On the Run: Wanted Men in a Philadelphia Ghetto

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Although recent increases in imprisonment are concentrated in poor Black communities, we know little about how daily life within these neighborhoods is affected. Almost all ethnographic work in poor minority neighborhoods was written before the expansion of the criminal justice system, and the bulk of research on "mass imprisonment" relies on survey data, field experiments, or interviews, conceptualizing its impact in terms of current or former felons and their families. Drawing on six years of fieldwork in Philadelphia, this article shifts the focus from imprisonment and criminal records to the increase in policing and supervision in poor Black neighborhoods, and what this has meant for a growing status group of wanted people. For many young men, avoiding jail has become a daily preoccupation: they have warrants out for minor infractions, like failing to pay court fees or breaking curfew, and will be detained if they are identified. Such threat of imprisonment transforms social relations by undermining already tenuous attachments to family, work, and community. But young men also rely on their precarious legal standing to explain failures that would have occurred anyway, while girlfriends and neighbors exploit their wanted status as an instrument of social control. I discuss the implications of my ethnographic observations relative to prior treatments of the poor and policing, and with regard to broader sociological questions about punishment and surveillance in the modern era.

The number of people incarcerated in the United States has grown seven times over the past 40 years, and this growth has been concentrated among Black men with little education (Garland 2001; Western 2006). For Black men in recent birth cohorts, the experience of incarceration is now typical: 30 percent of those with only high school diplomas have been to prison, and 60 percent of those who did not finish high school have prison records by their mid-30s (Pettit and Western 2004). One in four Black children born in 1990 had a father imprisoned (Wildeman 2009). Such "mass imprisonment" (Garland 2001) transmits social and economic disadvantage, to be sure. African American former felons face significant discrimination in the labor market, as well as health costs, obstacles to housing, and large-scale disenfranchisement (Hammett, Harmon, and Rhodes 2002; Pager 2007; Rubenstein and Mukamal 2002; Uggen and Manza 2002; Western 2006). Moreover, imprisoned and formerly imprisoned men have difficulties participating in sustained ways in the lives of their families (see Nurse 2002; Western, Lopoo, and McLanahan 2004). Their partners and children consequently become socially and economically disadvantaged in the process (for reviews,

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see Comfort 2007; Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999).[1]

Expansions in incarceration have been accompanied by increases in policing and supervision in poor communities. While the police were scarcely present in the ghetto decades ago, today, police helicopters can regularly be heard overhead, cameras now monitor people on the streets, and large numbers of young men—including many who have never been convicted of felonies—have pending cases in the criminal courts, are on probation, released on bail, issued low-level warrants, and are routinely chased, searched, questioned, and arrested by the police. How does this affect daily life in poor Black communities? Unfortunately, we know little in this regard. Indeed, much of the research literature, which relies on statistical data, field experiments, or interviews, most often centers on the consequences of going to prison. Although ethnographic accounts should arguably capture what enhanced policing and supervision has meant for the dynamics of daily life in poor minority communities, most ethnographies were written before the criminal justice system became such a prevalent institution in the lives of the poor (see, e.g., Anderson 1978; Liebow 1967; Stack 1974).[2]

This article, building on prior work pertaining to the urban poor, as well as broader conceptions of power in the modern era (e.g., Foucault 1979), draws on six years of fieldwork with a group of poor African American young men in Philadelphia. In doing so, it offers an extended ethnographic look at life in the policed and surveilled ghetto that has taken shape in the era of mass imprisonment. As the findings reveal, the dealings these young men have with the police, the courts, and the probation and parole board grant them an illegal or semilegal status and instill an overriding fear of capture. Suspicious even of those closest to them, young men cultivate unpredictability or altogether avoid institutions, places, and relations on which they formerly relied. Yet because being wanted is understood to be deeply constraining, it can, within the context of limited opportunity, serve as an excuse for obligations that may have gone unfulfilled anyway. The result is a complex interactive system in which ghetto residents become caught in constraining legal entanglements while simultaneously calling on the criminal justice system to achieve a measure of power over one another in their daily lives.

THE URBAN POOR AND POLICING

Ethnographic accounts of poor urban communities have long included descriptions of people who commit serious crimes, stand trial, go to jail, or find themselves on the run from the police (see, e.g., Anderson 1978; Liebow 1967). Until recently, these people comprised only a small group of criminals in a neighborhood: most residents of poor Black communities did not interact much with the authorities. Before the 1990s, in fact, the ghetto was frequently described as nearly abandoned by law enforcement.

Anderson (1978:2), writing about street-corner men in Chicago in the early 1970s (he devotes a whole chapter to hoodlums), reports that "the police glance over and slow down, but they seldom stop and do anything. Ordinarily they casually move on, leaving the street-corner men to settle their own differences." Venkatesh's (2008) description of the Chicago projects some 20 years later depicts a similar scene, noting that police simply do not come when called. Instead, gang leaders step in and maintain an informal, de facto system of justice with the help of project leaders and a few neighborhood cops. In *Crack House,* Williams (1992:84) likewise describes how, in New York during the late 1980s and early 1990s at the peak of the crack boom, police typically did not disturb open air crack sales:

> The police have firm knowledge about selling spots, but they usually ignore the spots until com-

[1] Although this body of research points overwhelmingly to the detrimental effects of incarceration and its aftermath, this picture is complicated by close-up accounts of prisoners and their families. Comfort (2008) shows how women visiting incarcerated spouses find that the prison's regulations in some ways enhance their relationships. As romantic partners, inmates contrast favorably to "free men."

[2] Ethnographies of ghetto life published more recently rely on fieldwork conducted in the 1980s and early 1990s, before the change in policing practices and crime laws took their full effect (see, e.g., Anderson 1999; Bourgois 1995; Venkatesh 2006; Wacquant 2004; for exceptions, see Jacobs 1999; LeBlanc 2003).

> munity pressure builds to a level that forces them to take action. . . . For the most part, the police stay away. . . . One night I watched a police car, with lights flashing, move down this street past hundreds of buyers, runners, touts, and dealers marching by continually making exchanges. Over the car's loudspeaker an officer kept saying, "Move on off the block everybody. This is the police." The buyers and sellers paid no attention.

Times, however, have changed. The past few decades have seen the war on crime, the war on drugs, a blossoming of federal and state police agencies and bureaus, steeper sentencing laws, and a near unified endorsement of "zero-tolerance" policies from police and civic leaders (Beckett 1997; Simon 2007). The number of police officers per capita increased dramatically in the second half of the twentieth century in cities across the United States (Reiss 1992). In 2006, more than 14 million people were arrested and charged with a criminal offense in the United States, and more than five million people were under probation or parole supervision (Glaze and Bonzcar 2006; U.S. Department of Justice 2007).

In Philadelphia—my field site—the number of police officers increased by 69 percent between 1960 and 2000, from 2.76 officers for every 1,000 citizens to 4.66 officers.[3] The Philadelphia Adult Probation and Parole Department supervised more than 60,000 people in 2006. These people paid the city more than 10 million dollars in restitution, fines, court costs, and supervisory fees that year. In Philadelphia, 12,000 people violated the terms of their probation or parole and were issued warrants for their arrest (Philadelphia Adult Probation and Parole Department 2007). Even more people were issued bench warrants for missing court or for unpaid court fees, or arrest warrants for failure to turn themselves in for a crime. Such surveillance, policing, and supervision raise important sociological questions about the role of the state in managing poverty and maintaining racial inequality (Wacquant 2001). They also raise questions about the nature and consequences of modern surveillance and power.

