Analysis of Victor Rios Book: Punished: Policing Lives of Black and Latino Boys

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**Analysis of Victor Rios Book: *Punished: Policing Lives of Black and Latino Boys***

The book, *Punished: Policing Lives of Black and Latino Boys*, was written by Victor Rios, a sociologist and Ph.D. holder at Berkeley University, mirrors social problems of black and Latino boys living in ghettos of Oakland in California in the years around the 1980s and 90s. As a former gang member in Oakland, Rios experienced all the nature of issues that African American and Latino boys faced in the inner city amid an increase in crimes and intensive policing by the government agents. The book examines the bleak lives of young men forced to live with punitive policies in their residential areas and schools where they are watched continuously and stigmatized. Rios wanted to show the lives of gangs in Oakland and how the system criminalizes them and limits their opportunities. He also intended to develop empathic solutions to help criminalized men find bearing in their lives and engage in useful and legitimate activities. The book is designed for black and Latino boys living in ghettos across American cities that they can find a way out of the gang and criminal lives. It is also for government agencies and institutions to review their policies on social control measures.

According to Rios, youth in the inner city of Oakland live in fear and suspicion because their lives have been hyper criminalized by the system, a process that has made them become targets of systemic social control. Their individual lives, behaviors, and styles have been treated continuously as deviant, threatening, and risky in all social contexts, including in schools. The lives of youth living in the inner city are always watched with many incarcerated for crimes not committed because the system has tuned the mindset about the criminal nature of black and Latino boys. Based on my reading of this book, I think that the Labelling Theory best explains the lives of the boys in Oakland. The concept of Labelling Theory explains that people act or behave in a way that other people see or describe them. The act of criminalizing young boys in Oakland stems from the act of stereotyping them as dangerous and risky criminals capable of destabilizing social order. As a result, black and Latino boys in Oakland always live in fear, suspicion, and anxiety as they wrestle with difficulties brought by stringent policing of their lives.

Rios explains that black and Latino boys in Oakland contend with constant punishment resulting from hyper criminalization of their lives. Punishments have made them feel defeated, ashamed, stigmatized, and hopeless because of sanctions and negative interactions imposed on the youth by representatives of institutions of social control. The punishments meted on them include incarceration in which the statistics indicate that most of those imprisoned are young black and Latino men. The young men studied admit that they have learned to live with perpetual imprisonment, and the chances of any one of the incarcerated are exceptionally high. Imprisonment as form as punishment in Oakland is so familiar to youths that most of them are aware of prison culture and live even before they go there. They have lived with former convicts and heard stories about prison lives, and some in schools have been treated like prisoners.

Rios uses both micro and macro-sociological approach in his book. There is evidence from the book that Rios engage in face to face conversations with young Black and Latino boys in Oakland. For instance, Rios interviewed, observe, and studied the lives of 40 black and Latino boys. Similarly, Rios brings out broader perspectives about trends and patterns of Black and Latino men living in ghettos across big cities in the United States. By engaging in close communication with groups and individuals in the ghetto, the writer managed to understand the realities and problems of colored men in Oakland and understand their daily struggles. Macrosociology discusses these realities in a broader perspective and highlighting the current racial issues that black and Latino face in communities, schools, and workplaces. Using these sociological approaches help the writer to meet its objective of showing social problems facing colored youth in America

Rios’ description of Oakland’s inner-city resembles ghettos such as Troy in New York, Boyle Heights and El Sereno in Los Angeles, etc. These ghettos share close similarities with Oakland's inner city. They have a high poverty level as the communities living in the area lack basic social necessities. The ghettos also have high youth unemployment leading to an increase in criminal activities such as gang life. Black and Latino youth are also highly discriminated against and accused of criminal activities.

In conclusion, Rios’ book provides a concise analysis of the lives of Oakland’s Black and Latino boys living in the inner city. I am satisfied with the writer’s description of Oakland’s inner city and the highlight of grave problems that they struggle with. Interviewing, studying, and observing the lives of black and Latino boys reveal aspects of their lives that have not been considered before. The writer prudently calls for reviewing of zero tolerant policies used by law enforcement because it marginalizes youth and brings negative effect. He calls for non-punitive support measures to help young men. Generally, I think the book is good as it provides a concise reflection of the lives of young black and Latino in the inner cities.

**Reference**

Rios, V. M. (2011). *Punished: Policing the lives of Black and Latino boys*. New York: New York University Press