

Book Review: Stuart, Forrest, *Down, Out and Under Arrest: Policing and Everyday Life In Skid Row*. University of Chicago Press. 2016. ISBN: 978-0226370811 (Hardcover). 352 Pages. \$27.50.

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In *Down, Out and Under Arrest: Policing and Everyday Life in Skid Row*, Forrest Stuart shares five years of ethnographic fieldwork, immersing himself in the turbulent culture of L.A.'s Skid Row, sometimes referred to as the "homeless capital of America." Stuart, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Chicago, examined specifically how the social fabric of disadvantaged neighborhoods are impacted by pivotal developments in history, such as, digital social media, zero-tolerance policing, and mass incarceration. The author is also the creator of the South Side Youth Violence Prevention Project (SSYVPP), a violence prevention intervention for teens in Chicago.

Although *Down, Out, and Under Arrest* is Stuart's first book, his attention to detail, thorough understanding of historical events and their impacts, and candid narrating of events is impressive and contributes much to this field of study. Stuart's fieldwork begins in 2007, with the intention to focus on the Skid Row's residents, but he soon realizes the constant, insistent, and ubiquitous interactions with police are so much a part of Skid Row residents' stories, that simply fixating on the residents alone would leave out a crucial part to their story. So, in 2008, the author conducted a portion of his fieldwork alongside the excess of police officers assigned to the tiny Skid Row area. Rotating between the two, usually a few months at time (although not always) proved to be a viable

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research strategy. The author also spent time with the Los Angeles Community Action Network and also poured through Los Angeles Police Department records. This mixed methods approach provides readers with an extremely well-rounded look at Los Angeles' Skid Row.

For clarity, Stuart breaks the book into two sections. The first part of the book shows the perspective of police officers and the historical origins of the Safe Cities Initiative, which helped to create this unique dynamic between police officers and residents. While Stuart was initially not expecting to include this area in his book, he soon realized that this perspective was essential for telling the whole story of the residents of L.A.'s Skid Row. The second part of the book focuses on the residents, and their "cop wisdom," which are skills acquired through experience, to learn to live in this unique environment of ubiquitous police officers. Stuart concludes the book with an in-depth discussion of "therapeutic policing," a specific moral and behavioral type of policing, which is designed to "cure those at the bottom of the social hierarchy" (6). He also explores possibilities the impact this way of policing will likely have, not only in Los Angeles but all throughout the United States.

One of the strengths of this book, is the author's dedication to detail, specifically his thoroughness in explaining the historical picture of L.A.'s Skid Row. Stuart does not begin by simply presenting L.A.'s Skid Row dynamic as it currently exists, but instead takes the time to paint a historical picture of exactly how the current environment came into being. He asserts that one of the ironies of Skid Row is that the very institutions presently in place to help the homeless played a large role in creating therapeutic policing. Stuart does this by breaking almost the last two centuries into three parts: the first lasting from the 1850s- 1930s; the second from the 1930s- 1990s; and the third from the 1990s to the present day. His purpose in doing this is to demonstrate the shift that has taken place in the way L.A. Skid Row has been molded over the course of decades.

The author emphasizes that during the first 70 years, the residents of L.A.'s rapidly growing Skid Row, were seen as the "result of willful defiance, moral deficiency, and lack of restraint," and it was society's job to "resocialize" these citizens as soon as possible (42). In order to accomplish this, involving the police force was essential to ensure none of the residents became too comfortable residing in Skid Row. The second time block, was focused on the opposite, namely *containment* and *quarantine*. Through a series of government interventions, L.A.'s Skid Row was created as we know it geographically today. This change, called the "1976 Containment Plan," made it so residents were confined

to small 50 block radius, buffered by light industrial buildings, to create a clear line. During this time, there was also a change in verbal terms, moving away from names like “vagrant” and “transients,” and moving toward terms like “homeless.” In short, it was a time of acceptance toward having a place where residents in need could reside, and police used a “hands off” approach for offenses like loitering, public drunkenness, and begging” (54).

The 1990s onward marked a shift back to earlier days where residents of L.A. Skid Row were again seen as a problem that needs to be solved. Social welfare moved from being government funded programs into private organizations, and those private organizations needed police help to enforce their goals. The idea of involving multiple players such as police, social service providers and community organizations to accomplish those goals is not a new idea, and one that is still under scrutiny today (Culhane, 2010). Three large shelters dominated L.A. Skid Row with a strong emphasis on needed to “resocialize” Skid Row residents. Instead of an emphasis on acceptance, it was the opposite, with missions focusing on the elimination of anything that would promote long term residence. Part of this strategy included the need for therapeutic policing or using the police as a tool for reinforcing missions in resocializing Skid Row’s residents.