Foucault (1979) suggested that the modern era would increasingly be characterized by surveillance and that state monitoring of citizens would become increasingly complete. Building on ethnographic insights, my conclusions highlight ways in which contemporary surveillance may indeed be taking the forms Foucault described in his analysis of panoptic power. Yet my conclusions also suggest that the consequences of such surveillance for everyday life may differ from those envisioned by Foucault. Rather than encouraging self-monitoring, the forms of supervision and policing found in the neighborhood I observed foster a climate of fear and suspicion in which people are pressured to inform on one another. Young men do not live as well-disciplined subjects, but as suspects and fugitives, with the daily fear of confinement.

FIELDWORK, THE 6TH STREET BOYS, AND NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

When I was an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania, I tutored a high school student, Aisha (names of people and streets are fictitious). I began to get to know some of her friends and neighbors, and in the fall of 2002 I moved into an apartment in the poor to working-class Black neighborhood in which she lived. At this point, Aisha's mother had begun referring to me as her "other daughter" and Aisha and I became "sisters" (Anderson 1978; Stack 1974). When Aisha's cousin Ronny, age 15, came home from a juvenile detention center, Aisha and I started hanging out with him in a neighborhood about 10 minutes away called 6th Street. Ronny introduced me to Mike, who was 21, a year older than I was. When Mike's best friend Chuck, age 18, came home from county jail, we began hanging out with him too.

When I first started spending time with Ronny and Mike on 6th Street, their neighbors and relatives remarked on my whiteness and asked me to account for my presence. Ronny introduced me as Aisha's "sister," and I mentioned that I lived nearby. After a few months, Mike decided to "take me under his wing" and began referring to me as "sis." Bit by bit, other young men in the group started introducing me

[3] Data on the number of police officers in Philadelphia is taken from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reports (1960 through 2000). Population estimates of Philadelphia are taken from the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

to others as their cousin or as a "homie" who "goes way back."

The five blocks known as 6th Street are 93 percent Black, according to a survey of residents that Chuck and I conducted in 2007. At the busiest intersection, men and boys stand outside offering bootleg CDs and DVDs, stolen goods, and food to drivers and passersby. The main commercial street includes a bullet-proofed Chinese food store selling fried chicken wings, "loosie" cigarettes, condoms, baby food, and glassines for smoking crack. The street also includes a check-cashing store, hair dresser, payday loan store, Crown Fried Chicken restaurant, and a pawnshop. On the next block, a Puerto Rican family runs a corner grocery.

Of the 217 households surveyed, roughly one fourth received housing vouchers. In all but two households, members reported receiving some type of government assistance in the past three years. The neighborhood also contains many people who make their living as teachers, bus drivers, parole officers, health care workers, and so on. Aisha's neighbors commonly referred to the area of 6th Street as "nice and quiet," and a place they would move if they had enough money.

Chuck, Mike, and Ronny were part of a loose group of about 15 young men who grew up around 6th Street and were joined by the fact that they were, for the most part, unemployed and trying to make it outside of the formal economy. They occasionally referred to their group as "the 6th Street Boys" when distinguishing themselves from other street-corner groups, and five of them had "6th Street" tattooed on their arms. Among the 15 young men, eight were 18 or 19 years old when I met them, four were in their early 20s, and one was age 23. Ronny was 14 and Reggie was 15. Six years later, Mike was the only one to have graduated from high school. Alex worked steadily in his father's heating and air-conditioning repair shop, and four others occasionally found seasonal construction jobs or low-skilled jobs at places like Taco Bell and McDonald's. By 2002, the crack trade was in decline, as it was in other parts of the country (Jacobs 1999). Seven of the young men worked intermittently as low-level crack dealers; others sold marijuana, Wet (PCP and/or embalming fluid), or pills like Xanax. Some of the men occasionally made money by robbing other drug dealers. One earned his keep by exotic dancing and offering sex to women.

All but two of the young men lived with female relatives, although about half got evicted and slept on other people's couches or on the streets for months or years at a time. Anthony slept in an abandoned truck on 6th Street for most of the time I knew him, although Chuck later let him sleep in his basement or got the women he was seeing to let Anthony sleep on the floor when Chuck spent the night.

Between January 2002 and August 2003, I conducted intensive observation "on the block," spending most of my waking hours hanging out on Chuck's back porch steps, or along the alley way between his block and Mike's block, or on the corner across from the convenience store. In the colder months, we were usually indoors at Chuck's and a few other houses in the area. I also went along to lawyers' offices, court, the probation and parole office, the hospital, and local bars and parties. By 2004, some of the young men were in county jails and state prisons; for the next four years I spent between two and six days a week on 6th street and roughly one day a week visiting members of the group in jail and prison. I also kept in touch by phone and through letters.

The young men agreed to let me take field notes for the purpose of one day publishing the material, but I generally did not ask direct questions and most of what is contained here comes from observations I made or conversations I heard.[4] Over the course of this research I also interviewed two lawyers, a district attorney, three probation officers, two police officers, and a federal district court judge.

On Being Wanted

By 2002, curfews were established around 6th Street for those under age 18 and video cameras had been placed on major streets. During the

[4] I use quotes when I wrote down what people said as they spoke (by typing it directly onto a laptop or by using a cell phone text message). I omit the quotes when I noted what people said after an event or conversation, and I paraphrase when I wrote down what people said at the end of the day in my field notes. Since I did not use a tape recorder, even the speech in quotes should be taken only as a close approximation.

first year and a half of fieldwork, I watched the police stop pedestrians or people in cars, search them, run their names to see if any warrants came up, ask them to come in for questioning, or make an arrest at least once a day, with five exceptions. I watched the police break down doors, search houses, and question, arrest, or chase suspects through houses 52 times. Police helicopters circled overhead and beamed search lights onto local streets nine times. I noted blocks taped off and traffic redirected as police searched for evidence or "secured a crime scene" 17 times. I watched the police punch, choke, kick, stomp on, or beat young men with night sticks 14 times during this first year and a half.

Children learn at an early age to watch out for the police and to prepare to run. The first week I spent on 6th Street, I saw two boys, 5 and 7 years old, play a game of chase in which one assumed the role of the cop who must run after the other. When the "cop" caught up to the other child, he pushed him down and cuffed him with imaginary handcuffs. He patted the other child down and felt in his pockets, asking if he had warrants or was carrying a gun or any drugs. The child then took a quarter out of the other child's pocket, laughing and yelling, "I'm seizing that!" In the following months, I saw children give up running and simply stick their hands behind their backs, as if in handcuffs, or push their bodies up against a car, or lie flat on the ground and put their hands over their head. The children yelled, "I'm going to lock you up! I'm going to lock you up, and you ain't never coming home." I once saw a 6-year-old child pull another child's pants down and try to do a "cavity search."

When Chuck, Mike, and Steve assembled outside, the first topic of the day was frequently who had been taken into custody the night before and who had outrun the cops and gotten away. They discussed how the police identified and located the person, what the charges were likely to be, what physical harm had been done to the man as he was caught and arrested, and what property the police had taken and what had been wrecked or lost during the chase.

People with warrants out for their arrest for failure to turn themselves in when accused of a crime understand that the police may employ a number of strategies in attempting to locate them. In an interview, two police officers explained that when they are looking for a suspect, they access Social Security records, court records, hospital admission records, electric and gas bills, and employment records. They visit a suspect's "usual haunts" (e.g., his home, his workplace, and his street corner) at the times he is likely to be there, threatening his family or friends with arrest, particularly when they have their own lower-level warrants or are on probation or have a pending court case. The police also use a sophisticated computer mapping program that tracks people who have warrants or are on probation, parole, or released on bail. The police round up these potential informants and threaten them with jail time if they do not provide information about the suspect they are looking for.

