1 In Medias Res

THE LIVES WE MEANT TO LIVE

When we count over the resources which are at work "to make order out of casualty, beauty out of confusion, justice, kindliness and mercy out of cruelty and inconsiderate pressure," we find ourselves appealing to the confident spirit of youth. We know that it is crude and filled with conflicting hopes, some of them unworthy and most of them doomed to disappointment, yet these young people have the advantage of "morning in their hearts"; they have such power of direct action, such ability to stand free from fear, to break through life's trammelings, that in spite of ourselves we become convinced that "They to the disappointed earth shall give. The lives we meant to live."

Jane Addams, 1909

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"Things come back like a flashback, like in a car accident," said Angel, 19 years old and wide eyed. I asked if he had ever heard of post-traumatic stress disorder.[1] He had not. I explained that when people go through something scary or painful, like a car crash, memories of it could come flooding back like they were in that moment again. Angel told me that when he gets angry with his ex, he can see in his mind a time that he "put hands on her" and ripped her dress. He wanted to control the flashbacks but didn't know how. "It's kind of hard getting over it, 'cause like, she always has, she always has that in her head, too, like in her mind." We were in an empty classroom at the small charter school he attended in South Los Angeles. On the walls around us were students' "dream collages" for a school assignment, pictures cut out of magazines and pasted onto construction paper showing images of what they wanted for their future. I saw one covered in expensive cars and a swimming pool, another with models in swimsuits, chopped out of their surroundings. Angel was

remorseful about his past actions but also stuck, unable to figure out how to move on. He wanted to get back together with his ex.

> There's a couple of things that I did to her that she will never forget. Like it haunts me a lot. Like it bothers me that I even did that. Like there was once that we got in an argument and I ended up spitting in her face. It always bugs me, like she always brings it up, too. I'm trying to like, I don't know, like it happened out of anger, too, like I regret it so bad. But like I don't know how we get over that.

While the collages around Angel played out stories of the future, Angel and the person he loved couldn't get away from the past. As much as they tried, they couldn't begin in the middle. And it wasn't just his own violence that Angel couldn't get away from, but his home and community life also bore scars. He told me that there was "all this violence and I knew I was at that place, like I was doing violence, violence was going on in my life."[2] The violence surrounding Angel came with messages. Growing up, Angel was taught "that females were always less than us." It used to be that every time he got angry, it would "come down to violence" because he did not care about anything else at that moment. He would punch walls. One time, he punched glass and badly lacerated his hand.

Angel's father "works for a good company. He does like statues and things like that." His mother worked on a maintenance crew. Even with steady jobs, Angel's parents struggled to pay for their car and apartment. "It's pretty expensive rent: pretty expensive one-room house. That's for six people." This put pressure on him at home, where his family gave him a hard time for still being in school at 19 years old. Angel saw finishing high school as a path to supporting his family and was hurt that they wanted him to quit school and find a job.

Angel explained that the way he thought about women was changing "after a couple experiences and, like, getting my things together and moving out, and getting my head out the streets." He had started to gain control of his temper. "It's changing little by little," he told me. Still, his history would not let go easily. Angel told me that "certain mistakes from the past" meant that he had to be careful in his neighborhood. When I asked Angel if there was anything he did to stay safe, he answered, "Just stay in my house." The past had its own inertia beyond Angel's control. Even as he

tried to change his life, the past pulled at him. His past, after all, was not his alone; it lived on in the stories of others: in tales of the street, in flashbacks and relationships.

Angel was at risk.[3] It was this fact that had brought me into his life through an interpersonal violence prevention program. The program had shown up in his classroom seemingly out of nowhere and was trying to change him and deter the dangers that loomed across his future. Programs like this one, in essence, started in the middle, *in medias res,* for a life that was ongoing. They dropped into lives and institutions already in progress. I had come to violence prevention looking for hope for the future; however, in many ways, for most of the young people I met, violence was already a fact of biography. Angel and young people like him require us to ask: What does it mean to be at risk?[4]

Two years earlier, I had begun research into feminist violence prevention programs, interested in how they took the personal stories that emerged from consciousness-raising and turned them into evidence-based programs. Like most people, I assumed that programs worked in the ways described in the evaluation literature: as powerful and effective approaches toward changing attitudes and behaviors.[5] But on the ground, I found that they were far more fractured and temporary than anyone had described them. I looked to the sociological literature on the state and found that, though the programs had things in common with the policies analyzed by scholars of neoliberalism, in myriad ways they were distinct.[6] I came to see that prevention programs and at-risk youth were pieces of an underexplored shift in how the state deals with social problems. For three and a half years, I embedded myself in the world of violence prevention in Los Angeles, particularly in an organization, Peace Over Violence, that implemented multiple programs. I set out to understand how the system was organized and how it was experienced.

After a year and a half observing and participating in prevention programming, I had seen how young people were shuffled through the system, but I knew less about how they made sense of the programs that streaked across their lives. Which brings us back to Angel. When it came to the program, he was ambivalent: "I don't have no problem with you all," he told me. However, he believed that the outsiders who came into his class—and there were many of them, myself included—couldn't really

understand what he had been through. He went on: "Everyone around here, like, it's just nothing but drama, violence. No love." This gap in understanding, I found, was at the heart of programs. Young people marked as at risk and the facilitators tasked with changing their lives—citizens and the state—grazed each other's lives, unable to understand one another.