Stuart’s depiction of therapeutic policing is another area that warrants praise. While not an area he originally planned to focus on when conducting his fieldwork, once Stuart realizes the entire story cannot be told without it, he approaches this area with surprising objectivity. Stuart does not simply follow officers around taking notes; he takes the time to get to know his subjects personally, even spending weekly happy hours with one, and provides many detailed and illustrative accounts of watching them do their daily work (90). This is important, because Stuart is able to understand how the officers are able to engage in such a punitive practice with such zeal. For these officers, this work is not punitive, rather, they see themselves as the “rescuers” of Skid Row residents. This cannot be overstated, because it serves as the motivation as well as the amount of punitive discretion these officers use in engaging with residents on any given shift.

Officers of L.A. Skid Row feel it is their duty to regularly interact, challenge, and “rehabilitate” the residents of L.A.’s Skid Row. They see their responsibility as police not merely as crime preventers, or regulators, but as community service workers. This means that Skid Row must be seen as a temporary place, where residents are making a concerted effort to make the changes needed to leave at some point in the

near future. The officers' focus in some ways, is to make life uncomfortable for the residents not involved in changing, and cutting slack to the ones that do. Stuart breaks these tactics down into four intervention strategies used by officers. First, punishing long- term residence, second, enforcing perpetual movement, third, constricting the availability of alternative resources, and fourth, protecting vulnerable future clients. By employing these strategies, these officers feel they are doing the greatest gesture of service for these residents, by ensuring they do not remain stuck in their circumstances indefinitely. While the officers Stuarts interacts with are confident in their methods and reasoning, therapeutic policing remains an issue still being looked at carefully (Berk and MacDonald, 2010). In addition, many researchers feel that while the Safer Cities Initiative may have good intentions, it was not designed for long- term solutions to homelessness (Braga, 2010).

After Stuart completes a well- rounded look at the historical contributions to therapeutic policing, and the officers' view of the current dynamic, he shifts his focus to the residents' point of view of day to day life on Skid Row and their perspective of therapeutic policing. The juxtaposition of Stuart setting the book up in this way is wise, because it allows for both points of view to be told. It also allows for an understanding of why the residents can feel very differently about the officers "charitable" actions, and that those officers' actions even contribute to the creation a culture of resistance among the residents.

Once again, Stuart does not settle for general statements but begins arguably the most interesting part of the book by focusing on a group of thirteen Black men, who consciously choose to not use the rehabilitation shelters available, and instead opt to carve out their own sobriety program through a rigorous exercise and weight lifting program. While doing so may not seem like a bold decision to outsiders, this places them in a precarious position with police officers, whose goal it is to see everyone on Skid Row engaged in a rehabilitation program. Because of this, "Steel," and the others in his weightlifting crew, must create a new set rules to avoid officers' attention, commonly referred to as being "copwise" (Stuart, 2016) (125).

For Steel and his gang, being "copwise" consists of several strategies, including sending out clear signals in their dress and mannerisms to show they are sober, using their newly formed physical fitness as show of their care for their bodies, and even taking care to avoid certain locations and times when they could be lumped in with drug dealers and abusers. Stuart references Alice Goffman's (2009) fascinating study, "On the Run," as a comparison of similar tactics used, where men with

outstanding warrants or parole violations learn to avoid specific places, people, and even work opportunities or hospitals to avoid unwanted police interactions. The irony is, the men in Steel's crew are not technically "on the run," from anything, yet they must employ similar tactics and keep themselves out of sight from the ever-present patrolling officers.

Another strength of Stuart's book, and one that is likely due to the extensive amount of time spent among L.A. Skid Row residents, is the author's unwillingness to make assumptions based on first appearances. For example, take Stuart's friendship with a group of street vendors who have begun policing the rampant drug problem on their own. To an outsider, this would appear as a clear case of Kelling and Wilson's (1982) "broken windows" theory in action. The theory states when police become more active in a community, it allows residents to feel more bold in helping police crime around them, and becoming "eyes" for police officers (174). This in turn eventually reduces crime and creates a more stable neighborhood.

