WACQUANT: QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION

QUOTES COVERED IN CLASS MON 10/19:

1. Abstract

“Not one but several ‘peculiar institutions’ have operated to define, confine and control African-Americans in the history of the United States: chattel slavery from the colonial era to the Civil War; the Jim Crow system in the agrarian South from Reconstruction to the Civil Rights revolution; the ghetto in the northern industrial metropolis; and, in the post-Keynesian age of desocialized wage labor and welfare retrenchment, the novel industrial complex formed by the remnants of the dark ghetto and the carceral apparatus with which it has become joined by a relationship of structural symbiosis and functional surrogacy. In the 1970s, as the urban ‘Black Belt’ lost its economic role of labor extraction and proved unable to ensure ethnoracial closure, the prison was called upon to shore up caste division and help contain a dishonored and supernumerary population viewed as both deviant and dangerous. Beyond the specifics of the US case, this article suggests that much is to be learned from the comparison between ghetto and prison as kindred institutions of forced confinement entrusted with enclosing a stigmatized category so as to neutralize the material and/or symbolic threat it poses for the surrounding society” (377).

2. pp. 378

“Viewed against the backdrop of the full historical trajectory of racial domination in the United States, the glaring and growing ‘disproportionality’ in incarceration that has afflicted African-Americans over the past three decades (footnote 1) can be understood as the result of the ‘extra-penological’ function that the prison system has come to shoulder in the wake of the crisis of the ghetto.” Not crime, but the need to shore up an eroding caste cleavage, along with buttressing the emergent regime of desocialized wage labor to which most blacks are fated by virtue of their lack
of marketable cultural capital, and which the most deprived among them resist by escaping into the illegal street economy, is the main impetus behind the stupendous expansion of America’s penal state in the post-Keynesian age* [post 1980s] and its de facto policy of ‘carceral affirmative action’ toward African Americans”

*REPHRASE: Looking at the institution of the prison within the context of a long-standing legacy of racial domination in the U.S., the glaring and growing rate at which African Americans are disproportionately incarcerated should be seen as the result of a prison system that is not used solely or simply for punishment, but for the purposes of maintaining and re-strengthening a racial hierarchy in America that threatened to crumble when the ghetto became an inviable way of maintaining that hierarchy.

3. pp. 378
“...both [the prison and the ghetto] belong to the same class of organizations, namely, institutions of forced confinement: the ghetto is a manner of ‘social prison’ while the prison functions as a ‘judicial ghetto’. Both are entrusted with enclosing a stigmatized population so as to neutralize the material and/or symbolic threat that it poses for the broader society from which it has been extruded. And, for that reason, ghetto and prison tend to evolve relational patterns and cultural forms that display striking similarities and intriguing parallels…” (378).

4. pp. 379
“America’s first three ‘peculiar institutions’, slavery, Jim Crow, and the ghetto, have in this in common that they were all instruments for the conjoint extraction of labor and social ostracization of an outcast group deemed unassimilable by virtue of the indelible threefold stigma it carries. [1] African Americans arrived under bondage in the land of freedom. [2] They were accordingly deprived of the right to vote in the self-appointed cradle of democracy (until 1965 for residents of the southern states). [3] And, for lack of a recognizable national affiliation, they were shorn of ethnic honor, which implies that, rather than simply standing at the bottom of the rank ordering of group prestige in American society, they were barred from it ab initio [from the start]. (footnote 2)

SLAVERY
5. pp. 379
“An unforeseen by-product of the systematic enslavement and dehumanization of Africans and their descendants on North American soil was the creation of a racial caste line separating what would later become labeled ‘blacks’ and ‘whites’. As Barbara Fields (1990) has shown, the American ideology of ‘race’, as putative [supposed] biological division anchored by the inflexible application of the ‘one-drop rule’ together with the
principle of hypodescent*, crystallized to resolve the blatant contradiction between
human bondage and democracy. [In other words, the idea of race being biological, and
Black inferiority being passed along through the blood, normalized the idea of Black
people as in- or non-human, in order to resolve the conflict between slavery and
democracy.] The religious and pseudo-scientific belief in racial difference reconciled the
brute act of unfree labor with the doctrine of liberty premised on natural rights by
reducing the slave to live property—three-fifths of a man according to the sacred
scriptures of the Constitution"

*In societies that regard some races of people as dominant or superior and others as
subordinate or inferior, hypodescent is the automatic assignment of children of a mixed
union or mating between members of different socioeconomic groups or ethnic groups
to the subordinate group.

