



Damien M. Sojoyner. *First Strike: Educational Enclosures in Black Los Angeles.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016. 288 pp. \$27.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8166-9755-7.

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First Strike: Educational Enclosures in Black Los Angeles provides a rich and timely critique of the school-to-prison pipeline metaphor by examining the historical and contemporary mechanisms that contribute to the imprisonment and criminalization of Black youth. To accomplish this, anthropologist Damien M. Sojoyner situates his ethnographic study of a public school in Los Angeles County within the current relationship between schools, the prison system, educational policy in Black Los Angeles, and a historical analysis of attacks on Black culture. By centering Black culture and the humanity of Black people, *First Strike* contributes to our understanding of the connections between mass incarceration and school failure and the effects of these phenomena on Black youth.

Drawing on these themes, Sojoyner problematizes the school-to-prison pipeline metaphor by proposing that what takes place is more nuanced and multifaceted than a simple funneling of Black youth to prisons. Instead, Sojoyner proposes “enclosures” to capture the current mechanisms and manifestations of racialized policing, mass incarceration, and attacks on the education of Black youth. As Sojoyner writes, “Enclosure most readily signifies a physical barrier such as wall, a fence, or anything that is meant to limit the freedom of movement. Yet, enclosures also refer to

the unseen forces that are just as powerful as the physical manifestation. In this sense, enclosure is representative of social mechanisms that construct notions of race, gender, class, and sexuality; and just as important as the imposition of the physical and unseen, enclosure embodies the removal/withdrawal/denial of services and programs that are key to the stability and long-term well-being of communities” (pp. xiii). This conceptualization of enclosures also points to the school-to-prison-pipeline metaphor’s inability to capture the full extent to which Black youth’s criminalization extends beyond the physical enclosure of prison and detention cells.

Sojoyner’s first chapter, “The Problem of Black Genius: Black Cultural Enclosures,” outlines the relationship between the suppression of Black culture since slavery and the current absence of art in public education to highlight the development of cultural enclosures in schools. Sojoyner argues that “cultural enclosures”—or the removal of Black culture from schools and curriculum, which Sojoyner attributes to the development of Western Christianity in the United States—has had detrimental effects on Black youth’s sense of belonging and connection to home, community, and schools. By centering Black cultural practices and the attack on them in a historical context, in this chapter, Sojoyner provides an understanding

of the role of such attacks in the “demise and rise of state structures” (p. 14).

The following chapter, “In the Belly of the Beast: Ideological Expansion,” examines the ideologies that have led to the normalization of the prison regime in public schools. Here, Sojoyner suggests that the prison regime as an ideological construct has been normalized as a necessity for schools and society, a construct that manifests itself as an ideological enclosure. In chapter 3, “Land of Smoke and Mirrors: The Meaning of Punishment and Control,” Sojoyner further examines the prison regime in the context of policy and an increase in punitive practices in public schools that threaten the education of Black youth. Centering theories of racial capitalism, Sojoyner masterfully traces the rise of militarization and punitive measures in Los Angeles County and Los Angeles public schools, starting with the 1984 Olympic Games. In this chapter, Sojoyner further troubles the notion that prisons are the only physical sites of imprisonment and argues that “the education of Black youth is itself a punitive enclosure” (p. 115).

Discussions of Black masculinity are present throughout *First Strike*; however, this is particularly the case in “Troubled Man: Limitations of the Masculinity Solution.” In this chapter, Sojoyner highlights the ways in which a particular type of Black masculinity, rooted in politics of respectability, has been constructed in Black Los Angeles. By outlining the entanglement of policy formation and constructions of a Black masculinity based in heteronormative bourgeois notions, this chapter analyzes “gendered enclosures” as mechanisms of violence imposed on Black women and men who push back against these problematic constructions of masculinity. As Sojoyner demonstrates, gendered enclosures in Black Los Angeles have historically persisted due to three frameworks driving policy: (1) the centering of societal failures on individuals that locate the Black community as criminal; (2) an investment in a het-

eronormative, upwardly mobile, Black masculine subject; and (3) violence against Black women through an emphasis placed on the needs on Black men (p. 124).

Continuing this approach of analyzing the historical and contemporary causes that lead to “enclosures,” in the final chapter Sojoyner situates his enclosure model within a racial capitalist framework. As Sojoyner writes, Black education is situated between “the libratory desires of Black communities and the attempted reinscription of Black subservience via the economic, political, and gendered demands of a racial capitalist status apparatus” (p. 148). In this way, he argues that the school-to-prison pipeline discourse fails to capture these tensions. Sojoyner concludes *First Strike* by centering the astute observations made by his mother, a retired special education teacher, about the changes in public education and special education undermining the education of Black boys. The first change he discusses took place in the 1990s, when his mother observed racial and gendered dynamics shifting in her classroom, as Black boys slowly became the majority in special education programs. Following that shift, as Sojoyner’s mother observed, was the rise of standardized testing and its failure to reflect the abilities of students. Combining his mother’s observations with his analysis of the relationship between the prison regime and schools, Sojoyner closes by suggesting that we “resituate our epistemological frameworks” and look for solutions that build on our already available “radically democratic social visions of the future” (p. 196).

I believe that *First Strike* has the potential to encourage scholarly work that further examines past and current mechanisms leading to enclosures and how they impact youth at the margins. By continuing to examine these mechanisms and their effects, scholars can expand an analysis of educational enclosures as experienced by some of the individuals present in the text. For example, Sojoyner gives attention to Latino young men in

“In the Belly of the Beast: Ideological Expansion,” but does not fully unpack the implications of enclosures for these young men. Similarly, Sojoyner discusses the violence that gendered enclosures impose on Black women in “Troubled Man: Limitations of the Masculinity Solution.” Yet this analysis is not present in other discussions of the enclosure model. However, given the scope of the study, I do not position this as a weakness or limitation. Instead, I view this as an invitation to build on Sojoyner’s enclosure model and examine its usefulness in understanding the criminalization of Black girls, Trans youth, and other youth impacted by mass incarceration and the manifestation of the prison regime in schools.

Following the tradition of intellectuals like W. E. B. Du Bois, Cedric Robinson, and others, Sojoyner grounds his analysis in theories of racial capitalism, anti-Blackness, and culture.[1] Sojoyner’s study and his notion of enclosures reimagines the school-to-prison pipeline and examines the subjugation of Black youth and Black culture in schools. *First Strike* persuasively interrogates the current iterations of the criminalization of Black youth by weaving in a unique historical analysis of systems of inequality while simultaneously forcing us to examine our collective and individual roles in the reproduction of enclosures. In so doing, *First Strike* offers significant contributions to the study of school discipline, the criminal justice system, the education of Black youth, and the interconnections *between* these systems to practitioners and scholars alike. Readers will also appreciate the attention Sojoyner gives to resistance to enclosures, both past and present, and the clear call for a centering of art and Black culture, which Sojoyner argues has “radical potential” (p. 194) for the education of Black children. *First Strike: Educational Enclosures in Black Los Angeles* is a timely work, and I invite educators to include it in their course syllabi as it is an essential read for anyone interested in addressing the criminalization and “enclosure” of Black youth.

Note

[1]. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay toward a History of the Part which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*, vol. 6 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935); and Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

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