In the 6th Street neighborhood, a person was occasionally "on the run" because he was a suspect in a shooting or robbery, but most people around 6th Street had warrants out for far more minor infractions. In the survey that Chuck and I conducted in 2007, of the 217 households that make up the 6th Street neighborhood, we found 308 men between the ages of 18 and 30 in residence.[5] Of these men, 144 reported that they had a warrant issued for their arrest because of either delinquencies with court fines and fees or for failure to appear for a court date within the past three years. Also within the past three years, warrants had been issued to 119 men for technical violations of their probation or parole (e.g., drinking or breaking curfew).[6]

[5] I counted men who lived in a house for three days a week or more (by their own estimates and in some cases, my knowledge) as members of the household. I included men who were absent because they were in the military, at job training programs (like JobCorp), or away in jail, prison, drug rehab centers, or halfway houses, if they expected to return to the house and had been living in the house before they went away.

[6] These violations are not the same as the "disorderly conduct" that became the focus of "quality of life" policing in places like New York during the 1990s. "Quality of life" policing arrests people for minor offenses like urinating in public, jumping turnstyles, or public drinking (Duneier 1999). The young men in this study were initially arrested for more serious offenses such as drug offenses, and then were served warrants when they failed to show up for court dates during the pretrial and trial, to pay court

Young men worried that they would be picked up by the police and taken into custody even when they did not have a warrant out for their arrest. Those on probation or parole, on house arrest, and who were going through a trial expressed concern that they would soon be picked up and taken into custody for some violation that would "come up in the system." Even those with no pending legal action expressed concern that the police might "find some reason to hold them" because of what they had done, who or what they knew, or what they carried on their person. In this sense, being "on the run" covers a range of circumstances. I use the term to mean anyone whose claim to a life outside of confinement is not secure or legitimate and who may be taken into custody if they encounter the authorities. People "on the run" make a concerted effort to thwart their discovery and apprehension, as Chuck, age 19, concisely put it in speaking to his 12-year-old brother:

> You hear the law coming, you merk on [run away from] them niggas. You don't be having time to think okay, what do I got on me, what they going to want from me. No, you hear them coming, that's it, you gone, period. Because whoever they looking for, even if it's not you, nine times out of ten they'll probably book you.

Police, jail, and court language permeates general conversation. Young men refer to their girlfriends as "Co-Ds" (codefendants) and speak of "catching a case" (to be arrested and charged with a crime) when accused of some wrong by their friends and family. "Call List," the term for the phone numbers of family and friends one is allowed to call from prison or jail, becomes the term for one's close friends.

One way to understand the quantity and quality of young men's legal entanglements is to look at nine members of the group during one month. In December 2003, Anthony, who was 22 years old and homeless, had a bench warrant out for his arrest because he had not paid $173 in court fees for a case that had ended the year before. He had spent nine of the previous 12 months in jail awaiting the decision. Later in the month, two neighbors who knew that Anthony had this bench warrant called the police and got him arrested because they said he had stolen three pairs of shoes from them. Shawn, a 21-year-old exotic dancer, was in county jail awaiting trial for selling crack, a charge that would ultimately be dismissed. Chuck, age 18, had a warrant because he had not paid $225 in court fees that were due a few weeks after his case for assault was dismissed. He spent almost his entire senior year of high school in county jail awaiting trial on this case.

Reggie, then age 16, and his neighbor Randy, age 19, had detainers out for violating the terms of their probation, Randy for drinking and Reggie for testing positive for marijuana (called "hot piss"). Alex, age 22, was serving a probation sentence, and Steve, age 19, was under house arrest awaiting the completion of a trial for possession of drugs. Ronny, age 16, was in a juvenile detention facility, and Mike, age 21, was in county jail awaiting trial.

Between 2002 and 2007, Mike spent about three and a half years in jail or prison. Out of the 139 weeks that he was not incarcerated, he spent 87 weeks on probation or parole for five overlapping sentences. He spent 35 weeks with a warrant out for his arrest, and in total had 10 warrants issued on him. Mike had at least 51 court appearances over this five-year period, 47 of which I attended.

The fact that some young men may be taken into custody if they encounter the authorities is a background expectation of everyday interaction in this community. It is a starting principle, central to understanding young men's relations to family and friends, as well as the reciprocal lines of action between them.

PATHS TO PRISON AND STRATEGIES OF EVASION

Once a man finds that he may be stopped by the police and taken into custody, he discovers that people, places, and relations he formerly relied on, and that are integral to maintaining a respectable identity, get redefined as paths to confinement. I am concerned here with the kinds of relations, localities, and activities that threaten a wanted man's freedom, with the techniques he commonly employs to reduce these risks, and with some of the contingencies associated with these techniques.

fees at the end of the cases, or to follow the dictates of probation and parole sentences they were issued after or instead of completing time in jail or prison.

Hospitals and Jobs

Alex and his girlfriend, Donna, both age 22, drove to the hospital for the birth of their son. I got there a few hours after the baby was born, in time to see two police officers come into the room and arrest Alex. He had violated his parole a few months before by drinking alcohol and had a warrant out for his arrest. As an officer handcuffed him, Donna screamed and cried, and as they walked Alex away she got out of the bed and grabbed hold of him, moaning, "Please don't take him away. Please I'll take him down there myself tomorrow I swear, just let him stay with me tonight." The officers told me they had come to the hospital with a shooting victim who was in custody and, as was their custom, ran the names of the men on the visitors list. Alex came up as having a warrant out for a parole violation, so they arrested him along with two other men on the delivery room floor.

After Alex was arrested, other young men expressed hesitation to go to the hospital when their babies were born. Soon after Chuck turned 21, his girlfriend, age 22, was due with their second child. Chuck told her that he would go to the hospital, even though he had a detainer out for a probation violation for breaking curfew. Chuck stayed with her until she was driven to the hospital, but at the final moment he said she should go ahead without him and that he would come soon. He sat with me later and discussed the situation. As we spoke, his girlfriend called his cell phone repeatedly, and he would mute the sound after a ring and stare at her picture as it came up on the screen each time. He said:

> I told her I was on my way. She mad as shit I ain't there. I can hear her right now. She going to be like, "You broke your promise." I'm not trying to go out like Alex [get arrested], though. You feel me?

Alex spent a year back upstate on the parole violation. Just after his son's first birthday he was re-released on parole, with another year left to complete it. He resumed work at his father's heating and air-conditioning repair shop, stopped smoking marijuana, and typically came home before his curfew. Three weeks before Alex was due to complete his parole sentence, he was on his way home from 6th Street when a man with a hooded sweatshirt covering his face stepped quickly out from behind the side of a store and walked Alex, with a gun in his back, into the alley. Alex said the man took his money and pistol-whipped him three times, then grabbed the back of his head and smashed his face into a concrete wall.

Alex called Mike and me to come pick him up. When we arrived, Alex was searching on the ground for the three teeth that had fallen out, and the blood from his face and mouth was streaming down his white T-shirt and onto his pants and boots. His jaw and nose were swollen and looked as if they might be broken. I pleaded with him to go to the hospital. He refused, saying that his parole officer might hear of it and serve him a violation for being out past curfew, for fighting, for drinking, or any other number of infractions.

That night, Alex called his cousin who was studying to be a nurse's assistant to come stitch up his face. In the morning, he repeated his refusal to avail himself of medical care:

> All the bullshit I done been through [to finish his parole sentence], it's like, I'm not just going to check into emergency and there come the cops asking me all types of questions and writing my information down and before you know it I'm back in there [in prison]. Even if they not there for me some of them probably going to recognize me then they going to come over, run my shit [run a check on his name]. . . . I ain't supposed to be up there [his parole terms forbade him to be near 6th Street, where he was injured]; I can't be out at no two o'clock [his curfew was ten]. Plus they might still got that little jawn [warrant] on me in Bucks County [for court fees he did not pay at the end of a trial two years earlier]. I don't want them running my name, and then I got to go to court or I get locked back up.

