

The Criminal Brand: America's Invisible Class

Introductory Overview: In November of 2012, building on the growing interest in Michelle Alexander's seminal text, *The New Jim: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, twenty five WU students were tapped to design and provide an off-campus community based program addressing mass incarceration that successfully amassed an audience of over 250 attendees. <http://news.wustl.edu/news/Pages/24545.aspx> Three years later, as conversations become more refined on the need for decriminalization, the rise and evolution of prisons, and most of all the nationally racialized consequences of hyper-surveillance and policing in communities of color and urban neighborhoods, *The Criminal Brand* proposes several exciting ways to widen and thereby deepen interrogations into the haunting legacies of race, class, and America's prisons by turning attention to the group most marginalized and silenced in discourses on the carceral crisis yet undeniably critical to disrupting the prison cycle - children with an incarcerated parent(s)/family member(s). This project, therefore, targets a vital core of sustainable urbanism within and beyond the St. Louis region by setting out to address the tangible familial effects of incarceration while devising solutions to counter the shadow of criminality children are often socially branded and forced to live within.

Stated Purpose, Goals, and Collaborative Partnering: *The Criminal Brand* proposes to provide the first humanities-social science partnered scholarly endeavor to center the personally lived testimonies of youth and children affected by the cycle of prisons, violence, and disenfranchisement through a platform - both on and off line - to expand the target audience base. To that end, we have several specific goals in centering the evolutionary legacies of the carceral state within their personal and family lives: (1) Forge greater attention to the affect of prisons, mass incarceration, and the need for greater policy and educational opportunities for families, youth, and children affected by this continued carceral expansion; (2) Building and providing a digital interface and interdisciplinary platform to explore the affects of children, juvenile, crime, detention centers, and the school to prison pipeline through a student run podcast series; (3) Compile a digital archive of sound based testimonials of youth, children, and adult children of prisoners that leads to developing an online repository. (4) Conduct research forums and develop empowerment, support, and success strategies for children and teens affected by prisons.

Methods: The proposed project being interdisciplinary between S. Butler-Barnes, S. Mustakeem and D. Flowe, our methods will employ a dual approach:

Social Science: The first stage of the study will include measures of relevant individual level assets (racial identity and motivational variables) and social support (e.g., family, peers, and teachers) systems. Adolescent data (from those with parent permissions) will be collected at local community organizations (e.g., Girls Inc., Boys & Girls Club, Demetrious Foundation, & Let's Start), religious institutions, or an agreed upon location (e.g., local library). The second stage of the study will consist of a qualitative analysis of interview data from a sub-sample of African American adolescents from stage 1 of the survey study. Youth will be purposefully selected based on variation in identified racial identity clusters, self-efficacy beliefs, and perceived social support from their survey data. Also, selection will prioritize variation in social class background, and child gender. The main objective of the study is to understand how youth with differing racial identities, self-efficacy beliefs, and social support systems describe their experiences of having an incarcerated parent as an adolescent of color. The semi-structured

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interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. Interview questions will center around three major questions: 1) how youth use their social support system(s) in coping with the incarceration of a parent(s), 2) the individual and culturally strength-based assets that help them cope with the incarceration of a parent(s), and 3) the barriers faced of having incarcerated parent(s). The study timetable for the project will take place June of 2016 through to April of 2017. This will allow realistic time-frame to seek approval from the local youth serving organizations, form relationship with students and families, survey administration, transcribe interview manuscripts, and build and integrate the digital interface through the podcast series. From the outset, approximately 30 youth will be targeted to participate in the study; although investigators see wide spread appeal that may grow into a national interest of participation. Upon IRB and site(s) approvals, we will distribute flyers inviting youth who have incarcerated parent(s) to participate in the study. Adolescents participating will receive \$20 cash.

Humanities: As a historian of slavery and more recently turning intellectual attention towards the historical underpinnings of gender, race, crime in its direct connection to the Missouri State Penitentiary, the methods intended to implement from the lens of African American Studies and history will dovetail into my course, "Mapping the World of 'Black Criminality'" where students in the course will help to launch the digital interface following the summer research forums and surveys conducted. As such, working with the proposed undergraduate and graduate students Morgan Holloman and Olivia Marcucci, course students will design and implement the podcast series through operation of a mobile soundbooth that centers testimonials captured by those willing to share their stories. This integration will not only give direct enhancement of skillsets for humanities and other majored students, it will also allow an opportunity to extend a personal and direct hand in the launching of a never before seen online portal that can potentially reintegrate a wholeness in carceral discussions to highlight families and most especially children left behind to navigate their presents and futures often stigmatized by the criminalized branding forced on them through the choices and decisions of their immediate family members.

Limitations: The greatest limitation for a project targeting such a broad yet vulnerable population anticipated through the project is finding participants who want to openly share their stories. The project is being partnered and investigated by two WU faculty members of color affected by prisons with incarcerated parent(s) and one faculty member who grew upon in an environment compounded by violence; this may help to ameliorate some of these possible challenges because of a shared sense of understanding. Moreover, this project also requires and will rely heavily on a digital immersion in introducing students to blogging, digital archiving, webpage design, and implementing an intellectual podcast series that can have local appeal.

Outcomes: Being interdisciplinary, this project has several projected outcomes: (1) Develop *The Criminal Brand: America's Invisible Class* Podcast (targeting children, youth, and adult children affected by prisons and violence) and digital archive; (2) Complete one article for scholarly publication at the conclusion of the project; (3) Produce a newsletter that will include dissemination to the site locations in our study; (4) Provide a project ending reception open to the community and university that highlights the podcast, research, outcome of the research conducted, and stories gathered.