After the interview ended I gave Angel the chance, as I did every young person, to ask me anything he wanted. Many young people took this as an opportunity to get my take on ideas from the prevention program, such as what I thought a healthy relationship looked like, or to ask me the same questions I had asked them. Others simply shrugged. A few asked me something similar to what Angel did, "What made you get into this?" by which he meant violence prevention. I told Angel that a friend of mine had been sexually assaulted and I had struggled to know what to do. I wanted to be able to support her, and myself, and to better understand why it happened. "Yeah. My, my ex been through that, too." He nodded. "Can I ask you a question? How can I help, like, somebody go through that?" Angel and I talked for another 20 minutes. He kept asking questions. My story had opened up a door. As I found repeatedly, personal stories made it possible to make a connection, to narrow social distance, at least for a while.[7]

This was not counseling, nor did Angel and I have any kind of lasting connection. In fact, I was acutely aware of the distance between my experience and his, as well as the force of race, class, and place in shaping how we ended up in that room. It was a rare chance—an opening in time and space—to talk about the reverberations of trauma, and to work through complex and compounding histories, something that I found was rare in the lives of youth marked as at risk. The young people I talked to spent a lot of time around adults, especially in schools, but those adults rarely if ever asked young people about their lives or talked about their own, especially when it came to harm and trauma. This book takes those stories—and their absence—seriously.

Harm lives twice. First in a flash, often away from view. And then a second life, long and searing, as trauma and memory. Violence prevention claims to undermine the first, and though it may, what it fails to reckon with is this second life of harm, where it is reconstructed and interpreted

and felt far away from its physicality. This second life of harm exists in real and tangible ways, even in bright and quiet classrooms. Harm takes on its lingering weight after the act, when it comes flooding back during an exam or on a date and sends us spiraling; when we cannot focus at a job; when we tell stories about it and remedy it—or we don't.

I wish I could tell you that our conversation helped Angel. I wish I could say anything about what happened next for him, but I never saw him again. The program's time at that school was up, which meant it was time to move on the next day to a different school, a different batch of strangers, with new and yet familiar stories. And then again and again, over and over. This churn of intervention and change, of which violence prevention was just one part, is the manifestation of a collection of policies designed to be fleeting and distant that I call the ephemeral state.

INTO THE EPHEMERAL STATE

The students were gone and I looked around the room. The space resembled the public school architecture I saw across Los Angeles: flickering halogen lights, dense rows of desks, pale walls and windows carved up with metal grating. Posters called out to youth to get tested or wear protection or not bully, alongside skeletons and maps of the human brain. Other rooms had bright inspirational posters of college-ready culture, which cried out with the watchwords of youth empowerment: Motivation! Respect! Leadership! A sheet of paper with blue sky and clouds printed on it had been scotch-taped onto the window, which had a thick film and did not open. This was a fitting metaphor for the wide range of programs that try to change youth: a promise of hope within the bars and concrete of broken-down institutions.

Throughout my research, I found myself in pockets of ephemeral change, flecked through massive institutions. Public schools are just one example, but an apt one. These lumbering institutions are largely dedicated to the long, slow grind of people processing: sorting and converting individuals into one category or another, issuing labels and credentials, sometimes alongside economic assistance.[8] Think of the grinding days at a courthouse, hours of testing at school, or long waits for food stamps and

you will have a feel for these institutions. I call this the slow state. In these places, the apparatus of government seems to be saying: You must learn to wait.[9]

These traditional arrangements of time and space in social policy are inverted in the ephemeral state. Rather than a slow-moving institution, the state acts through a multiplied field of fleeting interventions into institutions and daily life that encourage rapid transformation. Policy blinks into existence for a short time and then vanishes. At one level, grants and contracts reshuffle economic pressures every few years, and on another level, short-term programs flash by in days. Unlike the slow state, which keeps track of every personal detail, programs set out to accumulate masses of depersonalized data.[10] If the file cabinet is the symbolic distillation of the slow state, a messenger bag full of worksheets, pre- and post-surveys, sign-in sheets, and a tattered curriculum, all wiped of identifying data, represents the ephemeral state. These two temporal dimensions of the state—slow and ephemeral—produce a kind of social whiplash.[11]

This is what it was like in the ephemeral state: A security guard led Anne, a young white facilitator, through a keycarded door, past a maze of cubicles and attorney-client meeting rooms, and into the dim basement of the Children's Court of Los Angeles. Beyond a long table with five adults doing paperwork, the room opened up and about 30 young people, mostly Latino and Black, sat in rows of thin plastic chairs or stretched out on floormats, facing toward a big-screen TV playing cartoons. Some were there for a hearing on criminal charges. Others were foster youth waiting for news about their parents or guardians. Every few minutes the loudspeaker crackled and a hollow voice called another young person out to meet their attorney. Peace Over Violence maintained a standing monthly presentation on healthy relationships at the court, deep within the physical and institutional architecture of the slow state.

