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From Slavery to Social Class to Disadvantage: An Intellectual History of the Use of Class to Explain Racial Differences in Criminal Involvement

ABSTRACT

Social class differences have been invoked to explain perceived racial differences in criminal involvement in the United States since the middle of the nineteenth century. Scholars have joined with the public and the media to make such arguments with mixed success. Despite criticism of the theories and research methods used and contradictory evidence, social class arguments have persisted. Among the most enduring are subculture of violence and subculture of poverty theories, which purportedly explain instrumental crimes such as property crime, drug sales, and robbery, but also violence including homicide and assault. Proponents argue that African Americans are carriers of pro-crime norms and values. Criminologists and sociologists have recently advanced more parsimonious theories that posit that structured social and economic disadvantage account for racial and ethnic patterns of crime. Good data and analysis provide compelling supporting evidence. Ethnographic evidence has compellingly shown that observable cultural differences are consequences of disadvantage and not causes of the conditions in which the impoverished poor live.

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If you have thought about crime in the United States, you have thought about race and crime. To think about crime anywhere in the world is to think also about how and why some segments of the population have more criminal involvement and more victimization, or about differences in how states vary in responding to crimes by people of different groups (e.g., Tonry 1995; Wortley 2003; Crutchfield and Pettinicchio 2009; Crutchfield, Pettinicchio, and Robbins 2013). Where race is not the focus, differences in ethnicity, religion, immigration status, or some other marker of being “the other” are part of how we think about and talk about crime. In the United States and increasingly in other nations, higher levels of criminality among “others” are popularly attributed to one of two factors: inferiority or social class position. The “inferiority” explanations range from misplaced and antiquated biological conceptions of race to ethnocentric comparisons of cultures. A popular explanation of anti-Latin American immigration riots in Spain, for example, was that rioters were reacting to imported gang activity (Harter 2007). The French foreign minister at the time, and later president, Nicholas Sarkozy justified punitive police actions in Paris suburbs on the basis that the rioters were merely “thugs,” who just happened to be North African and Muslim “immigrants.” Notably, many participants have been residents of France for more than a generation, were French citizens, or both, but still were not considered to be French (Haddad and Balz 2006).

Efforts to explain racial and ethnic differences in criminality by explaining that “subordinated others” frequently are of the lower social and economic classes are common among both scholars and the general public, especially among those of a more liberal political persuasion. These explanations are the subject of this essay.

Some basic definitional clarifications are in order. Here in writing about race and ethnicity, I refer to basic understandings by educated Americans that are used by most scholars of race, crime, and ethnicity. The relevant groups in the United States are Asians, blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, and whites or, if one prefers, European Americans. These categories are socially constructed and meld scholarly understanding of the meaning of race and ethnicity. Within these groups there are important subdivisions. Within the category “black” are African Americans, a growing African immigrant population, and people whose families trace their lineage to the islands of the Caribbean. The Latino or “Hispanic” population is lumped together in government data

collections but includes groups of people who have been in what is now the United States far longer than many who are generally referred to as "white." Hispanics include people from many different nations, people who are native to the United States, immigrants who have long lived in the United States, and more recent arrivals. The same is true of "Asians." Unfortunately, criminologists have only recently begun to explore this complexity. Most of the arguments and research discussed here use the black/white dichotomy that has long characterized the criminological literature. Since the 2010 census of the US population, Latinos have been the second-largest demographic group in the country, and criminologists have fortunately moved beyond the black/white dichotomy (Peterson, Krivo, and Hagan 2006). Where appropriate, I discuss some of that more recent literature, mostly concerning Latinos.

It is also important to define what is meant by "crime." My focus is on common crimes of property and violence, because that is where the literature on race and crime has focused. If we begin a conversation that asks "what racial group commits more crime, and why?" we come to very different answers if the focus is on common crimes, as has been true of most criminological literature on race, crime, and social class. If the focus is on white-collar crime, or even includes white-collar crime (or organized crime), we would be asking "why are white folks so crime-prone?" Unfortunately, criminologists have not frequently paid much attention to that issue and would likely say the reason is simply that whites are more frequently positioned to have opportunities for white-collar violations, so it is not very interesting. Some would disagree. Still others say that the lack of serious work on this topic says a great deal about American society and perhaps even more about American criminology. Nevertheless, my aim here is to examine the intellectual history of our collective use of conceptions of social class to explain why there are racial differences in common crime involvement.