Alex later found out that the man who beat him had mistaken him for his brother, who had apparently robbed him the week before. Alex's jaw still bothers him and he now speaks with a kind of muffled lisp, but he did not go back to prison. Alex was the only member of the group to successfully complete a probation or parole sentence during the six years I spent there.

Like hospitals, places of employment become dangerous for people with a warrant. Soon after Mike, age 24, was released on parole to a halfway house, he got a job through an old friend who managed a Taco Bell. Mike refused to return to the halfway house in time for curfew one night, saying he could not spend another night cooped up with a bunch of men like he was still in jail. He slept at his girlfriend's house, and in the morning found that he had been

issued a violation and would likely be sent back to prison, pending the judge's decision. Mike said he wasn't coming back and they were going to have to catch him. Two parole officers arrested him the next day as he was leaving the Taco Bell. He spent a year back upstate for this violation.

A man with a warrant can get arrested on the job even if the police are not specifically searching for him. Chuck, who started working at the local McDonald's when he was 19, was issued a probation violation for driving a car (his driving privileges had been revoked as part of his probation sentence). Although he had a warrant, Chuck kept working, saying that if the police came he would simply run out the back door.

A couple of weeks later, an old employee got into a fight with three other employees, and the police shut down the McDonald's while they questioned witnesses and looked for the women who had been fighting. When the fight began, Chuck was in the storeroom talking on the phone with his girlfriend. He came out, he said, and saw six police officers staring at him. At this point he called and asked me to come and pick up his house keys, fairly certain he would be taken into custody. When I got there he was driving away in the back of the police car.

The Police and the Courts

Like going to work or to hospitals, using the police and the courts was risky. After Mike completed a year in prison he was released on parole to a halfway house. When his mother went on vacation, he invited a man he met in prison to her house to play video games. The next day Mike, Chuck, and I went back and found his mother's stereo, DVD player, and two televisions were gone. A neighbor told us he had seen the man taking these things out of the house in the early morning.

Mike called the police and gave them a description of the man. When we returned to the block, Reggie and Steve admonished Mike about the risks he had taken:

> *Reggie:* And you on parole! You done got home like a day ago! Why the fuck you calling the law for? You lucky they ain't just grab [arrest] both of you.
> *Steve:* Put it this way: They ain't come grab you like you ain't violate shit, they ain't find no other jawns [warrants] in the computer. Dude ain't pop no fly shit [accused Mike of some crime in an attempt to reduce his own charges], but simple fact is you filed a statement, you know what I'm saying, gave them niggas your government [real name]. Now they got your mom's address in the file as your last known [address], so the next time they come looking for you they not just going to your uncle's, they definitely going to be through there [his mother's house].

Mike returned to the halfway house a few days later and discovered that the guards were conducting alcohol tests. He left before they could test him, assuming he would test positive and spend another year upstate for the violation. Three days later the police found him at his mother's house and took him into custody. He mentioned that he thought their knowledge of his new address must have come from the time he reported the robbery.

Using the courts was no less dangerous. Chuck, age 22, was working in construction. He had been arguing with his children's mother for some months, and she stopped allowing him to see their two daughters, ages one-and-a-half and six months. Chuck decided to take her to court to file for partial custody. At the time, Chuck was also sending $35 a month to the city toward payment on tickets he had received for driving without a license or registration; he hoped to get into good standing and become qualified to apply for a driver's license. The judge said that if he did not meet his payments on time every month, he would issue a bench warrant for his arrest,[7] and Chuck could work off the traffic tickets he owed in county jail (fines and fees can be deducted for every day spent in custody).

Five months into his case for partial custody in family court, Chuck lost his job working construction and stopped making the $35 payments to the city for the traffic tickets. He was unable to discover whether he had been issued a warrant. Chuck went to court for the child custody case anyway the next month, and when the children's mother said he was a drug dealer and not fit to get partial custody of their children, the judge ran his name in the database to see if

[7] In Philadelphia, the courts can issue an arrest warrant if a person fails to pay fines for traffic violations or misses a court date in regard to these violations. A person can also be imprisoned for failing to pay moving violation fines (Philadelphia County, 33 Pa.B. Doc. No. 2745 and Pa.B. Doc. No. 03-1110).

any warrants came up. They did not. Walking out of the courthouse, Chuck said to me and his mother:

> I wanted to run, but it was no way I was getting out of there—it was too many cops and guards. But my shit came back clean, so I guess if they is going to give me a warrant for the tickets they ain't get around to it yet.

The judge ruled in Chuck's favor, and he was granted visitation on Sundays at a court-supervised daycare site. These visits, Chuck said, made him anxious: "Every time I walk in the door I wonder, like, is it today? Are they going to come grab me, like, right out of the daycare? I can just see [my daughter's] face, like, 'Daddy, where you going?'" After a month, Chuck was allowed to go to the mother's house on the weekends and pick up his daughters. Chuck appeared thrilled with these visits because he could see his children without having to interact with the courts and risk being taken into custody for any warrant that might come up.

While people on probation or parole may make tentative use of the police and the courts, men with warrants typically stay away. During the first year and a half I spent on 6th Street, I noted 24 instances in which members of the group contacted the police when they were injured, robbed, or threatened. These men were either in good standing with the courts or had no pending legal constraints. I did not observe any person with a warrant call the police or voluntarily make use of the courts during the six years I spent there. Indeed, young men with warrants seemed to see the authorities only as a threat to their safety. This has two important implications.

First, steering clear of the police means that wanted men tend not to use the ordinary resources of the law to protect themselves from crimes perpetrated against them. This can lead a person to become the target of those who are looking for someone to rob.

Ned, age 43, and his long-time girlfriend Jean, age 46, lived on Mike's block. Jean was a heavy crack user, although Chuck noted, "she can handle her drugs," meaning she was able to maintain both a household and her addiction. Ned was unemployed and occasionally hosted "dollar parties" (house parties with a dollar entrance fee and with drinks, food, and games that all cost a dollar) for extra money and engaged in petty fraud, such as stealing checks out of the mail and stealing credit cards. Their primary income came from taking in foster children.

Jason lived on Chuck's block and sold marijuana with his younger brother. In January of 2003, the police stopped Jason on a dirt bike and arrested him for receiving stolen property (they said the bike came up stolen in California four years earlier). Jason did not appear for court and was issued a bench warrant.

Around this time, Ned and Jean discovered they might be kicked out of their house because they owed property taxes to the city. Jean called Jason, telling him to come to the house because she had some gossip concerning his longtime love interest. According to Jason, when he arrived on the porch steps, Jean's nephew robbed him at gunpoint. That night, Jean acknowledged to me that she would take this money and pay some of their bills owed to the city. Reggie later remarked that Jason should have known not to go to Ned and Jean's house: as the only man on the block with a warrant out for his arrest at the time, he was vulnerable to violence or robbery because he could not call the police.

Second, wanted people's inability to turn to the police when harmed can lead young men to use violence to protect themselves or to get back at others. Black (1983) argues that some crimes can be understood as people taking matters into their own hands, that is, punishing people whom they consider to have committed a crime. This kind of self-help crime is typically carried out when the police and the courts are unavailable (in this case, because people have warrants out for their arrest and may be held in custody if they contact the authorities).

One winter morning, Chuck, Mike, and I were at a diner having breakfast to celebrate the fact that Mike had not been taken into custody after his court appearance earlier that morning. Chuck's mother called to tell him that his car had been firebombed outside her house and that fire trucks were putting it out. According to Chuck, the man who set fire to his car was someone who had given him drugs to sell on credit, under the arrangement that Chuck would pay him once he had sold the drugs. Chuck had not been able to pay because the police had taken the money out of his pockets when they searched him earlier that week. This was the first car that Chuck had ever purchased legally, a '94 Bonneville he had bought the week before

for $400 from a used-car lot in northeast Philadelphia. Chuck was silent for the rest of the meal, and as we walked to Mike's car, he said:

> This shit is nutty, man. What the fuck I'm supposed to do, go to the cops? "Um, excuse me officer, I think boy done blown up my whip [car]." He going to run my name and shit, now he see I got a warrant on me; next thing you know my Black ass locked the fuck up, you feel me? *I'm* locked up because a nigga firebombed my whip. What the fuck, I'm supposed to let niggas take advantage?