A woman introduced Anne and me: "These folks are here to talk about a very important issue, violence, so please listen." As Anne and I walked to the front, six or seven youth leaned forward in their creaking chairs. Others cradled their heads in their hands facedown on the mats in the front row, white earbud chords trailing down their necks. They did not register our presence. Anne began with what facilitators called "the check-in." She asked each youth to say their name and how they were feel-

ing. She forced some enthusiasm into her voice, a skill she learned in training to build connection and momentum in fleeting interactions. Moving along the rows, she pointed to individuals so they knew when it was their turn.

I caught sight of a young man toward the back, who smiled and leaned toward the young woman next to him. They shared a conspiratorial laugh and I wondered if relationships ever start here. A few seconds later, her expression flattened and she yelled out, "He's being disrespectful!" She smacked her right fist against her open left hand and sternly said to no one in particular, "I'm going to have to take care of him." The boy put out his hands palms up and shrugged. Despite the setting, this felt like the schools I had spent the last year observing. Young people navigated their personal relationships within these massive institutions, with adults all around, but at a distance. Anne waited a beat, and when it seemed neither the young man and woman, nor the other adults, had anything else to say, she continued the check-in.

As she snaked around the room, most of the young people said they were "good," but some said "bored" or "tired." One young woman said, "I have no feelings." A boy said that he was "frustrated" and pulled his gray hood close around his face until only his eyes showed. Facilitators told me that they used the check-in to gauge the "emotional temperature of the room." It let them know if the energy was low, if there was some trauma bubbling, or if a short fuse was lit and burning. After months listening to young people describe how they were feeling, I had learned how this would go. There was a hidden grammar of emotion in the slow state, which was to be vague and unremarkable. The majority of youth described their emotional state as simply good, fine, or tired. On this day, waiting for their names to be called out in children's court, it was difficult to imagine what it meant to be good.

As sometimes happened, a young person, in this case a young woman with wire-rimmed glasses, said that she was "not good, not at all." This seemed to set off a small alarm in Anne. I could feel it too, an embodied sense that I picked up in training and from watching implementers at work. When a young person says that they are not good in front of a classroom full of peers and strangers, it means they are likely on the verge of crisis. Anne nudged in a smooth drawl, "What's going on that is making

you feel bad?" The girl started to answer, "My mom, she—" but then, like something caught her, she stopped and shook her head. "Never mind." "You sure?" Anne nudged again, gently. "Yeah," the young woman said as she looked to the wall. Anne paused for several seconds, then moved on. If this was my only peek inside a room like this, I might have thought that her change of heart had something specific to do with the court and its representatives, or with Anne, or with her peers' eyes on her. But this happened nearly everywhere facilitators went. This is one of the things facilitators learn: young people want to talk, often badly, but then don't.

Anne continued, settling into a discussion of the roots of violence. She ran through exercises on how to identify an unhealthy relationship and how to help a friend. She finished by asking what the youth did to deal with violent feelings. One girl would scream into her pillow, several would listen to heavy metal alone in their room, another would go for long walks. This conversation seemed to be a release, and I could see people's body postures ease and some even cracked a smile.

In her study of school discipline, Ann Arnett Ferguson explores how institutional processes funneled Black boys in public schools into the "punishing room," where students were sent by adults when they were marked as trouble.[12] That room, and others like it, are symbolic and physical distillations of the larger system in many urban schools used to punish and mark youth, particularly Black boys. And yet, as Ferguson shows, punishing rooms are also sites of identity, power, and play: marginalized youth do not simply bend to labels, punishment, and school discipline; they have agency and make sense of themselves anew in the face of these forces. Young people's agency was evident one day, early in my research. I was new to a high school and the campus was vast and uneven and full of spaces hidden away from adult eyes, like the strange geometry of an M. C. Escher painting. I got lost. I weaved in and out of buildings, catching vignettes of kissing couples, girls snacking on contraband candy, and boys wrestling and laughing on patches of dead grass. It was the first time since I began observing violence prevention programs that I saw the hidden spaces that characterize so much of the underlife of young people in schools. Barrie Thorne described these relative free spaces youth develop within the disciplined structure of schools "like grass and dandelions sprouting through the cracks" in cement sidewalk blocks.[13]

The stories we hear about marginalized young people are pulled between poles of unstructured freedom and oppressive institutions. Yet, for even the most marginalized young people in the United States, daily life is shot through with pockets of something like state-sanctioned agency, as programs or campaigns come through promising a better life.[14] The programs I studied are just a few among a number of fleeting lessons throughout the daily lives of youth; posters in the halls, videos shown in classes, curriculums, after-school programs, social media campaigns, and more.[15] I came to recognize that there are places set aside for this kind of thing: A beige metal trailer on the outskirts of campus called the "Impact Office"; a YWCA in an office park; a windowless classroom wallpapered with students' art projects and crammed with cardboard boxes. They are, to build on Thorne's metaphor, curated gaps in the concrete, where only one type of flower is allowed to grow. These patches of programmatic empowerment often take place at the outer edges of labyrinth-like state institutions, but they are undeniable and scholars have not done enough to reckon with them. Urban public schools are not monolithic places where youth of color are relentlessly disciplined. Marginalized young people are also told that they are free, that they are responsible, that they can do anything they set their minds to. We must take these moments seriously, lest we ignore the shape of the contemporary state.