Social class explanations for racial differences in criminality are popular because of two sets of observed correlations. First, more African Americans are involved in some types of crimes, especially the kinds of crimes likely to result in prison sentences, than are whites, and mostly people from the lower social classes serve time for these offenses. African Americans are overrepresented among lower socioeconomic classes. Second, neighborhoods, cities, and states with larger African American populations have higher crime rates, and those same places frequently also have higher poverty rates. No serious scholar should stumble into

the ecological fallacy and interpret this second set of correlations in aggregate data as meaning that poor black people are the ones committing the crimes. Just that connection, however, perhaps because of the first set of correlations, is frequently made in the criminological literature, and it is certainly made in "polite company." In examining the intellectual history of use of social class to explain the correlation between race and crime, we should be careful to note that this explanation has been made at both individual and aggregate levels. Both levels have implications for our capacity to understand race and crime better by taking account of differences in racial distribution across social classes.

I use the notion of social class very broadly, unencumbered by the usual measurements of socioeconomic status or SES employed by social scientists. By social class I mean any and all distinctions in economic positioning or standing of individuals or groups. That ranges from aligning people on a linear social class hierarchy based on income and occupation to slave and free distinctions and variations between these poles such as those invented by Jim Crow, post-Civil War America. In this essay I trace efforts to explain that African Americans and increasingly Latinos engage in more crime because they disproportionately come from or live as lower social class people.

The intellectual history of this line of reasoning is rooted far back in American history. It predates the founding of the United States. Justifications for the slave trade included European conceptions of Africans as lazy and brutish and included assertions that they had only themselves to "blame" for the conditions in which they lived (conditions that were negatively and ethnocentrically evaluated by Eurocentric writers) and their enslavement (Daykin 2006; Rönnbäck 2014). Along the way, I consider arguments and evidence that contest the assertion that members of these groups are indeed more criminal, because much of that challenge is based on disputed conceptions of what social class means and how scholars have measured the critical concepts race and crime.

The first part of this essay briefly considers conceptions of Africans, slavery, and violations of law before the twentieth century. It should not be a surprise that conceptions were crude, but they set the stage for arguments that became popular in the last half of the twentieth century. The second section explores early answers to the question "why are more blacks arrested?" This became an important question as the United States became increasingly urbanized at the same time as large

numbers of African Americans moved from the rural South to cities in the North, South, and West in what demographers call the Great Migration. Subcultural theories emerged to explain higher black crime rates that became evident when the federal government established the Uniform Crime Reports. A survey of theoretical and methodological debates follows. Finally, I discuss the reemergence of structural arguments that focus on social and economic disadvantage, and more nuanced versions of cultural considerations, that help provide good sociological-criminological explanations for why members of some communities of color have higher rates of crime.

I. The Early Years

We have no good measures to distinguish racial or ethnic differences in criminality before the middle of the twentieth century, and the measures developed then have been subjected to considerable criticism. The lack of measurement, though, did not stop people from asserting that blacks were more violent, more dangerous. The nineteenth-century southern writer and reformer, George W. Cable, describing the “sentiments” of white America that justified slavery wrote,

First, then, what are these sentiments? Foremost among them stands the idea that he is of necessity an alien. He was brought to our shores a naked, brutish, unclean, captive, pagan savage,* to be and remain a kind of connecting link between man and the beasts of burden. The great changes to result from his contract with a superb race of masters were not taken into account. As a social factor he was intended to be as purely zero as the brute at the other end of his plow-line.

*Sometimes he was not a mere savage but a trading, smithing, weaving, town-building, crop-raising barbarian. (Cable [1889] 1969, p. 6)

Where did these early conceptions of Africans come from? Thomson (2008) argues that there was not a coherent narrative about Africans to base the slave trade on until the abolition movement gained traction in Europe in the mid-eighteenth century. The abolitionists' narrative was countered by people who used “science” to justify slavery by arguing that Africans were a different sort of human, in need of the civilizing influence and religious enlightenment that Europeans could provide within the context of slavery. Scientific racism continued to be a basis

for opposing equality for blacks in the United States well after emancipation (Smith 2007).

Perhaps ironically, in spite of the “brutish,” “dangerous” nature of the African, very few were imprisoned in the slave-holding South before the Civil War. That region lagged behind the rest of the nation in penal reforms begun by Jeremy Bentham and others that led to the building of penitentiaries in the North. It made little economic sense to punish black law violators by locking them up and depriving their masters of their labor, so punishment, frequently harsh and “brutish,” was left to the master.¹ After the war, after emancipation, when black southerners were no longer the property of slaveholders, when they were freedmen, the numbers of blacks held in captivity as convicts by states grew dramatically (Crutchfield and Finke 1983).