QUOTES TO BE REVIEWED AND CAREFULLY UNDERSTOOD FOR WED 10/21:
PURPLE QUOTES: THINK ABOUT CONNECTIONS/COMPARISONS TO WILSON &
KELLING.

6. pp. 380
“Racial division was a consequence, not a precondition, of US slavery, but once it was
instituted it became detached from its initial function and acquired a social potency of
its own. Emancipation thus created a double dilemma for southern white society: how
to secure anew the labor of former slaves, without whom the region’s economy
would collapse, and how to sustain the cardinal status distinction between whites
and ‘persons of color’, i.e. the social and symbolic distance needed to prevent the
odium of ‘amalgamation’ with a group considered inferior, rootless, and vile”

JIM CROW

7. pp. 380
“Most crucial of all, [Jim Crow] laws joined mores in condemning the ‘unspeakable
crime’ of interracial marriage, cohabitation, or mere sexual congress so as to uphold
the ‘supreme law of self-preservation’ of the races and the myth of innate white
superiority. Through continued white ownership of the land and the generalization of
sharecropping and debt peonage, the plantation system remained virtually untouched
as former slaves became a ‘dependent, propertyless peasantry, nominally free, but
ensnared by poverty, ignorance, and the new servitude of tenantry””

8. pp. 380
While sharecropping tied African-American labor to the farm, a rigid etiquette ensured
that whites and blacks never interacted on a plane of equality, not even on the track
field or in a boxing ring—a Birmingham ordinance of 1930 made it unlawful for them to
play at checkers and dominoes with one another. Whenever the ‘color line’ was
breached or even brushed, a torrent of violence was unleashed in the form of periodic pogroms, Ku Klux Klan and vigilante raids, public floggings, mob killings and lynchings, this ritual caste murder designed to keep ‘uppity ni***ers’ in their appointed place. All this was made possible by the swift and near-complete disenfranchisement of blacks as well as by the enforcement of ‘Negro law’ by courts which granted the latter fewer effective legal safeguards than slaves had enjoyed earlier by dint of being both property and persons.

THE GHETTO

9. pp. 381
“But as migrants from Mississippi to the Carolinas flocked to the northern metropolis, what they discovered there was not the ‘promised land’ of equality and full citizenship but another system of racial enclosure, the ghetto, which though it was less rigid and fearsome than the one they had fled, was no less encompassing and constricting.”

10. pp. 381
“…Restrictive covenants forced African-Americans to congregate in a ‘Black Belt’ which quickly became overcrowded underserved, and blighted by crime, disease, and dilapidation, while the ‘job ceiling’ restricted them to the most hazardous, menial, and underpaid occupations in both industry and personal services. As for ‘social equality’, understood as the possibility of becoming members of white cliques, churches, and voluntary associations, or marrying into their families’, it was firmly and definitively denied”

11. pp. 381
“Blacks had entered the Fordist industrial economy, to which they contributed a vital source of abundant and cheap labor willing to ride along its cycles of boom and bust. Yet they remained locked in a precarious position of structural economic marginality and consigned to a secluded and dependent microcosm, complete with its own internal division of labor, social stratification, and agencies of collective voice and symbolic representation: a ‘city within a city’ moored in a complexus of Black churches and press, businesses and professional practices, fraternal lodges and communal associations that provided both a ‘milieu for Negro Americans in which they [could] imbue their lives with meaning’ and a bullwark ‘to “protect” white America from “social contract” with Negroes’…Continued caste hostility and renewed ethnic affinity from within converged to create the ghetto as the third vehicle to extract black labor while keeping black bodies at a safe distance, to the material and symbolic benefit of white society”
12. pp. 382

But, while whites begrudgingly accepted ‘integration’ in principle, in practice they strove to maintain an unbridgeable social and symbolic gulf with their compatriots of African descent. They abandoned public schools, shunned public space, and fled to the suburbs in the millions to avoid mixing and ward off the specter of ‘social equality’ in the city. They then turned against the welfare state and those social programs upon which the collective advancement of blacks was most dependent. A contrario, they extended enthusiastic support of ‘law and order’ policies that vowed to firmly repress urban disorders connately perceived as racial threats…Such policies pointed to yet another special institution capable of confining and controlling, if not the entire African-American community, at least its most disruptive, disreputable, and dangerous members: the prison.