THE SHADOW STATE AND BEYOND

As we walked to his car after a session, a facilitator named Robert described a book he had read on the "nonprofit industrial complex." I knew the book Robert cited, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* by the INCITE! collective. In it, a range of academics and activists lay out the consequences of a sprawling system of nonprofits and funders, which secures inequality as it pacifies grassroots activism with band-aid measures. The authors argue that would-be activists are funneled into low-paying nonprofit work, which reinforces the status quo. Robert, who fit that description, agreed with the assessment of the book and hoped that funding might "dry up" for prevention programming—"then we could have a real movement," he said. Robert, like many facilitators, saw his

work in the tradition of consciousness-raising and activism, yet believed it was tainted by the incentives of funding. And though this was true at one point, facilitation had become something different, a new kind of work for a new kind of state project.

Alongside the notion that nonprofits constrain movements, there is a second argument woven through *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded,* one I did not hear from facilitators: that together, nonprofits represent what Jennifer Wolch in 1990 called the "shadow state," which has grown up parallel to the prison-industrial complex and the military-industrial complex and partially fills in the gaps left by the dismantling of the welfare state.[16] Over the last several decades, the social organization of social support has changed dramatically, as the supportive arm of the state has been devolved and replaced by a swarm of nonprofits, charities, and foundations.[17] These organizations fulfill many of the roles of the state, but they do so in ways that are obscured and distant.[18] The slow state is coming apart and something different is coming together in its wake.

From this angle, the organizations that often play the role of independent actor in our everyday stories—nonprofits—are called into question. Today, nonprofits, funded in large part by state and federal grants, are the primary deliverers of services in the United States.[19] A study from the Urban Institute estimates that government agencies have as many as 200,000 contracts and grants with some 33,000 human services nonprofits: an average of six per group."[20] In this way, the growth of the nonprofit sector represents a dramatic shift in the way that the state approaches social problems: away from government bureaucracies and toward a system of grant-funded nonprofits. In Los Angeles, nonprofit organizations dot the landscape to an extent that dwarfs the number from a generation ago, with nearly 35,000 registered nonprofits in 2008, "representing seven percent of the gross metropolitan product and six percent of the labor force" in 2010.[21] There are dozens of organizations in Los Angeles working against violence alone. The Violence Prevention Coalition, established in 1991 by the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services, which promotes the public health approach to violence, listed 117 members in 2017, the vast majority of which were nonprofits.

The shadow state distributes services and social support through a market logic, as nonprofits and private entities compete for a narrow pool

of temporary funding.[22] This is what Smith and Lipsky have called a "contracting regime." At the top, there are funders, who contract with organizations like the agency at the core of this book, Peace Over Violence, to implement a program within their desired parameters.[23] Grants rarely last more than three years, and organizations often have multiple grants at some point in "the cycle": drafting, submission, waiting, allocating funding, reporting on deliverables, repeat.[24] Funders might also hire grant-fidelity inspectors and technical assistance organizations to oversee the grant. At the local level, contracted organizations send programs, in the hands of trained facilitators, into schools and community centers.[25] Grants and curricula collapse the time horizons through which policy operates as they transform the kinds of work done by the state. This arrangement has led to new markets and commodities for temporally bounded policy—in short, to the ephemeral state.

Within the ephemeral state, this collapsing timeline is reorganizing the ground floor of social policy at those places where the state bumps up against the public. Facilitators set out not only to change citizens but to do so hastily before disappearing from their lives. No reliable numbers are available as to how many facilitators are in the United States today, but given the breadth of topics met with curricula, and the quick turnover of both employed and volunteer implementers, tens of thousands of people are likely to have been trained as program facilitators and likely millions have participated in at least one program. The facilitators of prevention programs are not the people at a heavy desk with a vast bureaucracy above them whom we usually think of as comprising the front lines of social support. Michael Lipsky, in a book which has had a lasting echo in sociology, coined the term street-level bureaucrats to describe how individuals manage the work of state bureaucracies—the slow state institutions of schools, police departments, welfare offices—that administer public benefits and sanctions. Unlike other street-level representatives of policy, facilitators' messages did not hinge on the promise of economic support or the threat of a fine or the restriction of liberty. They were not employed to provide any kind of support—financial, emotional, or otherwise—to youth participants. Their daily grind was built around providing messages and documenting the impact of those messages. They were, for the most part, undertrained and underpaid. While their bosses and managers felt the

market pressures of competition and economic rationality, for facilitators, the most salient quality of their work was that it was fleeting, played out in a never-ending cascade of metrics, campaigns, and programs designed to be impermanent.

