not meet white norms become indicators of criminality (Brucato 2014). Furthermore, police activities in neighborhoods populated by significant numbers of racial and ethnic minorities signify to outsiders that crime problems do not occur in predominantly white neighborhoods—crime is problem predominantly associated with racial *others*. When crime does occur in white neighborhoods, the problem is treated as a product of interlopers' trespassing in otherwise safe locales, promoting the need for spatial control of dangerous populations (Herbert and Brown 2006). Predominantly white spaces need to be protected from sources of disorder to prevent the "criminal element" from invading (Herbert 2001). In other words, crime in this context is viewed as a result of the populations of dangerous (racialized) spaces spilling over into unapproved locations that requires law enforcement intervention to contain (Muñiz 2015).

The use of civil injunction reflects the practices of criminalizing and stereotyping cultural expressions and practices as a way legitimate the control of minority bodies, movement, and spaces. For example, the documentation developed by police on known gang activity is used to restrict behaviors including

loitering in public, being seen in public with two more known gang members, trespassing on private property without written consent of the owner, disorderly conduct, wearing gang clothing, violating curfews, littering, blocking of free passage of streets and parks, and noise. (Bass 2001:170)

Thus, the reliance on vague stereotypes to identify gang members allows the suppression and exclusion of many inner-city minorities from public

spaces, and simple association with known gang members can become a punishable offense (Bass 2001; Stewart 1998). Policing gangs and the use of injunctions serves the dual purpose of controlling crime and criminalizing culture.

Cultural subjugation occurs hand in hand with the production of race. The particular imagery and language used by policymakers and law enforcement officials has helped construct African American culture, particularly young black men, as a dangerous criminal threat. These cultural symbols allow departments to act outside of *de jure* racism and criminalize other indicators of racial status (clothing, mannerisms, and other noncriminal or otherwise nuisance forms of behaviors). Such “colorblind racism” encourages the belief that racial disparities in traffic stops, drug arrests, and general police practices are the result of individual decisions to commit crime rather than a result of explicit systemic racial bias (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Schaefer and Kraska 2012). In the eagerness of the colonial machine to eradicate all notions of racism, law enforcement turns to an objective tool to predict risk and guide enforcement practices, which in turn generates new justifications for police presence and carceral control in ghetto communities predicated on the need to remove dangerous individuals. Yet the expansion of risk assessment and predictive policing tools, originally developed to track insurgents by the military, creates another narrative for police departments to justify their heavy presence in minority communities. For instance, researchers examined the validity of Northpointe’s risk assessment tool in Broward County, Florida, and found that the risk algorithm was twice as likely to label black defendants as future criminals compared with whites (Angwin et al. 2016). Furthermore, white defendants were mislabeled as low risk more than black defendants (Angwin et al. 2016). The risk assessment tools use prior criminal history and other factors that largely come from state interactions and disparate law enforcement treatments, which compounds the issues associated with colonial spaces.

The continuation of racism in police practices can be seen in the enforcement actions toward drugs. Linnemann and Wall (2013) show how the Faces of Meth (FOM) campaign ties the power of police with the power of the image to tie the use of methamphetamine to white trash, a rare instance in which whiteness was the central focus of police power. Yet the FOM campaign’s purpose was to detach white methamphetamine users as white trash to maintain “purity, or hegemonic whiteness” (Linnemann and Wall 2013:330). Despite the

overall connection of methamphetamine to whites, producers and traffickers are increasingly coming to be seen as Latino/a, and thus the threat of methamphetamine is being reimagined as a minority issue (Garriott 2010). Drug dealers in the suburbs are policed very differently than those in the ghetto (Jacques and Wright 2015; Manning 1980). When the perception is that user populations are white, there is a search for answers to address the root problems associated with drug use, but when the population consists of racial/ethnic minorities, the response is to demonize and punish. These patterns have been seen historically with disparities in crack versus cocaine sentencing and more recent shifts toward rehabilitation and the decriminalization of heroin (Mauer 2009). An increase in heroin use by African Americans in the 1960s was blamed for a rise in violent crime and a harsh criminal justice response. The more recent increase in heroin use by white persons has resulted in pushes for rehabilitation (Cicero et al. 2014).