Chuck and Mike discussed whether it was better for Chuck to take matters into his own hands or to do nothing (referred to as "letting it ride" or "taking an L" [loss]). Doing nothing had the benefit of not placing him in more legal trouble, but, as they both noted, "letting it ride" set them up to be taken advantage of by people who understood them to be "sweet."

A few days later, Chuck drove over to 8th Street with Mike and Steve and shot at the young man whom he believed was responsible for blowing up his car. Although no one was injured, a neighbor reported the incident and the police put out a body warrant for Chuck's arrest for attempted murder.

Labeling theory suggests that those accorded a deviant status come to engage in deviance because of being labeled as such (Becker 1963; Lemert 1951). This phenomenon is known as "secondary deviance" (Lemert 1951:75). Declining to engage authorities when there may be concrete reasons for doing so should be considered in this context. Young men's hesitation to go to the police or to make use of the courts when they are wronged, because of concern they will be arrested, means they became the targets of theft and violence because it is assumed they will not press charges. With the police out of reach, men then resort to more violence as a strategy to settle disputes.

Family and Friends

Like going to the hospital or using the police and the courts, even more intimate relations—friends, family, and romantic partners—may pose a threat and thus have to be avoided or at least carefully navigated. My observations of Alex made this all too clear. When I met Alex, age 21, he was on parole and living with his girlfriend Donna. Alex had recently gotten a job at his father's heating and air-conditioning repair shop. After work, he usually went to see his friends from 6th street, and occasionally he would stay on the block drinking and talking until late at night.

Donna and Alex frequently argued over what time he came home and his drunken condition. In these fights, I observed that Donna would threaten to call his parole officer and say that Alex was in violation if Alex did not return home at a reasonable hour. Donna also threatened to call the parole officer and tell him that Alex was out past curfew or associating with known criminals if he cheated on her, or if he did not contribute enough of his money to the household. Because Alex was paroled to Donna's apartment, she could also threaten to call the parole office and say that she no longer wanted Alex to live with her. If this were to happen, she explained to me, Alex would be placed in a halfway house.

In the early morning after a party, Mike and I drove Alex back to Donna's apartment. She was waiting on the step for him:

> *Donna:* Where the fuck you been at?
> *Alex:* Don't worry about it.
> *Donna:* You must don't want to live here no more.
> *Alex:* Come on, Don. Stop playing.
> *Donna:* Matter of fact I'll give you the choice [between prison or a halfway house].
> *Alex:* Come on, Don.
> *Donna:* Uhn-uhn, you not staying here no more. I'm about to call your P.O. now, so you better make up your mind where you going to go.
> *Alex:* I'm tired, man, come on, open the door.
> *Donna:* Nigga, the next time I'm laying in the bed by myself that's a wrap [that's the end].

Later that day, Donna called me and listed a number of reasons why she needed to threaten Alex:

> I can't let that nigga get locked up for some dumb shit like he gets caught for a DUI or he gets stopped in a Johnny [a stolen car] or some shit. What the fuck I'm supposed to do? Let that nigga roam free? And then next thing you know he locked up and I'm stuck here by myself with Omar talking about "Where Daddy at?"

Donna stopped short of calling the police on Alex and seemed to see her threats as necessary efforts at social control. This use of the criminal justice system as threat can be seen as parallel to the way in which single mothers threaten to turn fathers over to child-support authorities if they do not contribute money informally

(Edin and Lein 1997). I also witnessed women go a step further and call the police on their boyfriends or kin to punish them or get back at them.

Mike and Marie's relationship witnessed just such a tension. They had a son when they were seniors in high school and a daughter two years later. When Mike and Marie were 22, and their children were 1 and 3 years old, Mike began openly seeing another woman, Tara. Mike claimed that he and Marie had broken up and he could do as he wished, but Marie did not agree to this split and maintained they were still together and that he was in fact cheating. ("He don't be telling me we not together when he laying in the bed with me!") Mike provoked expressions of jealousy (called "stunting") as he began riding past Marie's block with Tara on the back of his ATV motorbike. Marie seemed infuriated at the insult of her children's father riding through her block with another woman for all of her family and neighbors to see, and she told him that he could no longer visit their two children. Mike and Marie spent many hours on the phone arguing over this. Mike would plead with her to let him see the children and she would explain that he would have to end things with Tara first.

Tara said she wanted to fight Marie and almost did so one afternoon. Marie stood outside her house, with six relatives in back of her, waving a baseball bat and shouting, "Get your kids, bitch. I got mine!" (Meaning that she had more claim to Mike than Tara did because they shared two children.) One of Tara's girlfriends and I held her back while she took off her earrings and screamed, "I got your bitch, bitch!" and "I'm going to beat the shit out this fat bitch."

One afternoon when Mike was sitting on a neighbor's steps, a squad car pulled up and two police officers arrested him. He had a bench warrant out for missing a court date. He said later that he never even thought to run, assuming the police were there to pick up the men standing next to him who had recently robbed a convenience store. As Mike sat in the police car, Marie talked at him through the window in a loud voice:

> You not just going to dog [publicly cheat on or humiliate] me! Who the fuck he think he dealing with? Let that nigga sit for a minute [stay in jail for a while]. Don't let me catch that bitch up there either [coming to visit him in jail].

Although Marie did call the cops and get Mike taken into custody that day, she was the first person to visit him in county jail after he got out of quarantine and she continued to visit him (sometimes wearing a "Free Mike" T-shirt) throughout his year-long trial. On the day of his sentencing, she appeared in the courtroom in a low-cut top with a large new tattoo of his name on her chest.

I also observed women use the police and the courts as a form of direct retaliation. Michelle, age 16, lived with her aunt on 6th Street. When Michelle started showing, she claimed that Reggie (who was 17 at the time) was the father. Reggie denied he had gotten her pregnant, and when Michelle said she wanted an abortion, he refused to help pay for it. Michelle's aunt declared that she and her niece were cutting off their relationship with Reggie and that he was no longer welcome in their house. Michelle threatened to have Reggie beaten up by various young men she was involved with. Reggie typically stood on the corner only two houses away from where they lived, and this became a frequent verbal conflict.

Around the same time, a newcomer to the block and to the group shot and killed a man from 4th Street during a dice game. The slain man's associates ("his boys") began driving up and down 6th Street and shooting at Reggie, Chuck, and Steve. On one of these occasions, Reggie fired two shots back as their car sped away; these bullets hit Michelle's house, breaking the glass in the front windows and lodging in the living room walls. Although the bullets did not hit anyone, Michelle was home, and called her aunt, who called the police. She told them that Reggie had shot at her niece, and the police put out a body warrant for his arrest for attempted murder.

After five weeks, the police found Reggie hiding in a shed and took him into custody. Reggie's mother and his brother Chuck tried to talk Michelle and her aunt out of showing up in court so that the charges would be dropped and Reggie could come home.[8] From jail, Reggie called his mother and me repeatedly to discuss

[8] This is a fairly common thing to do. Some people get others arrested simply to extort money from them, which they request in exchange for not showing up as a witness at the ensuing trial.

the situation. Once when we were both on the line he said:

> *Reggie:* The bitch [Michelle's aunt] know I wasn't shooting at them. She know we going through it right now [are in the middle of a series of shootouts with men from another block]. Why I'm going to shoot at two females that live on my block? She know I wasn't shooting at them.
> *Mother:* What you need to do is call her up and apologize [for not taking responsibility for her niece's pregnancy].
> *Reggie:* True, true.