It is popularly believed that the convict lease system in the South after Reconstruction was a means of reinstating slavery. It is more accurate to portray it as part of a larger system to subjugate blacks and keep them subservient and available as cheap labor, shifting the economic or class position of blacks from being slaves to their new roles as sharecroppers and tenant farmers. The convict leasing system provided labor for dangerous and difficult jobs including mining and railroad construction and served as a threat to keep free black workers in line (Adamson 1983).

Cable’s description of the lease system indicates how racialized it was. Cable, when studying southern prisons, found the published census numbers to be hiding something onerous, much as contemporary sociologists studying American prisons have done (Pettit and Western 2004; Pettit and Lyons 2009; Pettit 2012):

The official testimony of the prisons themselves is before the world to establish the conjectures that spring from our reasoning. After the erroneous takings of the census of 1880 in South Carolina had been corrected the population was shown to consist of about twenty blacks to every thirteen whites. One would therefore look for a preponderance of blacks on the prison lists; and inasmuch as they are a people only twenty years ago released from servile captivity, one would not be surprised to see that preponderance large. Yet, when the actual

¹ US census reports for 1850 and 1860 show very few blacks held in prison, but by the 1870 census, even though this was during Reconstruction, their numbers increased considerably (Crutchfield and Finke 1983). For a description of slave punishments in the pre-American Revolutionary War period, see Aguirre (1999) or Paton (2001).

numbers confront us, our speculations are stopped with a rude shock; for what is to account for the fact that in 1881 there were committed to the State prison in Columbia South Carolina, 406 colored persons and but 25 whites? The proportion of blacks sentenced to the whole black population was one into every 1488; that of the whites to the white population was but one in every 15,644. (Cable 1969, pp. 32–33)

The difference was that blacks were disproportionately held outside of what were, even by standards of the day, awful prison conditions in the South Carolina penitentiary, in the much worse lease systems, exploiting their labor, shortening their lives, and buttressing the post-Reconstruction racial and social hierarchy. Cable noted similar distributions in other states that used variations on the convict leasing systems.

We cannot credibly use racial distributions in nineteenth-century imprisonment to say anything meaningful about differences in criminal involvement, but at that time they were used for that purpose. This changed only marginally well into the twentieth century before the public, politicians, and even criminologists made the “enlightened” move toward using arrest statistics to demonstrate that blacks engaged in more crime than whites (e.g., von Hentig 1940; McKeown 1948). And, like the apologists for slavery noted by Cable, some attributed the higher number of blacks in confinement in the nineteenth century and higher levels of arrests in the twentieth century to the brutish nature of people of African blood. More liberal thinkers, like Cable himself, pointed to social conditions and notably blacks’ economic positioning and social conditions.²

II. Why Are More Blacks Arrested?

When the FBI began collecting crime statistics for the Uniform Crime Reports in the early 1930s, arrest rates became available nationally, or nearly nationally. It became possible to make statements about characteristics of those taken into custody. Higher black arrest rates fit with the predominant belief that blacks were more involved in crime than whites. That led for many to the conclusion that blacks were more frequently arrested because they engage in more and more serious criminal

² At the turn of the twentieth century, African American intellectuals from different sides of the political spectrum argued that black law violations resulted from the conditions and circumstances of black day-to-day life (Du Bois 1899; Washington 1912).

behavior. This was a data source in which the more "liberal" explanation, the lower social class position occupied by nearly all black people, could not be tested.

While many assumed that social class differences explained racial differences, others took a different tack: blacks commit more crimes because they are embedded in a pro-crime subculture. That alternative is a hybrid of the two extremes I described above: either the brutish, in-born constitution of people of African descent makes them more criminal or continuous occupation of the lower rungs of the social class stratification ladder is responsible. This argument has the added benefit that it can explain their higher levels of both materially motivated property crime and violence. Underlying many low-SES-leads-to-high-crime arguments is an instrumental conception of crime motivation. With the exception of robbery and homicides resulting from robbery, however, additional conceptual work is required to explain why people from the lower social classes would be any more likely than other people to commit rapes or assaults or to kill without pecuniary motivation. That explanation was provided by those who argued that African Americans were affected by a subculture of violence or by subcultures of poverty values and beliefs.

A. Crime-Conducive Subcultures

African Americans who must live in lower-income places, which meant nearly all until late in the twentieth century, were exposed to and said to be more likely to internalize norms and values and patterns of behavior that made crime more likely. They became carriers of a crime-conducive subculture. Two variants of subculture theory link racial differences in crime to racial differences in social class: most prominently the subculture of violence thesis advanced by Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967) and various theories of the subculture of poverty that have been prominent in sociology and criminology (e.g., Banfield 1970; Murray 1984).

