

Tanya Domi: Hi, this is Tanya Domi, welcome to The Thought Project, recorded at The Graduate Center of The City University of New York fostering groundbreaking research and scholarship in the arts, social sciences and sciences. In this space, we talk with faculty and doctoral students about the big thinking and big ideas generating cutting-edge research, informing New Yorkers and the world.

Tanya Domi: Carla Shedd is an Associate Professor in Sociology in Urban Education at The Graduate Center CUNY. Her work focuses on the timely issues related to criminal justice, race, law and society, social inequality, and urban policy. She's the author of an award-winning book Unequal City: Race, Schools, and the Perceptions of Injustice, published in 2015. This books explores obstacles facing urban adolescence in Chicago. Her current research centers on New York City's juvenile justice system, specifically investigating how young people's institutional experiences influences their placement on and movement through the prison system for juveniles. Welcome, Professor Shedd, to The Thought Project podcast.

Carla Shedd: Thank you for having me.

Tanya Domi: In your award-winning book, Unequal City: Race, Schools and the Perception of Injustice, you actually garnered a number of awards. Congratulations on that.

Carla Shedd: Thank you.

Tanya Domi: But in this book, you did a deep dive analysis with an intersectional lens about race, place, and opportunity in the Chicago schools. What did you learn about the community, the families and the children who are enrolled in Chicago schools? What's the big takeaway here? Then, we'll break it down.

Carla Shedd: Okay. I'm a Sociologist, so I approached the work thinking about schools as this very interesting sociological site for me to understand how people come together, how they experience school in Chicago. But I had to connect it to who they were as individuals, so race, and gender, and class, and even just presentation by their parents mattered, as well as how they got to school, and what did they encounter once they got to school, and how did they take away lessons both about education, but also about opportunity and the law, and police, as they walked out of school and back home. And synthesizing both the experiences of young people at such a formative age was important for me to showcase. This is what democracy, this is what education looks like if we really look at who matters and who's experiencing it.

Tanya Domi: In this case study of Chicago schools, which has gotten a lot of attention, your book has gotten a lot of attention, but the city of Chicago and the fact that mayor Rahm Emanuel has really closed a lot of schools in that city. They assert that they closed those schools because they aren't working. What does that say about the system itself? I'd like to hear. Then, given your book an examination

obviously of this system because of the way people go to school, the way they experience it, can you talk about that?

Carla Shedd: Yes. The study really predates Rahm Emanuel, it goes back to Arne Duncan, who was the CEO of Chicago Public Schools, and then eventually became Barack Obama's National Secretary for Education. They both took Chicago to the nation stage and saying, "Here are policies that we've implemented on the ground in this city, are laws that we passed." For me, I was a bit befuddled, because things that did not work on the local level that they then ramped up to the federal level, I thought. We have evidence, we have evidence of Chicago where young people are still very much stratified by who they are and where they live. I think you can make it worse if you foreclose the schools and other opportunities for young people where they need the most in these disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Carla Shedd: Chicago becomes this guiding light for us to think about who do we really care about? What do we invest in? What are the outcomes we're expecting based on those investments? I looked at how much are we putting into police versus counselors? How much are we listening to young people who really know what's happening? They are the walking guinea pigs in so many of these experiments on schooling, and housing. I just so happened to be doing the research in a moment when they were transforming both Chicago public housing, closing public housing down, demolishing high-rises as well as closing and combining schools. It was fortuitous-

Tanya Domi: Cabrini-Green.

Carla Shedd: Cabrini-Green was one of the last to go. It mattered.

Tanya Domi: Yeah. So then they elevated that platform at the federal level, and there was a lot of criticism of the Obama Department of Education. Of course, there is a lot right now too, but it's a different approach, it was this approach, this sort of systematized approach to how you put children through school, what they study. You know a lot more about this, but I'd just like to hear what happened to poor children in Chicago? Because poor children are both black and white and brown, but what happened to poor children in Chicago?

Carla Shedd: Many things, and not all of them positive. I think for both Barack Obama as president and Arne Duncan, they all had that sort of impulse to try to say, "How do we help those who are most needed?" But their treatment was a bit problematic if we go to standardized testing. If we move into a market-based approach to schooling, where charter schools expanded remarkably in the 2000s. How you sort of measure who that hits and who it benefits? You saw a very sort of stratified system where the kids who were most advantaged, mostly in Chicago white kids who are middle class, upper class, are going to public schools, but they're going to magnet schools. They're going to the IB schools. They're going to a different set of schools than those who are black and brown

students, the majority of the public school population, and they're truly left behind in these neighborhood schools that we see closing each and every day.