CONCLUSION

As articulated in this article, contemporary policing in the United States continues to perpetuate systems of inequality and domination that, in many ways, mirror colonial forms of control. As the line between police and military has become increasingly blurred in recent decades, the police become law enforcers *and* a militarized occupation within these communities (Kraska 2007). The use of a militarized police force to invade and occupy these spaces is quintessential colonialism; as Tatum (1994) explains, “the police and the soldiers are the official maintainers of the colonizers and their rule of oppression” (p. 36). Ghetto communities are wracked by poverty, victimization, segregation, and other problems. None of these issues, however, are remedied by such occupation. Police operations appear to focus on containment of urban people and problems rather than resolving the structural forms of oppression that have shaped these spaces. Law enforcement and the military become tools of domination against the colonized people under the guise of maintaining law and order. The police thus help create, recreate, and manage a racialized “problem population” or “dangerous class” pushed to the margins of the labor market and political priority—or, as Brucato (2014) explained, they maintain the “color line” (Shelden 2008; Spitzer 1975). As also argued in this analysis, the police shore up these spaces for business growth and expansion. Ghetto residents are further displaced or

suppressed for the purposes of “urban renewal” and similar efforts.

When considered as a whole, the policies and practices described throughout this analysis reveal that many poor African Americans were (1) pushed into wretched spaces such as the urban ghetto; (2) symbolically and paternalistically connected to social maladies (such as crime); (3) subjected to an influx of police forces to control and supervise their behavior, both inside and outside of the ghetto; (4) inflicted with police strategies designed to “civilize”; (5) treated as if their neighborhoods were war zones; and (6) financially exploited through fines and displaced via gentrification and “urban renewal” initiatives for the sake of business growth and development. When considered *in toto*, these characteristics reflect the colonial occupations of old. Even calling such practices “neocolonial” seems inappropriate; these practices are surprisingly colonial in a classical sense.

The state’s role in maintaining order in public spaces also shapes the development of urban capitalism (Mitchell 2003). Contemporary police practices such as broken windows are innovations in state management, emphasizing the need to maintain order and improve the health of communities to revitalize capital investment in low-income neighborhoods (Smith 1996). Urban denizens are considered a problem population that must be pushed out or pulled up to make room for growth and redevelopment (Spitzer 1975). Even when well intentioned, seemingly benign liberal intentions often mask deeper, paternalistic power relations (Murakawa 2015). Police, as the front line of status quo maintenance, perform the grunt work for broader policies and initiatives that affect the lived material existence of populations relegated to urban ghetto spaces (Brucato 2014; Neocleous 2000). Thus police buttress these spaces and control their denizens so that capital can profit (gentrified locations, tourism, etc.)—the same mechanisms colonists have historically deployed to exploit places and people since the sixteenth century.

Beyond unpacking the relationship between African Americans and the police through colonialism, this analysis bears broader implications for the sociological understanding of race and racism within the United States. We agree with Glenn’s (2015) argument that other theories of race “do not explicitly consider . . . whether and in what ways U.S. national and regional racial systems may be unique and/or idiosyncratic because they have grown out of distinct material, social, and cultural circumstances” (p. 69). Although our focus is specifically on policing, this analysis supports the

broader conclusion that contemporary racial inequality can be understood as a result of enduring historical processes and structures linked to colonial domination. In fact, considering that the police often constitute the front line of the status quo, this study perhaps taps into the most visceral and immediate material consequences of ongoing colonialism for the marginalized. Furthermore, this analysis allows current police-minority community tensions to be understood not as the result of a few “rotten apples” but a result of a “rotten barrel” (Kappeler, Sluder, and Alpert 1998). It must be recognized that policing cannot be understood without examining broader structural elements, and those structures themselves cannot be understood without considering the role of the police in maintaining control. Black Lives Matter, for instance, did not arise out of indignation over a few errant officers. Rather, the movement erupted as a result of pressure created over time by a system that continually subjected African Americans to the colonial “technologies” of control (Glenn 2015:62). The particular appearance of the control may have changed over time, but the technologies of “containment (separation and segregation) . . . erasure (culture assimilation) . . . terrorism (violence, lynching), and . . . removal (expulsion, deportation)” have persisted in one form or another, with the police serving as a key institution in their implementation and management (Glenn 2015:62). This analysis points to broader, systemic forms of domination through colonialism beyond the barrel of a gun or the end of a truncheon. The police are part and parcel to an entire structure of oppression (Alexander 2010; Murakawa 2015; Platt et al. 1977).