CHANGE PROGRAMS

I describe curricula designed to transform some social or cultural metric and their implementation as *change programs*. Hailed as a means to transform embedded cultural norms and prevent future harm, change programs are a slow-rolling policy revolution. Although change programs take a range of forms and names—including "norms change," "culture change," "positive youth development," or "health promotion"—they have several defining characteristics. They are temporary and bounded to a predetermined time and space. They are produced and evaluated in a market and operate through a tightly structured curriculum. Their goal is to change people in measurable ways. The CDC Training Prevention Guidelines state that program statements should define five elements, which are known as the ABCDE Method:

A—Audience: Who will change—the people you are training.

B—Behavior: What will change—the knowledge, attitudes, and skills you expect to change.

C—Condition: By when—the timeframe within which you hope to see change.

D—Degree: By how much—how much change you think you can realistically achieve.

E—Evidence: How the change will be measured—the surveys, tests, interviews, or other methods you will use to measure the different changes specified.

If you grew up in the United States in the 1990s or 2000s, a program has likely tried to change you. Your attitudes and behaviors, even your culture, were fodder. If you lived in a low-income, urban place, it is likely that multiple programs tried to change you. They may have been trying to change some of your most everyday and, perhaps, fundamental qualities:

how you talk with your peers or the people you love, your thoughts about violence to yourself or others, your sexual habits, your eating and exercise habits, and how you watch TV or listen to music.

This approach arose out of what public health has called "primary prevention" and it was honed through campaigns to increase seat belt use, curb smoking, and encourage people to wear condoms in response to the HIV epidemic.[26] As a category, change programs encompass the moral messages of marriage promotion and responsible fatherhood that were attached to welfare reform in the 1990s, except those messages were bound up with the conditioning mechanisms of incentives and punishments, neither of which are necessary aspects of change programs.[27]

In some ways, change programs mirror public education in that they provide knowledge. But the intended use of that knowledge is neither credentialing nor the production of a citizenry. Instead, it is to be used in personal lives.[28] The most apt analogy is to marketing: change programs transmit stories in order to direct behavior, attitudes, and norms. The weight of success is placed on the producer of the content, not the audience. Just as Coca-Cola doesn't (and cannot) require you to buy a soda, change programs do not exert force; rather, they pull the cultural levers available to position you to make a specific behavioral choice. This is a distinct kind of power, one which feels like a slight breeze on the ground, but looks like a storm system from afar.[29]

There is no comprehensive data on how many programs there are, but we can begin to put together a picture. For example, *Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development,* based at the University of Colorado Boulder, which assesses the evidence base on a range of positive youth development programs, had reviewed over 1,500 programs by 2018.[30] Change programs are now a common part of young people's lives and, taken together, they amount to a dramatic transformation in how young people experience social policy. In the United States, this type of programming has quietly become ubiquitous. Sixty-five percent of youth in the United States have gone through violence prevention programming.[31] For millions of young people every year, programs streak brightly across their lives, then disappear.

One reason for their multiplication is that the grants and curricula that undergird change programs make an incredible claim backed up by reams

of evidence: that they simply and directly change individuals and culture writ large. This is the enticement of curricula: at-risk youth go in and healthy, empowered, nonviolent youth come out, and during that process, norms on the larger scale are changed. For example, programs designed explicitly to reshape and shift the masculinity of potentially violent and at-risk boys and men have multiplied at an astounding rate over the last decade. In a review of 58 programs aimed at encouraging healthy masculinities around the world, Barker et al. found that the programs could lead to a stunning list of positive transformations in men's attitudes and behaviors "related to sexual and reproductive health; maternal, newborn and child health; their interaction with their children; their use of violence against women; their questioning of violence with other men; and their health-seeking behaviour."[32] Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in the rooms where programs take place and out into the social worlds of those intended to be changed, this book casts doubt on the conclusions we may draw from these studies.

AT-RISK YOUTH AND THE UNEQUAL PAST

The fleeting interventions of the ephemeral state stand in contrast to the abiding harm and inequality in the lives of young people marked as at risk. The young people I encountered were haunted by the past. Zephire, a young man I met in a prevention program, put it this way: "Everybody comes from some past that they didn't do so well, were feeling bad. And that may lead them to act as some adults do now towards each other . . . they mistreat each other really horribly." The past, however, isn't a fair place. Difficult pasts aren't equally distributed: they are sorted along lines of inequality. Although violence occurs across society, it is multiplied by structural racism, heteronormativity, environmental hazard, deprivation, and so on.[33] To be an at-risk youth, in a way, is to have more than one's share of bad pasts.[34]

Los Angeles, like most cities, has seen a dramatic decline in violence over the last several decades. Yet even as rates of violence experienced by youth have decreased across the nation, the numbers remain stunning. Nearly two-thirds of all children in the United States will be exposed to violence in their homes, schools, or communities this year alone.[35]