Tanya Domi: Yeah, apparently it's like 83 schools have been closed under Rahm Emanuel. This is a really interesting question, a lot of times we do case studies, and then we look at them and we say, "Okay, this can actually, has got some resonance and that it can be transferred or adapted to." Now, Chicago is a huge city, it's a urban center, but New York City has got the most schools, it's the biggest school system in the country. It's also the most segregated racially, and they've been closing schools, and they opened up charters here, especially one of the most controversial success academy. Is there anything we've learned from Chicago in your study in how that could apply, or actually inform, what now the first chancellor to use the S-word, who said just recently, "New York City schools are segregated." I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

Carla Shedd: Yeah. Having these two amazing cities as my sites of study, New York, Chicago. Chicago was one that would follow New York in thinking about the transparency of data and sort of understanding what happens in schools would then have to be shared with the rest of the world, and I appreciate New York kind of leading the way. But we do see New York kind of doubling-down and really becoming more segregated, if we understand the kind of charter school expansion as it works. Unfortunately, for Unequal City coming out as a cautionary tale, no one's listened in that way, because we're still closing schools, and we're still not putting the young people who are going to be most impacted at the center, as we understand how this really shapes them and their lives, and interrupting the kind of neighborhoods that they're belonging to. What is a neighborhood without a school? We're not asking that.

Carla Shedd: Then, we go and turn these schools into condominiums. Kids sort of have to walk past how many abandoned neighborhood schools that they will eventually see redeveloped into housing for people who don't look like them and think, "Wow, what am I worth? What is the investment that should be made into me?" Unfortunately, it connects with the other part of my research, which is on the juvenile justice system and thinking about policing, and courts, and other ways that we demonstrate what we're willing to invest in.

Tanya Domi: Yeah, I want to get to that in a minute, but you've also raised the question [inaudible 00:09:50] what is a school without a neighborhood? You're talking about the gentrification now of this is an emerging issue that you've been quotes extensively about, which I find very interesting is that not only are these dynamics in play, but now, and especially in a city like New York, where we are seeing increased gentrification, and this happening in many urban areas, but here in New York City in particular there's a lot of white people moving to Harlem, that's very controversial. But you have been quoted extensively talking about the connection between schools and housing and how it's been decoupled and how that has yield to increased gentrification of neighborhoods.

Can you talk about that issue and what we see as a consequence? What are the consequences of that dynamic?

Carla Shedd: Yes, it's really a turn from, you know, at the end of the 20th century where we were charting white flights to the suburbs, and where people were leaving the inner city because they wanted to go to a suburban environment that had better schools, and had more resources. Then, to reverse that, where there's more demand for housing in the central city, but people are saying, "Well, school doesn't have to be attached to that? There are so many markets, there's the private schools, there's Catholic schools, there are charter schools that we can go into where we don't have to really plant our roots in the place where we're living, and where we're investing money and having a mortgage." It's a different mindset where you would then be able [inaudible 00:11:40] these elements of life that are so foundational. Work from school, from home, and from where you spend your time, what we sociologists call the third places, the coffee shops.

Carla Shedd: You can see this sort of alienation even in the midst of perhaps people who are unlike each other still coming together a great deal. But is it deep interaction? Is it truly integration? Those are some of the questions that I've covered in *Unequal City*, where you could look at different school environments and you could have different children sitting next to each other with different skin colors. But are they truly interacting and engaged? I think that's a different outcome.

Tanya Domi: One of the other ... the other question I have to ask, as you know, I grew up in the Midwest myself in Indianapolis, I was in public schools when schools were being desegregated in the '70s, late '60s. But here in New York, the system here about school choice is unlike anything I've ever seen anywhere. I began to learn about it when I worked at Columbia University and had a lot of colleagues who had children. They start telling me about applying to school. "What do you mean applying to school? Don't you go to the school in your neighborhood?" They're like, "No, no, no, no. There's all these schools, Bronx Science, the charter schools." Everybody goes through this application process, everything from pre-K, the K through 12, some people go into some of the most prestigious public high schools, and then others are going to private schools. Is there a consequence of school choice? And do that also drives segregation and separation of people?

Carla Shedd: Yes. Definitely. I think that's why New York really is at the top of the register if we talk about segregation in schools, and stratification. Because of how it's structured. Even as an Associate Professor of Urban Education now, I'm really just learning this universe, and I'm marveling at how [inaudible 00:13:53], ridiculous it is, how do we justify that? How do we know that if we are providing a structure where people with the most resources that have the ability to make an actual choice will game a system, and will make it work for them? How do we walk away and say this is fair and this is something that is open to everyone?

Carla Shedd: We either have to level up where every school could have similar options and you truly are picking and choosing based on attributes if you want the fine arts school, or if you need the STEM education, or is it those who have the most figure out how to make it work for them and everyone else ends up being left behind?

