



2012

**Review of *Banished: The New Social Control in Urban America*.
Katherine Beckett and Steve Herbert. Reviewed by Lucia Trimbur.**

Lucia Trimbur
John Jay College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Trimbur, Lucia (2012) "Review of *Banished: The New Social Control in Urban America*. Katherine Beckett and Steve Herbert. Reviewed by Lucia Trimbur.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 39 : Iss. 2 , Article 13.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol39/iss2/13>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



is a self-published book, available commercially, that came to my attention because two of the authors are my friends.) The writers describe their active participation in anti-Vietnam War protests, educational work during wartime in Nicaragua, teaching in Cuba and community organizing and teaching in distressed neighborhoods in Boston from the 1960s through the 1980s. While these accounts are of activities that doubtless were more daring and less mainstream than those of the interviewees in Corrigan-Brown's sample, in many ways these activists' trajectories resemble those in the persistence category. Active participation was fueled by ideology but also, importantly, by social and friendship networks. Most of the contributors became politically active in college or soon thereafter, a period of political upheaval in the U.S. Two gave up academic careers to work, for a time, in factories, in order to do political education and/or union organizing with their working class colleagues. Several lived in communes where their political activities were shared with housemates. Two spent considerable time in Latin America after their family responsibilities abated; the others apparently dropped out during mid-life while they were raising children. Later, most chose careers in teaching or work at the community college level, work that is respectable but in keeping with their tempered political ideologies. The book is very engaging, a reminder to their contemporaries, including the less adventurous, of what those turbulent times were like and informative for others who may want to know more about those times and to compare them to what may be coming.

*Marguerite G. Rosenthal, Emerita, Social Work,
Salem State University*

Katherine Beckett & Steve Herbert, *Banished: The New Social Control in Urban America* (2011). Oxford University Press, \$19.95 (paperback).

As has been widely documented, the 1970s ushered in a new era of crime control. Since then, what, when, and how punishment should be used have been topics of intense, contentious, and very public debate. Less widely appreciated, though of equal consequence, is that during this same period,

there has been a radical expansion of social exclusion practices, which have dovetailed with the criminal justice system's limitation of citizenship rights of the poor, the un-housed, and people of color. In *Banished: The New Social Control in Urban America*, Katherine Beckett and Steve Herbert address the growing use of legal tools to criminalize poverty and limit the movement of so-called undesirables. *Banished* joins a growing number of articles, books, and edited volumes dedicated to exploring the origins and impact of regulation—indeed restriction—of urban space and the use of the criminal justice system to enforce such limits.

The book provides important insights into some of the most critical and highly charged applications of crime control. An important strength of this timely, engaging, and readable book—and what distinguishes it from some others—is the clarity of purpose with which it demonstrates how banishment as a feudal form of social control reemerged to exclude certain groups of people from otherwise public areas in order to protect the interests of property owners. Using Seattle, Washington—a city known to be progressive yet with pronounced vigilance in law enforcement—as a case study, the authors examine how new exclusion orders, or civility codes, such as Stay Out of Drug Areas (SODA) and Stay Out of Areas of Prostitution (SOAP) orders, trespass policies, and gang injunctions produce spatial marginalization.

The introduction provides a crisp and focused entry into the issues. Beckett and Herbert argue, "... cities across the United States increasingly employ novel social control mechanisms that entail spatial exclusion and fuse civil and criminal legal authority" (p. 9). To reduce unwanted social acts and enhance security, banishment has been revived. Here the inclusion of a short discussion on why the authors have chosen the term "banishment" is noteworthy. Defined as "the legal compulsion to leave specified geographic areas for extended periods of time" (p. 10), banishment is used to highlight the power of the state, to focus on the punishment of the deviant, to capture how those ostracized feel about their exclusion, and to suggest the extent to which banishment begets more banishment.

The book draws upon myriad data sources to analyze the emergence, uses, and repercussions of banishment. Chapter 5, "Voices of the Banished," is particularly remarkable. It looks at

how the banished feel about their ostracism. Forty-one people subject to civility codes were interviewed about how they understand the functions of their banishment. Beckett and Herbert find that, with several exceptions, banishment does not force its targets to seek alternative locations and places of travel. For some, the threat of jail, for example, is not a deterrent. One respondent explains:

Well it [going to jail] affected me some, but, uh, to be honest with you, you basically being a minority and being homeless, going to jail is something which, which is an ongoing policy. Like I say, it is the system which you kinda get used to ... No, what can they do to you? At this point I can say they must be doing me a favor. I don't care. I don't tell them that, but if they see that I'm homeless ... nothing you could do to me. It's kinda pathetic. But what can they do? There's really nothing they can do. (p. 110)

Others reported not complying with banishment orders because they did not think they would get caught. Others remained in banishment zones, especially parks, because such spaces were perceived as crucial to personal security, the only option for dwelling, preferable to shelters, and/or important for social interaction. Civility codes, then, do not stabilize the poor, nor do they lead to a reduction in entanglements with law enforcement. Banishment creates a conduit to the criminal justice system rather than being a substitute for it. In this way, banishment creates more insecurity.

Banished is an important contribution to the literature on urban inequality, space and crime, and punishment as they percolate throughout various disciplines. It will be of particular interest to readers of crime and punishment, urban theory, social inequality and justice, and law and society. The range of perspectives in the book helps us appreciate the role of banishment in crime control and to understand how attempts to attack the victims and symptoms of social problems rather than their root causes only produces an increase in both.

*Lucia Trimbur, Dept. of Sociology, John Jay College,
& Dept. of Criminal Justice, The Graduate Center, CUNY*