Violence disproportionately affects those living in poverty and people of color, and can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder, economic hardship, and educational disparities.[36] The aftershocks of violence are acutely felt in health institutions. In 2011, more than 707,000 young people ages 10–24 were treated in emergency departments for injuries sustained from violence.[37] The criminal-legal system also deals with a share of the damage. According to the FBI, in 2009 approximately 86,000 adolescents were arrested for violent crimes.[38] These rates are even higher in poor and working-class urban "hot spots." In Los Angeles, at least 90 percent of the 120,000 young people living in the most violent neighborhoods will be directly impacted by violence. For tens of thousands of young people in Los Angeles, whether or not they have been perpetrator or victim, violence in a myriad of forms is common: part of the social fabric of their lives.[39]

While it may be spectacular and public violence that makes the news, close-up, intimate violence between people who know each other is far more common, even among youth. One study of middle-school students in "high risk urban communities" found that, of those students who had dated, more than three-quarters had perpetrated verbal or emotional abuse and nearly one-third had perpetrated physical abuse.[40] Another study of young adults ages 14 to 21 found that eight percent reported that they had kissed, touched, or "made someone else do something sexual" when they "knew the person did not want to." In 66 percent of the incidents, "no one found out" and the perpetrator did not face any consequences.[41] Other scholars have found that violence makes it more difficult to make friends, deters the completion of high school, and has long-term negative health consequences.[42] Interpersonal violence is pervasive and yet, for all the violence present in the lives of youth and the lasting consequences, the incidents themselves are often fleeting, or if they are persistent, they are obscured from public view, or hidden away in the past.

THE STORIES YOUTH TELL AND THE ONES THEY DON'T

It was the third day of class at a charter school for system-involved youth, when Anthony, an 18-year-old Latino young man to whom I had never spoken directly, told me his story. There had been a pause between two

units of a prevention curriculum and I had gone to the bathroom. I was digging around for the paper towel dispenser when he came in. He looked right at me, eyes glistening, and I knew something was wrong. He spoke in a staccato: "I did something I'm not happy about, but that I don't like telling people." He loved his girlfriend, he explained, but they were always yelling at each other and he worried what he might do if she "kept pushing him." His girlfriend made him cut himself and he got really mad at her and he didn't know if he could take it. He wanted to get counseling. He wanted my help and I was unprepared. He did not want to call the anonymous hotline that the organization ran because he did not trust them. He did not want to tell anyone at his school. He had approached me at his own peril. He was nervous that I might "get him in trouble or something," but he desperately wanted to know what to do. I encouraged him to consider the hotline. I emphasized that it was truly anonymous. I tried to work out someone at the school he could trust with his story. None of it seemed to convince him. I'm not sure what I could have said to get him to confide in someone who could provide the support and counseling that I believed he would benefit from and that I was unable to provide. According to facilitators, what happened with Anthony was common. Young people would approach them out of the blue to tell their stories. But other times, young people would shut down when asked about their lives. Some would get frustrated, or cry without saying why.[43]

Many young people were trapped in the stories of their past, but change programs did not have a way to hear those stories. The past, it turns out, is a problem for an ephemeral policy. Sociologists and policy makers alike have few ways to make sense of the lasting consequences of trauma and violence beyond the personal and psychological. The response to the past was to change young people's futures, not reconcile their trauma or change the situations that enabled it.[44]

Stories are social objects. Making order from chaos, they unfold action over time as a series of events or scenes, which individuals use to make sense of the past, present, and future, and the links between them. Certain details are privileged and others omitted. Stories have characters, plots, scenes, props, and make us all into actors. That is, stories have power: they *do* things.[45] Stories can be used to do all kinds of things: to build social movements or to navigate the law in court proceedings or to trigger

punishment. This is, of course, what Anthony was scared of: that his story would cause an institutional response. Telling a story, depending on how you tell it, can get you support or mark you.[46] Stories can also organize the disjointed raw material of experience into an identity and in turn drive personal action and meaning.[47] Social location—gender, race, and class—become a part of stories about who we are and who we want to be.[48]

Young people are not the only ones who tell stories about their lives: the state tells stories, too.[49] The stories of the state are often narratives of social location, as social policy works to actively transform meanings around race, socioeconomic status, age, gender and sexuality, and with them, identities.[50] The stories told by the state create the world they tell of, or at least a version of it. At the same time as they provide services and sanctions, social policies divide people into new categories—such as "at-risk youth" and "nonprofit organization"—and give meaning to categories.[51] The stories that social policy tells constrain and enable how people make their lives legible.[52] Although all social policy tells a story, the ephemeral state is, above all, a storytelling apparatus. Within it, narratives are the core mechanism of policy action, from the statistical stories of risk data, to the transformation stories of evaluations, to the blunted stories told to mandated reporters in schools.[53] This book is an ethnography of those stories.