Reggie did apologize and spread the word that he was responsible for making Michelle pregnant. Michelle and her aunt did not show up at three consecutive court dates, and after six months the case for attempted murder was dropped and Reggie came home. Michelle's aunt seemed pleased with this result:

> You not just going to get my niece pregnant, then you talking about it's not yours, you know what I'm saying? Fuck out of here, no. . . . I mean, I wasn't trying to see that nigga sit for an attempt [get convicted of attempted murder], but he needed to sit for a little while. He got what he needed to get. He had some time to sit and think about his actions, you dig me? He done got what he needed to get.

While family members, partners, or friends of a wanted man occasionally call the police on him to control his behavior or to punish him for a perceived wrong, close kin or girlfriends also link young men to the police because the police compel them to do so. It is common practice for the police to put pressure on friends, girlfriends, and family members to provide information, particularly when these people have their own warrants, are serving probation or parole, or have a pending trial. Family members and friends who are not themselves caught up in the justice system may be threatened with eviction or with having their children taken away if they do not provide information about the young men in their lives.

Reggie, age 17, was stopped by the police for "loitering" on the corner and allowed the police to search him. When the police officer discovered three small bags of crack in the lining of his jeans, Reggie started running. The cops lost him in the chase, and an arrest warrant was issued for possession of drugs with intent to distribute.

Reggie told me that the police raided his house the next night at 3:00 a.m. He left through the back door and ran through the alley before they could catch him. The officers came back the next night, breaking open the front door (which remains broken and unlocked to this day), and ordered Reggie's younger brother and his grandfather to lie facedown on the floor with their hands on their heads while they searched the house. An officer promised Reggie's mother that if she gave up her son, they would not tell Reggie she had betrayed him. If she did not give Reggie up, he said he would call child protective services and have her younger son taken away because the house was infested with roaches, covered in cat shit, and unfit to live in.

I was present two nights later when the police raided the house for the third time. An officer mentioned they were lucky the family owned the house: if it was a Section 8 building they could be immediately evicted for endangering their neighbors and harboring a fugitive. (Indeed, I had seen this happen recently to two other families.) The police found a gun upstairs that Reggie's mother could not produce a permit for; they cuffed her and took her to the police station. When her youngest son and I picked her up that afternoon, she said they told her she would be charged for the gun unless she told them where to find Reggie.

Reggie's mother begged him to turn himself in, but Reggie refused. His grandfather, who owned the house, told Reggie's mother that he would no longer allow her to live there with her kids if she continued to hide her son from the police:

> This ain't no damn carnival. I don't care who he is, I'm not letting nobody run through this house with the cops chasing him, breaking shit, spilling shit, waking me up out of my sleep. I'm not with the late night screaming and running. I open my eyes and I see a nigga hopping over my bed trying to crawl out the window. Hell no! Like I told Reggie, if the law run up in here one more time I be done had a stroke. Reggie is a grown-ass man [he was 17]. He ain't hiding out in my damn house. We going to fuck around and wind up in jail with this shit. They keep coming they going to find some reason to book my Black ass.

Reggie's grandfather began calling the police when he saw Reggie in the house, and Reggie's mother told him that he could no longer stay there. For two months, Reggie lived in an abandoned Buick LeSabre parked in a nearby alleyway. Reggie's mother said she missed her son

and felt she had betrayed him by abandoning him, even though she had not turned him in to the police. When the police finally took Reggie into custody, she expressed relief:

> Well, at least he don't have to look over his shoulder anymore, always worried that the law was going to come to the house. He was getting real sick of sleeping in the car. It was getting cold outside, you know, and plus Reggie is a big boy and his neck was all cramped up [from sleeping in the car]. . . . And he used to come to the back like: "Ma, make me a plate," and then he'd come back in 20 minutes and I'd pass him the food from out the window.

Whether a man's friends, relatives, or girlfriend link him to the authorities because the police pressure them to do so or because they leverage his wanted status to get back at him or punish him, he comes to see those closest to him as potential informants. Mike and Chuck once discussed how they stood the highest chance of "getting booked" because of their friends and relatives' attempts to "set them up." Mike noted:

> Nine times out of ten, you getting locked up because somebody called the cops, somebody snitching. That's why, like, if you get a call from your girl like, "Yo, where you at, can you come through the block at a certain time," that's a red flag, you feel me? That's when you start to think like, "Okay, what do she got waiting for me?"

I observed wanted men try to reduce the chance of their intimates informing by cultivating secrecy and unpredictability. Chuck and Reggie referred to this strategy as "dipping and dodging" or "ducking in and out." Chuck, age 20, remarked:

> The night is really, like, the best time to do whatever you got to do. If I want to go see my mizz [mother], see my girl, come through the block and holla at [say hello to] my boys I can't be out in broad day. I got to move like a shadow, you know, duck in and out, you thought you saw me, then bam, I'm out before you even could see what I was wearing or where I was going.

When Steve, age 19, had a bench warrant out for failure to appear in court, he was determined, he said, never to go back to jail. He slept in a number of houses, not staying more than a few nights in any one place. On the phone, he would lie to his family members, girlfriend, and fellow block members about where he was staying and where he planned to go next. If he got a ride to where he was sleeping, he requested to be dropped off a few blocks away, and then waited until the car was out of sight before walking inside. For six months, nobody on the block seemed to know where Steve was sleeping.

Cultivating unpredictability helps wanted men reduce the risk of friends and family informing on them. In fact, maintaining a secret and unpredictable routine decreases the chance of arrest by many of the other paths discussed previously. It is easier for the police to find a person through his last known address if he comes home at around the same time to the same house every day. Finding a person at work is easier if he works a regular shift in the same place every day. Cultivating secrecy and unpredictability, then, serve as a general strategy to avoid confinement.

BEING WANTED AS A MEANS OF ACCOUNTING

Once a man is wanted, maintaining a stable routine, being with his partner and family, going to work, and using the police may link him to the authorities and lead to his confinement. Yet when wanted men (or social analysts) imply that being wanted is the root cause of their inability to lead "respectable" lives, they are stretching: long before the rise in imprisonment, urban ethnographers described the distrust that Black people felt toward the police and one another, and the difficulties poor Black men faced in finding work and participating in the lives of their families (Anderson 1999; Cayton and Drake [1945] 1993; DuBois [1899] 1996; Duneier 1999; Edin and Lein 1997; Liebow 1967; Newman 1999; Stack 1974). While legal entanglements may exacerbate these difficulties, being wanted also serves as a way to save face and to explain inadequacies.

Liebow (1967:116) wrote that the unemployed men he spent time with accounted for their failures with "the theory of manly flaws." For example, instead of admitting that their marriages failed because they could not support their spouses, they explained that they were *too manly* to be good husbands—they could not stop cheating, or drinking, or staying out late. For the young men of 6th Street, being "on the run" takes the place of, or at least works in concert with, the "manly flaws" described by

Liebow as a means to retain self respect in the face of failure.

Mike, age 21, had a bench warrant out because he did not show up to court for a hearing in a drug possession case. During this time, he was not making what he considered to be decent money selling drugs, and he had been unable to pay his son's Catholic school fees for more than a month. Parents' Day at his son's school that year was a Thanksgiving fair, and Mike had been talking about the day for weeks. The night before the fair, Mike agreed to pick up his children's mother, Marie, and go to the school around 10:00 the next morning.