13. The ghetto as ethnoracial prison, the prison as judicial ghetto: pp. 382-383

14. pp. 383

The resulting formation is a distinct space, containing an ethnically homogenous population, which finds itself forced to develop within it a set of interlinked institutions that duplicates the organizational framework of the broader society from which that group is banished and supplies the scaffolding for the construction of its specific ‘style of life’ and social strategies. This parallel institutional nexus affords the subordinate group a measure of protection, autonomy, and dignity, but at the cost of locking it in a relationship of structural subordination and dependency.

The ghetto, in short, operates as an ethnoracial prison: it encages a dishonored category and severely curtails the life chances of its members in support of the ‘monopolization of ideal and material good or opportunities’ by the dominant status group…dwelling on its outskirts.

15. pp. 383

Note next the structural and functional homologies with the prison conceptualized as a judicial ghetto: a jail or penitentiary is in effect a reserved space which serves to forcibly confine a legally denigrated population and wherein this latter evolves its distinctive
institutions, culture, and sullied identity. It is thus formed of the same four fundamental constituents, stigma, coercion, physical enclosure and organizational parallelism and insulation, that make up a ghetto, and for similar purposes. Much as the ghetto protects the city’s residence from pollution of intercourse with the tainted but necessary bodies of an outcast group in the manner of an ‘urban condom’, as Richard Sennet vividly put it in his depiction of the ‘fear of touching’ in 16th century Venice, the prison cleanses the social body from the temporary blemish of those of its members who have committed crimes, that is, following Durkheim, individuals who have violated the sociomoral integrity of the collectivity by infringing on ‘definite and strong states of the collective conscience.’

16. pp. 384

Now, the carceral system had already functioned as an ancillary institution for caste preservation and labor control in America during one previous transition between regimes of racial domination, that between slavery and Jim Crow in the South. On the morrow of Emancipation, southern prisons turned black overnight as ‘thousands of ex-slaves were being arrested, tried, and convicted for acts that in the past had been dealt with by the master alone’ (Oshinsky) and for refusing to behave as menials and follow the demeaning rules of racial etiquette. Soon thereafter, the former confederate states innovated ‘convict leasing’ as a response to the moral panic of ‘Negro crime’ that presented the double advantage of generating prodigious funds for the state coffers and furnishing abundant bound labor to till the fields, build the levees, lay down the railroads, clean the swamps, and dig the mines of the region under murderous conditions. (see footnote 10) Indeed, penal labor, in the form of the convict-lease and its heir, the chain gang, played a major role in the economic advancement of the New South during the Progressive era*, as it ‘reconciled modernization with the continuation of racial domination’.

*The Progressive Era was a period of widespread social activism and political reform across the United States, from the 1890s to 1920s.

17. pp. 384

By the end of the 1970s, then, as the racial and class backlash against the democratic advances won by the social movements of the preceding decade got into full swing (see footnote 5), the prison abruptly returned to the forefront of American society and offered itself as the universal and simplex solution to all manners of social problems. Chief among these problems was the ‘breakdown’ of social order in the ‘inner city’, which is scholarly and policy euphemism for the patent incapacity of the dark ghetto to contain and dishonored and supernumerary population henceforth viewed not only as deviant and devious but as downright dangerous in light of the violent urban upheavals of the 1960s. As the walls of the ghetto shook and threatened to crumble, the walls of the prison were correspondingly extended, enlarged, and fortified, and ‘confinement of differentiation’, aimed at keeping a group apart (the etymological meaning of segregare)
gained primacy over 'confinement of safety' and 'confinement of authority'...Soon the black ghetto, converted into an instrument of naked exclusion by the concurrent retrenchment of wage labor and social protection, and further destabilized by the increasing penetration of the penal arm of the state, became bound to the jail and prison system by a triple relationship of functional equivalency, structural homology, and cultural syncretism, such that they now constitute a single carceral continuum which entraps a redundant population of younger black men (and increasingly women) who circulate in a closed circuit between its two poles in a self-perpetuating cycle of social and legal marginality with devastating personal and social consequences.