Tanya Domi: I think, when you add in the charter schools, you add that into you're taking all this money away from the regular K through 8 elementary school in your neighborhood. They get deprived, they lose resources. Then people are like, "Well, I'm not going to send my child to this school around the corner because it's not that good." Whereas I want to go to the Leadership Academy in Riverdale, you know in the Upper West side. Then kids are in public transportation, they're riding all around the city. That, in and of itself, I can't imagine being a parent and trying to negotiate that system, and just like you said, people, whenever there's a system that appears to be unfair, or disproportionate in the way it's distributed, there's always a way to game it and finding a way to get what you think is right for you and your family.

Tanya Domi: I think the stratification issues that you're talking about also is different when we start talking about children of color, and poor children that are treated differently in schools. I would love to hear what you have to say about how police affects school and the impact it has on children. We know that with the dynamic of guns, and the shooting in Florida, and now all of a sudden, they want to put more guns in schools with teachers handling guns, I mean, crazy ideas, really crazy ideas. Then people will start discussing this and saying, "Oh my god, I don't want a teacher to have a gun, because if they don't like my kid, what happens?" You've written about the role of police in schools and how it affects the educational process. Let's hear about your analysis.

Carla Shedd: There is a lot there. First, there's nothing inherently wrong with crossing boundaries and going far for school, because you learn something different, and Chicago and New York are pretty emblematic of the kind of value in moving across what are still very segregated neighborhood spaces and the promise of schools moving people past these boundaries by housing that we still haven't been able to eradicate since Brown v. Board was necessary. There's something that young people get when they move and leave their neighborhood and understand that. That's a different thing. But if we are now tying schools and the quality of those schools to the demographics of the children in them, and there being a different experience in school based on the percentage of black and brown students in particular, that's a different case, and that's not everyone moving around, that's not a random distribution. It's something else.

Carla Shedd: One of the measures that I've looked at is the role of the police in schools. New York and Chicago have huge police forces that are inside the schools. They have uniformed officers, New York City, the police force for the school system is bigger than the Boston police force. They're there. Our kids feeling safer, and the kids that I talked to in Chicago, some of them say, "Having that police

presence, makes me feel like they're here to protect me." But for other kids they say, "It makes me think they believe I'm a perpetrator. They'd see me as doing something wrong potentially, and they're here to surveil me instead of to protect me."

Carla Shedd: It can work in many different ways, especially if you have this universal system of all the schools have police, all of them have metal detectors, but how often are they using those scanning devices? It depends on who's in the school. With the efficacy of those officers, I mean, Parkland, and Connecticut, and Sandy Hook. Like all of these things have happened and could more police have stopped that? No. There's something else to be said about how much we're really willing to invest in nurturing relationships, and teachers having the support they need for kids who may have a problem and want to come in school ... to think about the possible intruders whether it's a grizzly bear [inaudible 00:19:08] that may be coming into a school to harm kids versus some lone white male who may come in with a machine gun.

Carla Shedd: It's a different apparatus that's necessary. What we're doing is going with what's easy and who does it benefit? It's not really making the kids feel safer, it may actually make them feel like they're more at risk.

Tanya Domi: We're dealing with a regime that I personally never experienced going to school. We're talking about standardized testing from the earliest age, I don't know when it starts, all the way up through high school. We're talking about police in schools. We're talking about people applying to school in New York City. We're talking about the rise of charters and how your child is going to get more attention in a charter, therefore a lot of people think that's really attractive. I can understand that. Then we're also talking about where in New York City, just like they do in Chicago, they close the schools. The renewal school system has been perceived as really not very successful. How to renew the schools so that we can prevent them from closing? There's been a lot of criticism of the current Mayor and his plan for K through 12.

Tanya Domi: Now, he's got a new chancellor, who is actually decent enough and honest enough to use the S-word, that the schools are segregated.

Carla Shedd: Segregation, yes.

Tanya Domi: Yeah, that's really groundbreaking, because the mayor won't say the word, because he believes it probably reflects negatively on him, because he probably hasn't done enough to address it. This is like a huge albatross, I mean, it's like a mega problem. New York City, the largest school system in the country, and we also have children that end up potentially into the juvenile justice pipeline. That actually centers on your new research, I'm sure school to prison is probably part of it, because I don't know exactly what you're doing, but you're looking at New York City's juvenile justice system, and specifically investigating how young

people's institutional influence really affects their placement into the juvenile justice system. This is huge.

Tanya Domi: There's been terrible stories showing on television about what happens to kids from school to prison. We know that LGBT kids, especially LGBT brown and black kids, are more likely to end up into that pipeline. I want to hear about your new research and what you're looking at.