The next morning, Marie began calling Mike's cell phone at 8:30. She called around 13 times between 8:30 and 9:30. I asked Mike why he did not pick up and he said that it was not safe to go, considering the warrant. At noon, he finally answered her call. By then the fair was almost over and Marie had caught the bus back and forth herself. She was yelling so loudly that Steve, Chuck, and I could hear her voice through the phone:

> What the fuck good are you on the streets if you can't even come to your son's fair? Why I got to do everything myself—take him to school, pick him up from school, take him to the doctor. . . . And you on some "I'm falling back. I'm laying low. I can't be up at no school. I can't do this I can't do that." What the fuck I'm supposed to tell your son: "Michael, Daddy can't come to the fair today because the cops is looking for him and we don't want him to get booked." Is that what you want me to say?

Mike called her some names and hung up. Before going back to sleep, he mentioned what a "dumb-ass" she was:

> Do she want me to get locked up? How I'm going to be there for my kids if I'm locked up? She don't be thinking, like, she don't have to look over her shoulder, you know what I'm saying. She be forgetting I can't just do whatever I want, go wherever I want.

Mike seemed convinced that going to the fair would put him at risk, and at the time I believed this to be the reason he stayed home. But a few months later, although he was still wanted for the same bench warrant, he attended a parent–teacher conference.

> *Alice:* I thought you didn't want to go up there. Remember Marie was mad as shit the other time you didn't go.
>
> *Mike:* I'm cool now because I just paid the school fees. I ain't want dude to come at my neck [get angry], like, "Where the money at? Why you ain't pay?" I wasn't trying [didn't want] to hear that bullshit.

From this, I gathered that Mike had not gone to Parents' Day earlier in the year at least in part because he had not paid the school fees and did not want to confront the school's administration. Once he paid the bill, he proudly attended the next event, a parent–teacher conference. The warrant provided him with a way to avoid going to Parents' Day without admitting that he did not want to go because he could not pay the school fees.

Warrants also serve as an important explanation for not having a job. Steve had a warrant out for a few weeks when he was 21, and repeatedly mentioned how he could not get work because of this warrant:

> If I had a whip [car] I'd go get me a job up King of Prussia [a mall in a neighboring county] or whatever. But I can't work nowhere in Philly. That's where niggas be fucking up. You remember when Jason was at McDonald's? He was like, "No, they [the police] ain't going to see me, I'm working in the back." But you can't always be back there, like sometimes they put you at the counter, like if somebody don't show up, you know what I mean? How long he worked there before they [the police] came and got him? Like a week. They was like, "Um, can I get a large fry and your hands on the counter because your Black ass is booked!" And he tried to run like shit, too, but they was outside the jawn [the restaurant] four deep [four police officers were outside] just waiting for him to try that shit.

Although Steve now and then invoked his warrant as an explanation for his unemployment, the fact was that Steve did not secure a job during the six years I knew him, including the times when he did not have a warrant.

James, age 18, moved with his aunt to 6th Street, and after a while became Reggie's "young-boy." Like the other guys, he talked about his court cases or mentioned that he had to go see his probation officer.

Steve, Mike, Chuck, and I were sitting on Chuck's back-porch steps one afternoon when Reggie drove up the alley way and announced: "Yo, the boy James he clean, dog! He ain't got no warrant, no detainer, nothing. He don't even got like a parking ticket in his name."

Reggie told us he had just been to James's mother's house across town, and she had complained to him that James had not yet found a job. James's mother informed Reggie that James had no pending cases, no warrants or detainers or anything "in the system that would hold him" and so should have no problem finding employment. When Reggie finished explaining this to us, Mike continued the conversation:

> *Mike:* What happened to that case he caught? Damn that was a little minute ago [a while ago].
> *Chuck:* I think he spanked that jawn [the case was dropped].
> *Reggie:* I wish I would get my shit [warrant] lifted. I'd be bam, on my J-O [job], bam, on my A-P [apartment], bam, go right to the bank, like, "Yeah, motherfucker, check my shit, man. Run that shit. My shit is clean, dog. Let me get that account." I be done got my elbow [driver's license] and everything.

Reggie explained how his wanted status blocks him from getting jobs, using banks, obtaining a driver's license, and renting an apartment. Yet the things that Reggie thought a "clean" person should do were not things that Reggie himself did when he was in good standing with the authorities over the course of the years that I knew him. Nor were they things that most of the other men on the block did. Alex, Mike, and Chuck looked for jobs when they did not have warrants out for their arrest, but others, like Reggie and Steve, did not. None of them obtained a valid driver's license during the six years I knew them.[9] Only Mike secured his own apartment during this time, and he kept it for only three months. To my knowledge, none of the men established a bank account.

Being wanted serves as an excuse for a wide variety of unfulfilled obligations and expectations. At the same time, it is perhaps only because being wanted is in fact a constraining condition that it works so well as a means of accounting for failure. Having a warrant may not be the reason why Steve, for example, did not look for work, but it was a fact that police officers did go to a man's place of work to arrest him, and that some of the men experienced this first-hand. In the context of their ongoing struggles, what they said amounted to reasonable "half-truths" (Liebow 1967) that could account for their failures, both in their own minds and in the minds of others who had come to see their own lives in similar terms.

DISCUSSION

The presence of the criminal justice system in the lives of the poor cannot simply be measured by the number of people sent to prison or the number who return home with felony convictions. Systems of policing and supervision that accompanied the rise in imprisonment have fostered a climate of fear and suspicion in poor communities—a climate in which family members and friends are pressured to inform on one another and young men live as suspects and fugitives, with the daily fear of confinement.

Young men who are wanted by the police find that activities, relations, and localities that others rely on to maintain a decent and respectable identity are transformed into a system that the authorities make use of to arrest and confine them. The police and the courts become dangerous to interact with, as does showing up to work or going to places like hospitals. Instead of a safe place to sleep, eat, and find acceptance and support, mothers' homes are transformed into a "last known address," one of the first places the police will look for them. Close relatives, friends, and neighbors become potential informants.

One strategy for coping with these risks is to avoid dangerous places, people, and interactions entirely. A young man thus does not attend the birth of his child, nor seek medical help when he is badly beaten. He avoids the police and the courts, even if it means using violence when he is injured or becoming the target of others who are looking for someone to rob. A second strategy is to cultivate unpredictability—to remain secretive and to "dip and dodge." To ensure that those close to him will not inform on him, a young man comes and goes in irregular and unpredictable ways, remaining elusive and untrusting, sleeping in different beds, and

[9] Obtaining a driver's license requires a birth certificate or passport, a Social Security card, and two proofs of residence. Obtaining these items, in turn, requires identification and processing fees. One must undergo a physical exam by a doctor, pay for and pass a written permit test, and locate an insured and registered car with which to take the driving test. Because men drove without proper documentation, they got tickets, which had to be paid before they could begin the application process.

deceiving those close to him about his whereabouts and plans. If a man exhausts these possibilities and gets taken into custody, he may try to avoid jail time by informing on the people he knows.

Whatever the strategy, a man finds that as long as he is at risk of confinement, staying out of prison and participating in institutions like family, work, and friendship become contradictory goals; doing one reduces his chance of achieving the other. Staying out of jail becomes aligned not with upstanding, respectable action, but with being an even shadier character.

Family members and romantic partners experience considerable hardship because of their association with men who are being sought or supervised by the state. Specifically, I found that family members living with a relative or boyfriend with a warrant out for his arrest are caught between three difficult lines of action: allowing him to stay in their homes and placing their own safety and security in jeopardy, casting him out, or betraying him by turning him in to the police.

It is possible that issuing warrants to a large group of young men for minor probation violations or delinquencies with court fees, while straining family life and making it difficult for men to find and keep a job, also serves to discourage them from committing crime. Although this article notes some instances of warrants potentially encouraging crime (e.g., by keeping men from participating in the formal labor market or by leading men with warrants to become the target of robbers), I cannot speculate as to the net effect of such policies on crime or violence. The data presented here merely suggest that current policies in Philadelphia grant a sizable group of people—before they are convicted of crimes and after they have served a sentence—an illegal or semilegal status, and that this status makes it difficult for them to interact with legitimate institutions without being arrested and sent to jail.

