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Book Review --Manuscript Draft--

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Book Review

Josephine Ross (2020). *A Feminist Critique of Police Stops*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 978-1108710875. 244pp.

Wesley Skogan (2023). *Stop & Frisk and the Politics of Crime in Chicago*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 978-0197675069. 280pp.

Two important US texts on police stops have been published in recent years. They present very different evidence and analysis demonstrating, once again, the controversial nature of this apparently simple policing strategy.

The first, by Josephine Ross from Howard University School of Law, draws on experience with young Black men in particular. Her focus is on the encounter, on the trauma and on the law. Drawing on feminist principles, she questions the argument that there is nothing wrong with consensual frisks. In what meaningful way is consent given in the context of an encounter with the police. Furthermore, Ross argues that the frisk is a very public and sexual assault. US police routinely search in a manner that is very intrusive. The impact on young people is, in many cases, traumatizing. She concludes that stop and frisk undermines constitutional rights, perhaps most particularly in the most marginalized communities. However, as a lawyer, Ross is also a realist. Speaking to young Black men in the classroom and in advice sessions, she recognizes that to challenge the practice would be dangerous. You may have a right to simply walk away from an officer, but that is a very dangerous right to exercise. We have all seen enough recordings of incidents involving the police shooting individuals to realize just how potentially dangerous any interaction can become – particularly if you are Black.

In contrast, Wes Skogan is not really concerned with the details of the practice of stop and frisk. He is interested in it as an organizational strategy in response to gun-related deaths and violence. Skogan draws not only on research and analysis but also on his years of engagement with policing in Chicago to tell a story. Perhaps as a consequence, the story is not a simple one, and the nuance will not please all readers. Skogan does not simply condemn stop and frisk as a practice. He takes the reader on a journey into the politics of policing a city. As murder rates rise, what options are available to the leadership in city hall and police plaza? Numbers are important. Politicians promise to reduce crime and to make communities safer. What then is the evidence that stop and frisk makes a difference in targeting gun violence and increasing a sense of security? In sections, the book reads like a cross between two TV dramas, *The West Wing* and *The Wire*. We get a very real sense of the pressures on politicians and police leaders.

However, at the heart of Skogan's book is one particular incident upon which changes in policy revolved: the shooting of Laquan McDonald in Chicago in October 2014. Called to reports of a young man carrying a knife, police officers shot him 16 times, including 9 times in the back. Initial police accounts suggested McDonald was behaving erratically and threatening officers. The shooting was deemed justified. However, despite several police vehicles having dashcam recordings, no video was released until the following year, after a mayoral race had re-elected the incumbent. The footage revealed a very different story to the one told by the police. McDonald was walking away from the officer who first fired and was no apparent threat to anyone. There were further reports that CCTV

recordings at a local fast food outlet were deleted by the police on the night of the shooting. In short, there was an attempt to cover-up the events. One officer was convicted of second-degree murder in 2018.

This incident also features briefly as one of the cautionary tales discussed among Ross' students in class. At the heart of each of these two books is a problem. How is the practice of stop and frisk to be governed and scrutinized? Ross addresses the question head on, suggesting that, in effect, it cannot be. Should it then be abolished. Skogan. In contrast, largely leaves the question unanswered. And yet the Laquan McDonald case demonstrates that you cannot simply divorce the policy from the practice. What happens on the street is the policy as experienced by those young Black men most subjected to police attention. This is a classic example of the tensions and dilemmas at the heart of all street-level practice (Lipsky, 2010). Regardless of the data suggesting it has an effect on gun crime, we cannot ignore the fact that it has other effects as well. The trauma inflicted is a long-term and largely hidden problem.

Read together, the two books illuminate the tensions in the debate. The pragmatic focus of politicians and the police on what works to reduce violent deaths is in contrast to the principled stance of lawyers. The two perspectives are different again to the practice of stop and frisk and the ways in which encounters play out. Ross acknowledges this, and recognizes the dangers of trying to exercise your rights. Skogan can, at times, appear indifferent to questions of legality and practice.

Lipsky, M. (2010). *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. 30th anniversary expanded edition. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.