Carla Shedd: So, I went from studying Chicago schools that felt like they were prisons, to now thinking about New York City courts that bring into the schools, the neighborhoods, and sort of how that works, and sort of understanding this system, and how there's a symbiotic relationship between the school system and the criminal justice system. The school to prison pipeline metaphor, a lot of people use it, I don't, I like to talk about a carceral continuum, so that we can empirically track young people's paths toward or away from the system. There are so many examples, particularly in New York City, where young people are introduced to the justice system, they don't even have to set foot in a courtroom.

Carla Shedd: You can think about, and I use this example in the book manuscript, and when I've done talks, the Tompkins Houses in Brooklyn. They had a jail playground on the grounds of the Tompkins Houses for about six years.

Tanya Domi: I'm shocked. I'm shocked. I cannot-

Carla Shedd: Jail playground. I mean, it was pristine, and beautiful, with these painted on metal bars, and the word jail, and it's on the grounds of a public housing project, which is one of the biggest centers of people to real jail. This is not child's play, it's a figment of their imagination, because these are children playing on this apparatus that no people who've gone to jail, and you think what does this forecast for them? Instead of the Upper West side, I see playgrounds with space shuttles, and astronauts. So what's the contrast for what our expectations are? Then you think about, what are some school policies that bring these systems together?

Carla Shedd: One of my students in Urban Education is telling me about the late policy at his charter school where he, as a teacher, is supposed to walk kids who are not picked up by 6:00 to the precinct, the police precinct two blocks away from the school, and have them wait there for their parents to pick them up from a police precinct. Why are we merging a punitive system with something that should be formative? He is this individual actor who's like, "Oh no, I hide them, I smuggle them out, and I want to subvert the system." But why is this the system that he's working on? I am trying to capture all of these policies, all of these practices that make it so the young people show up in family court.

Carla Shedd: In New York City, there's a particular division, or a part a family court, for juvenile delinquency, where I and a team of students tracked this court for 10

months, sitting in pretty much every day and seeing the types of cases that came in. I was at first just interested in school-based defenses, but there was so much more to capture systematically, where young people were coming in for offenses, and they have to be 15 or younger, because you are still an adult at 16 in New York State until October 2018. These are 11-year-olds we see coming in who've had some traumatic experiences. But because they're in juvenile delinquency court, the judge has to look at them for this particular offense and almost partition everything that's happened to that kid, where other institutions have failed them.

Carla Shedd: We can see across judges the kind of ways that they evaluate what kids do, and they say, "Oh, well. I may detain you, because I don't want to send you back to your bad neighborhood where you're likely to get rearrested." This is how social factors are influencing legal decisions. I'm really wanting to document all these processes, because often all we just have is a snapshot. These amount of kids are arrested. These are the kids who are put in placement. But how do they get there? What are the sort of ways that they've gone to and through institutions that have perhaps given them resources? I've seen trans youth show up in the court, and the judge may say, "Because you're in my court, I could get you hormones." But the judge may also call this trans youth a public health menace and detain her because of that.

Carla Shedd: I want to capture the data, the evidence, the nuance even so that we can't look away, and we can't sort of say, "What is not happening as we devise policy moving forward?" It really is timely in a way that we're raising the age, closing Rikers, all of these systems are coming back to the court that I study, where they're going to have an expanded reach of 16-year-olds this year, in October, next year it'll be 17-year-olds in they're going to see different types of offenses. I'm having to be very careful in my analysis of how I think not only looking backward from this retrospective data on what they have done, but we have to sort of say, "What should we be doing more and what should we perhaps not do because it's doing more harm as we move forward?"

Tanya Domi: That is a book, I hope it's maybe several books. It sounds like it could more than one book. What a great opportunity for PhD students to work with you on this. We'll have you back to discuss your research as it evolves, because these are really important issues. The horror stories of people ending up in jail, somebody was 14 and was just sprung from jail, was a wrongful conviction. This man is 41 years old, the judge said this was completely wrong, and she took his hands into her hands. But I can't imagine it. So I think that whatever your research does, if it can help inform people in a way that will preserve children in their ability to exercise agency and grow into a better, more mature human being, then more power to you, Professor Shedd. Thank you for being with us today.

Carla Shedd: Thank you for having me.

Tanya Domi: Thanks for tuning in to The Thought Project. And thanks to our guest, Professor Carla Shedd.

Tanya Domi: The Thought Project was produced in partnership with CUNY TV, located at The Graduate Center in the heart of New York City with production, engineering, and technical assistance by Sarah Fishman and Jack Horowitz. I'm Tanya Domi, tune in next week.