The account offered here is undoubtedly incomplete. Colonialism is an expansive and pervasive structure and process. There are, therefore, a multitude of colonial dynamics left unexplored in this single article. In addition, various components of policing were not mentioned here for the purposes of brevity. For instance, scholars have noted that colonialism tends to fill leadership ranks in economic, educational, law enforcement, and military institutions with members of the colonizing population (Blauner 1969). Racial and ideological dynamics in the hiring of African Americans within policing agencies may be linked to colonial logics. Future research should also consider the colonial implications for the policing of other racial/ethnic groups. The impact of colonial policing on Hispanic and Latino communities was alluded to throughout the study, yet these populations have unique experiences with colonialism within the United States. Contemporary immigration policies such as the

Delegation of Immigration Authority Section 287(g) Immigration and Nationality Act, commonly known as 287(g), are part of a concerted effort to exclude Latino immigrants from the United States, forcing them back toward Central and South American countries, many of which are subjected to imperialistic exploitation by Western countries such as the United States. Such policies allow the heavily racialized policing of our borders against alleged economic or terroristic threats but may more broadly serve the interests of white capitalism (such as the economic exploitation of Mexico through policies including the North American Free Trade Agreement) (Fernández-Kelly and Massey 2007). Similarly, unique colonial experiences may be evident regarding the policing of Native Americans. Laurence Armand French (2016) provides a sweeping overview of the history and contemporary circumstances of the relationship between the police and Native American populations, but more research is needed.

Future research should take seriously the contemporary and historical linkages between race, policing, as well as structures and processes of colonialism. Rather than viewing such inequalities as stemming from amorphous systems of “racism” in social consciousness, colonialism provides an explanatory mechanism dialectically nuanced and grounded in the historical materialist formations of contemporary society, including its institutions of social control. Recent crises in American policing are not new developments. They are the products of long-running contradictions in American society—contradictions an attunement to colonialism helps unravel.

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NOTES

1. If history remains true, by the time this article is published, there will be more current names that could be included.
2. Like Saleh-Hanna (2008), we reject the idea of “neocolonialism,” as many of the strategies adopted under contemporary colonialism are not necessarily

new and, indeed, trace their genesis to tactics used in early colonialism. As such, current colonialism is not so much “new” as it is “contemporary.”

3. Many articulations within the literature treat colonialism as primarily a form of racial domination. This analysis, however, argues that under colonial rule, race and class are intimately linked (Gans 2005; Losurdo 2014). Race and racism have historically emerged as an ideology to legitimate the cultural, social, economic, and political subordination of populations for the purposes of economic expansion and accumulation, a project so complete that bodies were converted into exportable resources. As a legacy of the ongoing colonial project, contemporary racism’s genesis and maintenance are thus a product of political economic forces that have shaped material conditions globally.
4. Pinderhughes (2011) defined internal colonialism as “a *geographically-based* pattern of subordination of a differentiated population, locating within the dominant power or country. This subordination by a dominant power has the outcome of *systematic* group inequality expressed in the policies and practices of a variety of societal institutions, including systems of education, public safety (police, courts and prisons), health, employment, cultural production, and finance [emphasis in original]” (p. 236).
5. We recognize that urban communities may often want crime control, as they are the most frequently victimized. The particular form and function of criminal justice intervention, however, has largely failed to protect these areas from crime and has served, instead, as an institution designed largely to control the “dangerous classes” (Shelden 2008).
6. When Giuliani and Bratton took office, the New York Police Department published eight new policing strategies. The fifth, “Reclaiming the Public Spaces of New York” was the linchpin, with Bratton stating, “we are going to fix the broken windows and prevent anyone from breaking them again” (Bratton and Knobler 1998:229).
7. Civil injunctions are used to restrict the behavior of gang members in public spaces. According to Bass (2001), police and prosecutors compile dossiers of suspected gang members and their associates and use this information to restrict individuals from engaging in certain behaviors in certain neighborhoods. These behaviors include being in public with two or more gang members, trespassing on private property, violating curfews, littering, and wearing “gang clothing.”

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