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Alamance County: Racial Profiling, Policing and How they Contribute to the
School-To-Prison Pipeline

Introduction

The prison boom, and subsequent era of mass incarceration and social control, has largely stimulated the rise of what we now consider the school-to-prison pipeline. The school-to-prison pipeline is the culmination several social processes: hyper-regulation, criminalization of poverty, and racialized surveillance. Hyper-policing minority communities and surveilling children's behavior in school streamlines children of marginalized groups from schools directly into the judicial system, disproportionately affecting children in racialized, classed, and gendered ways (Schept, Wall, & Brisman, 2015; Wildeman, 2013). Instead of investing in all children's education, the state relegates the poor who don't conform to a certain standard into the prison system (Schept, Wall, & Brisman, 2015; Fording, 2001; Mallett, 2015; Wilson, 2014; Castillo, 2014).

To begin to understand the school-to-prison pipeline and its mechanisms of reproduction, it is important to begin with theoretical understandings of social control and social regulation which have allowed for its existence. Taking Alamance County, NC as a case study, we will understand more clearly how these processes actually effect Latinx individuals living in the South. Alamance County is known for its racial profiling and criminalization of Latinx

community members. This example will serve to explain how processes of racial profiling, discrimination, and tough-on-crime attitudes have led to criminalization of Latinx individuals, which culminates in and further reinforces the school-to-prison pipeline.

Mechanisms that Contribute to the School-to-Prison Pipeline

The punitively-minded state more often regulates marginalized communities and criminalizes poverty at higher rates—essentially, more vulnerable communities are often punished for their vulnerable position, instead of being offered assistance (Beckett & Western, 2001; Wacquant, 2009). Contemporary discourses surrounding criminality tend to impose stigma on those with criminal statuses/records, and tough-on-crime policies that intend to maintain the social order reinforce this stigma in the popular imagination (Beckett & Western, 2001; Fording, 2001). Instead of addressing the deep-seated social problems (poverty, unemployment, educational disparities, etc.) at their roots, the state more often relegates the poor to correctional institutions (Wacquant, 2009). The neoliberal state's role is to punish and neutralize any threat—often that of insurgency—to their stability (Fording, 2001; Wacquant, 2009).

The policing of marginalized communities of color, specifically Latinx men in these communities, has played a large role in the growth of this group's contact with the penal system (Western & Wildeman, 2009; Rios, 2011; Alexander, 2012; Armenta, 2016; Embrick, 2015). Victor Rios explains that many targeted groups feel as though the police automatically assume that they are guilty, "These boys frequently felt that they were treated guilty until they could prove themselves innocent, and much of their worldviews and actions were influenced by this

process” (2011). These groups, that receive heightened policing measures, feel as if they constantly have to prove their innocence in any interaction with police because they are initially perceived to be guilty (Rios, 2011). The concept of hyper-policing communities also manifests in the classroom.

A lot of these realities remain true for Latinx residents in Alamance County, NC. The U.S. Department of Justice has filed a lawsuit for discrimination against this county for their involvement with the 287 (g) program from 2007 to 2012 (Molina, 2018). Sheriff Terry Johnson is known for his racial prejudice and support for antiimmigrant immigration reform groups like FAIR (Ball, 2012). He and Alamance County’s police system have received a lot of negative media attention for the extra time they spend policing Latinx residents.

Johnson has set up checkpoints near predominantly Latinx neighborhoods, which disproportionately affects undocumented immigrants who have a vulnerable status (Molina, 2018). Reporters detailed an instance where Johnson went into a DMV and arrested dozens of undocumented immigrants who were attempting to obtain licenses with fake documents (Ball, 2012). Reporters implied that this action was intended to scare Latinx residents, especially those with vulnerable documentation status. In the county, Latinx drivers are twice as likely to be stopped, sometimes for no traffic violation at all (Ball, 2012). A report published by Elon University explains that not only were Latinx drivers disproportionately targeted, but also that deputies pulled over twice as many Latinx individuals as the police reports actually showed.

These negative interactions with police are common and result in the expectation of being incarcerated at some point in their lives (Armenta, 2016; Rios, 2011). Men of color, specifically Latinx men, believe it is more likely that they will go to jail or prison than college and are 38%

more likely to face incarceration at some point in their lives due to higher levels of racial profiling in police encounters (Han, 2018; Rios, 2011). Sheriff Johnson provides a local example of the criminalization of Latinx individuals. Labeling undocumented immigrants as criminal, stealing jobs, and draining tax revenue allows the state a reason to focus their policing efforts on this group (Ball, 2012). The result for many Latinx families is that they must move to different counties where they face less racial profiling (Ball, 2012). While Latinx individuals are not inherently criminal for these reasons, the narrative that is woven leads police to put more resources into surveilling their communities to keep crime rates low (Western & Wildeman, 2009).

How the School-to-Prison Pipeline Results

Scholars agree that zero-tolerance policies, an example of repressive social regulation, have had the largest influence on the reproduction of the school-to-prison pipeline. These policies predetermine severe consequences for any undesirable behavior, but they do not define serious vs. non-serious offenses and do not differentiate between intentional behavior and children with behavioral disorders or differences (Castillo, 2014; Mallett, 2015; Wilson, 2014). Additionally, most disciplinary action is decided at the discretion of the teachers and school administration which allows for implicit or explicit bias along racialized, classed, and gendered lines (Green, Perreira, & Ko, 2017; Wilson, 2014).

The No Child Left Behind Act was implemented in order to keep schools accountable for students who might fall behind due to socioeconomic status or disabilities, or, in the case of

many Latinx youth, speaking Spanish as a primary language (Mallett, 2015; Green, Perreira, & Ko, 2017). However, this law in combination with zero-tolerance policies has facilitated the removal of underperforming students from the classroom (Mallett, 2015). Once removed from the classroom due to punishment, students miss important concepts and opportunities for educational growth and then become enveloped in a seemingly unbreakable cycle. There are ramifications of policies such as this one, “The construction of an ‘at risk’ and criminalized population is sutured to the narrow epistemology that promotes accountability through standardized testing via the neoliberal capitalist logics of accountability and individual responsibility” (Schept, Wall, & Brisman, 2015). The unforgiving nature of these imperfect, punitive policies, like those associated with Alamance County’s police force, funnel students, specifically underprivileged Latinx boys, directly into contact with the justice system.

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*Note: The sources in italics are sources that I read for the purposes of writing this paper. Other sources are things I have read in this class, or for other classes (primarily the more theoretical pieces and books), that I drew on for writing this paper.