VIOLENCE AND THE STATE

The state and violence are historically and theoretically linked. Max Weber, in a 1919 lecture, defined the state as "a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory."[54] Since then, scholars have sought to tease apart the relationship between the state and violence. This makes violence prevention a vital and intriguing site for understanding how the state functions and how the meaning of violence is legitimated, contested, and transformed. In the world of violence prevention, it is taken for granted that a well-designed curriculum could change norms around violence, but, if we take a step back, we can see how audacious and strange this is. Throughout history, violence has been viewed, in turn, as innate to

mankind, as held in check by the state, as a failure of state power, and as a widespread cultural norm. In violence prevention there is a novel way of thinking of violence—as the byproduct of behaviors and risk factors— and with it, new ways to think about the state.[55]

In all my time in the field, I saw a dozen or so instances of play fighting, most of which were among boys and rarely between a boy and a girl. I saw a few exchanges that could have been considered verbal or emotional violence. Still, the language of violence was ever-present. It was on every branded poster, pin, and T-shirt that read Peace Over Violence, of course. But it was also on our grants and in the mouths of teachers and administrators. In the world of social policy, where lived stories rarely appeared, there was a swell of discourse on violence, but rarely did I witness its physical manifestation. Foucault argued that sexuality was created and defined by the multiplication of discourses around sex that arose in the nineteenth century: that an obsession with sorting and categorizing varieties of sex and deviance gave power and meaning to the concept. Something similar may be happening with violence.

Violence is no one thing. When we name something violence, and then, further, sort it into a specific subspecies, we place it as a point in a kind of story of morality and policy. These categorizations are fiercely contested and call up moral questions of intention, harm, physicality, power, and choice. Policy stories about violence have high stakes for the allocation of funding, the framing of problems, the assignment of victim and perpetrator labels and legal repercussions. Control over the story of violence comes with a kind of power, and various institutions jockey for that power. This seems obvious when it comes to the military or the police, but it is also true of social movements, support agencies, and healthcare policy. For this reason, the ways that groups and institutions frame violence have consequences. The courts may determine if an incident rose to the legal definition of violence, while a guidance counselor may gauge if an incident was emotional violence in order to determine the best course of treatment. A referee may decide if a foul was flagrant and in war, policing, and sport violent actors may gauge the effectiveness of the violence in order to award medals and acclaim.

Anti-violence organizations do not agree on what violence is. Instead, there are competing organizational stories of violence and various kinds of

data that they draw on to make their case. To use criminal-legal data, which is affirmed by the weight of the bureaucratic state, results in a narrower categorization. Alternatively, drawing on hospital records of injuries, many of which never go to the criminal-legal system, provides a broader definition that still requires some formal authority. In contrast, surveys or interviews from self-defined survivors and victims offer a different accounting, which often varies considerably from formal reports from police and hospitals. This is particularly important for underreported crimes such as sexual assault, as well as threats and emotional violence for which the act may be contested or subjective. In addition, organizations and institutions must decide whether or not they believe that a person can consent to violence: If a person approves of their own harm, is it violence? In practice, this meant that some organizational definitions include self-directed harm, such as suicide or cutting, others discount consensual harm, such as in football or BDSM, and others only count nonconsensual harm directed at others.

These questions, while moral and theoretical, are also practical in the daily work of violence prevention. When I first entered the field, the Violence Prevention Coalition of Greater Los Angeles had, after decades and a contentious debate, only recently come to a formal definition of violence. They decided on a definition that "excluded suicide but included football." Weiss, who founded VPC, in a 1996 article made the case that the public health definition of violence requires intention, so as to distinguish it from the public health data on injuries from accidents. As Weiss put it: "public health records focus on the victim, criminal justice records focus on the perpetrator."[56] VPC's definition was less expansive than that of the World Health Organization, which defined violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against another person or against a group or community that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation."[57] This is, if you pause to look at it, a stunningly broad definition, full of flexible terminology and concepts, such as power, threats, community, likelihood, and psychological harm. It is also a definition that lacks a notion of consent. In 2012, the Department of Justice changed their definition of sexual violence to "a sexual act committed against someone without that person's freely given consent." The changes to the definition of sexual

violence, for the first time, included nonheterosexual violence. When the definition of sexual assault changed, it meant that whole new actions, things that real people did, meant something different to the state.

The formal definition of violence at POV, which I heard dozens of times in trainings and presentations, was this: Any act, action, or force that causes harm. Many facilitators emphasized, as a manager named Joan did: "Our definition of violence doesn't include intent. If you hurt somebody, physically or emotionally, it doesn't matter what you intended to do—violence is violence." There was also an informal and contradictory mantra around POV, "violence is always a choice," which aligned with the use of violence in self-defense classes and with the logic of prevention more broadly. These two definitions signal the contentious debates over the meaning of violence that have taken place during the more than forty-year history of Peace Over Violence and the state more broadly.

A NEW POV

Peace Over Violence is located in a two-story modern box in the shadow of skyscrapers just north of Wilshire Boulevard. Since they moved in, development has steadily marched through the neighborhood, with a new towering hotel and apartment building on one side, and a rundown lot destined for redevelopment across the street. The building is quietly fortified with a metal screen that rolls down in front of the door and a mechanical gate with a passcode for the parking lot on the roof. Multiple times each day, whenever someone pulls in, the building rattles. During the day, with the metal screen up, the front is glass, and you have to press a call button to page Sandra at the front desk to let you in. Through the glass doors, it looks like a corporate office. Sandra, who is Latina and grew up in Los Angeles, is often behind the desk and partition wall, a phone curled between her ear and shoulder while clicking on the computer. This is the "seventh or eighth" nonprofit job Sandra has had. After her family member died of a drug overdose, she started working in a recovery center for women and then after that "kept staying in the nonprofit organizations." When I asked how she felt about POV, she said that "what they do here is something that everybody goes through almost. If you think about

it, everybody has experienced some sort of domestic violence or sexual assault, something even if it's not a major thing. That's what I liked about it is that it's universal. Everybody goes through the same thing."