To an outsider, it would appear as though that is exactly what is happening with the street vendors. They, under the increased police presence are cracking down on the drug trade in their "territory," and in turn, are reducing the amount of drug related crimes in the area. It would be easy for Stuart to assume the same thing, that street vendors forcing the quick cleanup of visible drug trade, is a result of the "broken windows" theory, and that extra police presence is creating a boldness in them to reduce the drug trade in the community. He could also assume that the street vendors and police are working together for the same end goal, and their actions are in fact reducing the drug trade. But, as credit to Stuart's diligence and focus on the details, he soon realizes that actually the opposite that is happening. Instead, these street vendors dedication to policing the drug trade is actually working *against* police officers, rather than helping reduce the drug trade. As Stuart describes, when an officer's presence detected near the vendors' area, an alert is created, usually the term *one time* is announced (slang for "police") and passed in waves down the street (185). This gives drug users and dealers ample time to clear out and disappear before the officers arrive on the scene. So unwittingly, the street vendors, along with the ubiquitous police presence are actually making it easier to for the drug problem to continue on Skid Row, by always ensuring enough time for them to leave before being apprehended.

It's also important to note that in this situation the street vendors and police may not actually be after the same goal. While the police may

have the goal of reducing the drug trade, it may be safe to assume the street vendors, are much more focused on the simple *appearance* of reduced drug trade during a short duration of police engagement. Stuart should be commended for his sharp eye for detail in catching this, and for his hesitation in assigning interactions to classical theory conclusions based on first glance.

In an interesting and unexpected twist, Stuart next introduces “Malcolm,” a long-term resident of L.A.’s Skid Row. Malcolm stands out, because unlike the previous residents Stuart observed, he does not spend his focus and learned “cop wisdom” evading officers. Rather, Malcolm, through an ongoing partnership with the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LACAN), wants to end the Safer Cities Initiative and reduce the overwhelming police footprint around L.A.’s Skid Row. Unlike Steel and the street vendors, who strive to distance themselves as much as possible with identifying with other members of Skid Row, Malcolm sees Skid Row as a place that not only has “entertained, employed, and sheltered” him throughout his life, but still provides those same things for the residents today, and intends to fight for the continued freedom to live that way (212).

Once again, Stuart is involved in a hands-on and long term capacity, and follows Malcolm on his mission to reduce officer presence by recording officer interactions with residents. The goal is to “catch officers slipping,” such as, catching officers incriminating themselves, offering false information, or treating residents in an illegal or unfair way. At first, these activities lead to little in the way of results, partly because anytime an issue reaches a courtroom or public forum, the appearance or mannerisms of those living on Skid Row causes the public to discredit them, especially when compared to the credibility of the officers they are up against (218). Although some victories had been won in the past, Malcolm and the LACAN’s proactivity was an ongoing and often fruitless struggle to protect the vulnerable rights of its residents (Boghosian, 2009).

As the author notes, Malcolm’s tenacity eventually paid off, over a heated battle concerning officers confiscating residents’ property in a particularly cruel way specifically designed to force them into rehabilitative shelters. This resulted in a federal class action lawsuit, *Tony Lavan, et al. v. City of Los Angeles*, a surprising victory for the homeless, which effectively limited police power and presence concerning resident’s property confiscation in Skid Row. Even more shocking, was Stuart’s report that the officers actually followed through in respecting the court’s decision and carefully obeyed the new

guidelines when interacting with residents on the street (246). This was an empowering victory for L.A.'s Skid Row residents, and a powerful indicator of the strength of "cop wisdom," and grassroots movements, especially for a population as vulnerable those on Skid Row.

Stuart's *Down, Out and Under Arrest: Policing and Everyday Life In Skid Row*, provides readers with a careful examination of the negative impact of punitive policing on the lives of L.A.'s Skid Row residents. The author is to be commended for his capability, willingness, and dedication to finding hidden truths. He never settles for pigeonholing the street scenes that were played out in front of him into the quickest and neatest theory available. Rather, the author used his energy to examine the broader picture at play. Stuart also unearths some powerful and important questions regarding the way the poor and homeless are viewed. While such questions may make readers uncomfortable at times, they are also precisely what makes this book so brilliant and well worth the read. This book is recommended for anyone interested in the ever fluid cultural waves of social dynamics in the United States.

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