More surprisingly, the system of low-level warrants and court supervision has the unintended consequence of becoming a resource for women and relatives who, possessing more legal legitimacy, can use it to control their partners and kin. Girlfriends, neighbors, and family members threaten to call the police on young men to "keep them in line," and occasionally they call the police or get a man arrested as payback for some perceived wrong. Young men also turn their wanted status into a resource by using it to account for shortcomings or failures that may have occurred anyway. Because being wanted is understood by 6th Street residents to be deeply constraining, young men with little income, education, or job prospects can call on their wanted status to save face and to assuage the guilt of failing as a father, romantic partner, or employed person.

Contemporary theories of social stratification and political sociology argue that the criminal justice system has become a vehicle for passing on disadvantage (Western 2006) and "an instrument for the management of dispossessed and dishonored groups" (Wacquant 2001:95). The findings presented here confirm these important theses, but my fieldwork also suggests that those so managed are hardly hapless victims, immobilized in webs of control. Instead, men and women on 6th Street evade and resist the authorities, at times calling on the state for their own purposes, to make claims for themselves as honorable people, and to exercise power over one another.

CONCLUSIONS AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Young men on the run in Philadelphia can tell us something about how power operates in contemporary society. Indeed, the policing of the modern ghetto may be usefully juxtaposed to the influential theory of power Foucault outlines in *Discipline and Punish* (for discussions of Foucault's dominant position in the sociology of punishment see Cohen 1985; Garland 1990).

Foucault's (1979) theory of power begins with the prison and extends to work houses, almshouses, military barracks, cities under tight regulation during cholera epidemics, and finally to modern society. He argues that popular illegalities were widespread in early modern society, and sovereigns made no systematic attempts to stamp them out. Instead, sovereigns intervened sporadically, making gruesome public examples of a small number of cases. Taking the prison as an example, Foucault suggests that modern punishment is organized not on the principle of occasional fear-inspiring public brutality, but on a panoptic system of inspection, surveillance, and graded rewards and punishments. The law is enforced systemati-

cally: individuals are carefully monitored and examined and files are kept on them. The age of popular illegality is replaced by the age of rational discipline.

At first glance, the Philadelphia neighborhood I studied, with its video cameras on street lamps, frequent police stops and searches, and monitoring of residents through probation, parole, and house arrest, seems to resemble the panoptic fortress town Foucault envisioned in *Discipline and Punish* (1979). Yet the ghetto cannot be placed under the general umbrella of the panopticon. A different form of power exists there, and with different results for the people involved.

Foucault suggests that in prisons, army camps, and other such panoptic places, authorities accomplish cooperation through "constant, uninterrupted supervision" and a system of graded punishments and rewards. People are coaxed into compliance through careful training, examining, and monitoring, through minute attention to the movements and gestures of the body. Eventually, subjects come to internally monitor themselves (Garland 2001).

In comparison to places like prisons, monasteries, or army camps, the monitoring and supervision of ghetto residents is incomplete. Enclosed spaces make near perfect surveillance and enforcement possible: people can live unlawfully only if they do not get caught or if the authorities look the other way (Sykes [1958] 2007). In spaces like the 6th street neighborhood, however, many people break the law without the authorities knowing; many others are known to be in violation but the authorities do not have the resources or the ability (or, to be more cynical, the desire) to locate them all and bring them to justice. This opens up the possibility of people existing in the spaces between identification, discovery, and apprehension.

Surveillance and supervision in the ghetto are incomplete not only because people are widely able to break the rules and to evade the authorities, but also because the forms of supervision do not strive to be all-encompassing in the first place. Residents of the neighborhood I studied do not find that their movements are tightly controlled and regimented, as they would be in a prison or convent; they do not eat, sleep, and live together under the watchful gaze of one central authority, nor is their privacy and personal property permanently denied them (Foucault 1979; Goffman 1961; Sykes [1958] 2007). Supervision around 6th street is not based on constant observation and disciplining, but on a kind of checkpoint or flashpoint system, whereby certain people are only occasionally (if not randomly) monitored, searched, observed, or dispossessed.

These occasional examinations (the urine test during a probation meeting, the stop and frisk on a street corner, the raid of a house, or the running of a driver's name in the police database to see if any warrants come up) are put to use not—as Foucault envisioned—to dole out a range of small punishments and rewards in the interest of correction and training, but to identify people who may qualify for prison and to bring those people into the hands of the state.

This form of power—occasional, incomplete, and for the purpose of identifying candidates for extreme sanction—does not seem to produce orderly subjects. Self-discipline and the internalization of norms makes little sense in a context in which following the rules (e.g., appearing in court, showing up to probation meetings, or turning oneself in when accused) may *hasten* one's removal to prison.

A final point of comparison: Foucault argues that power based on fear (the public hangings) was replaced in the modern era by power based on observation, examination, and discipline. In the 6th street neighborhood, one indeed finds monitoring and supervision, but this monitoring does not put an end to fear. In fact, the lives of residents are organized precisely around fear, that is, the fear of being sent to jail.

Garland (1990:168) argues that a significant failing of *Discipline and Punish* is that it describes "the control *potential* possessed by modern power-knowledge technologies as if it were the reality of their present-day *operation.*" By studying the ghetto ethnographically, we can see how the forms of power Foucault envisioned operating in a panopticon actually pan out when applied to a neighborhood. People in the modern policed ghetto do not live as tightly controlled and disciplined subjects. Rather, they are living as semilegal or illegal people, coping with the daily threat of capture and confinement. The life of a suspect or a fugitive is quite different from the life of a captive, even though broadly speaking, the same forms of power—observation, examination, the keeping of files—may sustain them both.

One can of course argue that wanted people, poised to perpetuate their own criminality, have indeed internalized the norms that disciplining powers sought to instill. In this sense, a status group of fugitives fits nicely into Foucault's functionalist ideas about the production of delinquency and its political uses (Foucault 1979:272). But to argue this is, I believe, a stretch. Fugitives are, in point of fact, resisting the will of the authorities, and whether or not this resistance is in the end liberatory, their daily lives and the forms of power governing them are clearly distinct from those of inmates subject to panoptic power.

Rather than placing the ghetto, along with the rest of society, under a "generalized panopticism" (Garland 1990:146), the 6th street situation suggests an alternative form of power. In cases where a state (or some other power) is in the business of severely sanctioning a group of people (e.g., by killing them, deporting them, forcibly sending them to war, or placing them in institutions like prisons, concentration camps, or plantations) we will see one group of people who are charged with administering the sanction and another group who are receiving it. If the sanction is confinement in a prison, workhouse, or mental asylum, we may see a group of people living as inmates or subjects as described by Foucault's panopticon (or in the way that Sykes [1958] (2007) described people living in prisons or Goffman [1961] described people living in total institutions). But we will also see, outside of these institutions, an apparatus charged with identifying, catching, and judging likely candidates, and a group of people living with the risk of sanction and trying to avoid it, as fugitives.

Instead of thinking of residents of the modern ghetto as inmates of prisons or other panoptic places, we might compare ghetto residents to other semilegal or illegal people who qualify for some sanction and who are trying to avoid it: undocumented immigrants who are at risk of being deported, Jews living in Nazi Germany who may be sent to concentration camps, draft-dodgers or deserters from the army who may be imprisoned or shot, escaped slaves who may be found and sent back to the plantations, or communists in the United States and Europe when the party was illegal. It is with these groups that residents of the modern ghetto may find some common experience. It is this kind of social situation that should be taken into account if we are to fully grasp the effects of policies like mass incarceration.

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