Peace Over Violence was where I began my research, and it remained my touchstone throughout. However, to study how stories circulated through the ephemeral state, I conducted over three years of ethnographic research in the world of interpersonal violence prevention in Los Angeles. With the door cracked open by Peace Over Violence, between November 2009 and May 2013, I shadowed stories back and forth across contexts: the booming market for programming, an organization striving to keep pace, the classrooms where programs were implemented, and the lives of so-called at-risk youth.[58]

During the course of my fieldwork, I spent time in 20 program contexts across Los Angeles, including large public high schools, a continuation school for "troubled" students, a wealthy suburban school, the children's court, afterschool programs, and more, sitting in on programs and at times implementing them myself.[59] Most of the schools where youth programs were implemented were also schools marked by disadvantage and crime control approaches, as grants focused on specific geographic communities or demographic populations seen as at risk.[60] The audience for programming, in line with the population of the Los Angeles Unified School District, was almost entirely youth of color. Only two of the 20 sites were populated by a majority of white students. In total, I observed over two thousand students enrolled in violence prevention programs. During the course of my ethnographic research, I also conducted dozens of informal interviews with youth and with various participants in and around programming, including campus police, teachers, and guidance counselors. I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 32 youth.

The world of violence prevention is made up of moving pieces. In addition to my time in schools, I participated in trainings and regular meetings of facilitators and other organizational staff, during which time they discussed challenges and strategies of facilitation. During the third year of participant observation I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 11 program facilitators. In addition, I interviewed 10 employees working in various other departments in the organization. I also attended conferences, meetings, and webinars in the broader world of Los Angeles

violence prevention. I talked with professionals in the field of public health who ran technical assistance and taught workshops on effective prevention. I read as many violence prevention curricula as I could find and the public health research on violence that undergirded program content.

OVERVIEW OF THIS BOOK

How did violence become preventable? Chapter 2 draws on in-depth interviews, primary organizational documents, and secondary sources—including a study of Peace Over Violence (then the Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women) between 1972 and 1990—to trace the trajectory from feminist consciousness-raising, which centered on personal narratives of interpersonal violence, to contemporary interpersonal violence prevention, with its focus on data and evidence. With the expansion of the nonprofit sector, change programs arose in the 1990s to fill a gap created by the expanding punitive state and the devolving welfare state. In tracing this history, I develop a theory of *curricularization,* a process whereby human conditions and social problems become formalized into problems met with narrative curricular interventions.

What is lost when a life becomes data? Chapter 3 examines the cultural consequences of risk data, as statistical methods change the way we think about and act upon the problems of personal lives. In contexts marked by ubiquitous crime control, fraught intimate relationships, and persistent trauma, the process of stripping out social context that gives population data its power is multiplied. Ultimately, this widens the gap between personal stories and statistical lives, making experience less recognizable and limiting the usefulness of risk analysis on the ground as it distances youth from the state. In contrast to the statistical lives of youth marked as at risk, the chapter sketches textured portraits of young men and women coming of age and forming relationships within a world of temporary programs.

What is the work of the ephemeral state? Chapter 4 explores the social organization of the interactions between facilitators, who act as street-level representatives of social policy, and the subjects of the ephemeral state, in this case young people marked as at risk. The ephemeral state,

and its multiple overlapping interventions, give rise to new processes of marking risk and enrolling young people in programming. At street level, the ephemeral state produces a constant churn of temporary encounters with social policy. Inundated by an avalanche of metrics, facilitators distrust the ephemeral state, but ultimately participate in its validation.

Can a story change a life? In chapter 5, I take up the seemingly simple question of whether or not these programs succeed in changing narratives. Drawing on excerpts from widely used curricula and classroom vignettes of role-plays gone wrong, games with contradictory messages, and narratives of violence stripped of emotion, I provide a rare look inside the rooms where violence prevention curricula, intended to reshape intimate thoughts and feelings, are brought to life. The new narratives of prevention, untethered from personal connection and failing to engage with the jumble of narrative projects that make sense of lived experience, collide and fracture in a form of *narrative entropy*. Youth pick up the pieces, drawing on their own experiences to resist and transform the messages of programming, often in gendered ways.

How do young people come to understand the state? The final empirical chapter examines how young men and women marked as at risk engage with adult representatives of the state in their lives. Young men and women marked as at risk, unlike their hypercriminalized peers, experience a cascade of cultural frames from state-aligned adults, teachers, administrators, school resources officers, and guidance counselors. In practice, I argue, young people come to understand the state through the lens of interpersonal interactions, or what I call *policy in person*. This has consequences for the ways that young people make sense not only of the state, but those closest to them. Young men seek out meaningful connection outside of institutions, and many young women cultivate individual success within them.