



Source: Courtesy of Victor Rios

CAREERS AND RESEARCH

**Victor Rios, PhD, Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology,
University of California, Santa Barbara**

Dr. Rios grew up in Oakland, California, and as a young man joined a street gang, because he thought it would provide him the protection that the police and other authority figures failed to provide. During an encounter with a rival gang when he was 15, his best friend was shot and killed. When he asked a police officer if the police were going to catch the kid who killed his friend, Rios was told, “What for? We want you to kill each other.” It was perhaps this traumatic moment when he realized that the treatment he was enduring was directed not just at him but also at his entire community, and he wanted to know why. After a high school teacher reached out as a mentor and a police officer gave him another chance while he was on parole, he committed himself to pursuing an education.

After completing his BA while working full time, Rios was accepted into graduate school and completed his PhD at the University of San Francisco. The research from his award-winning book, *Punished*, is highlighted in this chapter. Dr. Rios’s research addresses many questions, but it focuses primarily on how juvenile crime policies and criminalization affect the everyday lives of urban youth. In addition to conducting research, he has committed himself to making a difference in the world by participating in motivational programming for educational equity and resilience and by speaking about transforming the juvenile justice system. You can see him on Ted Talks.

He wants both students and teachers to stop labeling others as “at risk” and begin seeing them “at promise”! He encourages students to never give up despite the roadblocks in their way.