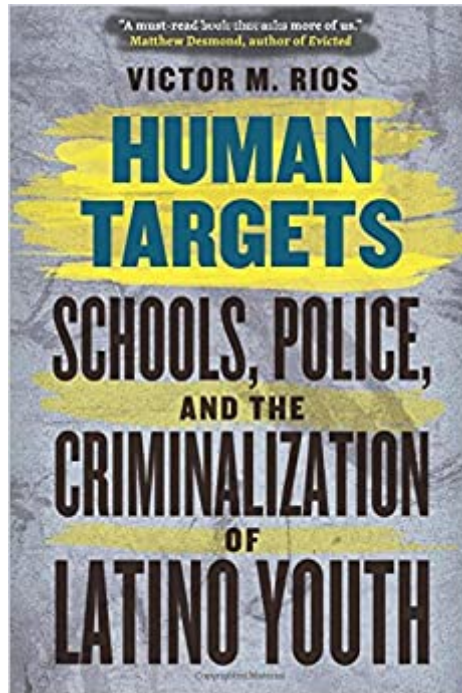


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# Human Targets: Schools, Police, And The Criminalization Of Latino Youth



## Synopsis

At fifteen, Victor Rios found himself a human target—flat on his ass amid a hail of shotgun fire, desperate for money and a place on the street. Faced with the choice of escalating a drug turf war or eking out a living elsewhere, he turned to a teacher, who mentored him and helped him find a job at an auto shop. That job would alter the course of his whole life—putting him on the road to college and eventually a PhD. Now, Rios is a rising star, hailed for his work studying the lives of African American and Latino youth. In *Human Targets*, Rios takes us to the streets of California, where we encounter young men who find themselves in much the same situation as fifteen-year-old Victor. We follow young gang members into schools, homes, community organizations, and detention facilities, watch them interact with police, grow up to become fathers, get jobs, get rap sheets—and in some cases get killed. What is it that sets apart young people like Rios who succeed and survive from the ones who don't? Rios makes a powerful case that the traditional good kid/bad kid, street kid/decent kid dichotomy is much too simplistic, arguing instead that authorities and institutions help create these identities—and that they can play an instrumental role in providing young people with the resources for shifting between roles. In Rios's account, to be a poor Latino youth is to be a human target—victimized and considered an enemy by others, viewed as a threat to law enforcement and schools, and burdened by stigma, disrepute, and punishment. That has to change. This is not another sensationalistic account of gang bangers. Instead, the book is a powerful look at how authority figures succeed and fail at seeing the multi-faceted identities of at-risk youths, youths who succeed and fail at demonstrating to the system that they are ready to change their lives. In our post-Ferguson era, *Human Targets* is essential reading.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Training his attention on social problems he himself experienced growing up—street violence, poverty, racism—Rios is an important and original voice. In this patient and insightful relational ethnography, Rios shows how gang-associated Latino youth, often written off as a ‘lost generation,’ contain multitudes of identities and brim over with promise. But broken schools and justice systems far too often blunt these children’s potential and contribute to casting them on the wrong path. Critically urgent and rendered in clear prose, *Human Targets* is a must-read book that asks more of us.” (Matthew Desmond, author of *Evicted*)

“How do we move beyond the cycle of criminalization, violence, and mass incarceration that American society has been stuck in for the last several decades? Rios draws upon the perspectives of youth—the very ones most likely to be labelled, incarcerated, or killed—to provide insights to lead us out of our state of paralysis. Through his probing of their perspectives and experiences, Rios develops new and original ways of thinking about how to intervene, support, and alter outcomes for marginalized youth.” Written in a style that is both rich in analysis yet still packed with an emotional fervor, *Human Targets* never allows us to forget that real lives are at stake even as it also provides hope that it is indeed possible to move beyond the dismal reality we find ourselves in.” (Pedro Noguera Distinguished Professor of Education, UCLA, and coauthor of *Schooling for Resilience*)

“*Human Targets* is a gripping, disturbing, and deeply moving ethnographic account of interpersonal street violence. Told from the author’s heart, it is based on careful interviews and his own personal observation. *Human Targets* is a provocative yet subtle analysis of the relentless social forces that too often undermine and frustrate the everyday lives of a major segment of America’s urban population. Extraordinary and important, this book is a must read for anyone seeking to understand the culture of the city today—it needs to reach a wide audience beyond the halls of the academy.” (Elijah Anderson, author of *Code of the Street* and *The Cosmopolitan Canopy*)

Victor M. Rios is professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is the author of *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys* and *Street Life: Poverty, Gangs*, and a Ph.D.

Excellent analysis on how the system punishes Latino youth, because they are seeking their identity. Rios explains the various facets Latino youth endure in the creation of perennial criminals and the pernicious cycle of fulfilling the prophecy of failure. A must read if you are in education.

great read

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