The subculture of violence theory posited that high rates of violence in inner-city communities existed because residents carried pro-violence values and norms. The subculture of poverty thesis is that the values of the poor either directly cause crime, because people socialized into particular sets of values, norms, and beliefs engage in crime rather than patiently wait for legitimate opportunities, or indirectly cause crime be-

cause their values do not attach sufficient importance to such things as education and hard work. A fundamental thesis is that poverty subcultural values are a fundamental cause of poor peoples' continuing impoverished state. Central to both the subculture of violence and the subculture of poverty arguments are two tenets: first, that values, norms, beliefs, and patterns of behavior that are different from those of people in the cultural mainstream are fundamentally responsible for the criminal involvement of particular segments of the population (carriers of the subculture); and, second, that subcultures are passed down intergenerationally, primarily within families.

Wolfgang and Ferracuti did not limit the appearance of subcultures of violence to the lower classes but noted that there is fertile ground for the emergence of such values among those living in poor sections of cities. And, while they say that there are other generators of such subcultures, a great deal of their discussion is about its emergence in inner-city, poor, predominantly black neighborhoods. Their theory emerged from their study of homicide patterns in Philadelphia. They noticed higher rates in poorer neighborhoods and from that observation developed their version of the subculture of violence. Many of Philadelphia's black residents in the 1950s and 1960s lived in those poor places. So while their version of the theory is not expressly about race, they, and subsequently others, used it to explain why African Americans have higher rates of involvement in criminal violence than do native-born whites or most white immigrant groups. They specify that subcultures of violence emerge in lower-class, urban, nonwhite communities and are perpetuated by the social structure of the place, characteristics of the families that live there, the value system in place, and an emphasis on aggression. Poverty is central to their thesis, leading to more female-headed households with mothers who, more frequently than their white middle-class counterparts, act aggressively toward their partners and their children. This leads to higher levels of female homicide alongside high levels of male homicide, which result from street aggressions and gang activity. Child-rearing (punishing) patterns help to transmit the subculture into subsequent generations.

Davis (1981, pp. 156-61) lumped the subculture of violence thesis together with differential association theory (Sutherland 1924) and other formulations that appeared in reaction to and rejection of consensus conceptions of society embraced by early disorganization theorists and functionalists (Park, Burgess, and McKenzie 1925; Davis 1937; Davis

and Moore 1945). Her argument was that Wolfgang and Ferracuti acknowledged normative differences but would not take the political step to link the lot of the poor to their position in the social stratification system. Historian Roger Lane (1986), although he focused on an earlier period (1860–1900), studying many of the sections of Philadelphia that Wolfgang and Ferracuti wrote about, attributed black violence to “exclusion” (social and economic stratification, which Davis would likely consider more politically honest) rather than to cultural differences.

Another subculture of violence thesis, focusing on southern subculture, attributes pro-violence values that blacks purportedly carry to their southern roots (Gastil 1971; Butterfield 2008). Slavery, a harsh, violent, brutish system, was perpetuated by violence, as was the post-Reconstruction Jim Crow system. And lynching, used widely to keep blacks in their place, was a regular occurrence well into the twentieth century (Tolnay and Beck 1995). Gastil (1971) used the southern subculture of violence thesis to explain high rates of violent crime in the southern states and argued that blacks took it with them when they moved to the cities of the North and South. Butterfield (2008) traces high southern regional violence rates to the honor and manhood culture of the Scottish Highlands, brought to the American South by Scotch-Irish immigrants.

Subculture of poverty arguments have some elements in common with Wolfgang and Ferracuti’s thesis. Two notable examples are Banfield’s widely read *The Unheavenly City* (1970) and Murray’s *Losing Ground* (1984). Murray’s book was widely seen as providing the intellectual blueprint for federal welfare reform during the 1990s. Banfield, like Wolfgang and Ferracuti, asserted that his was not a theory about race. Few who read it, however, would have thought of many other groups than blacks as he described how people of the lower classes, lacking middle-class values, such as capacity and willingness to defer gratification, were more likely to engage in behaviors, including crime, that caused urban problems. For Banfield, higher rates of crime among African Americans resulted from higher proportions of that population not having absorbed and not reflecting important middle-class values.

Banfield and Wolfgang and Ferracuti in their different ways link the emergence and perpetuation of subcultures to poverty and life in lower-class communities. They give a slight tip of the intellectual hat to the social forces that lead to people living in these circumstances. There is, especially for Banfield, an implication that these lower-class people, these

black lower-class people, are there because of their own failings, because of their values and beliefs.

Lieberson's groundbreaking *A Piece of the Pie* (1981) was published a decade after Banfield's book. In it he contrasts the experiences of white European immigrants from southern, central, and eastern Europe and those of African Americans. He shows that blacks were substantially more disadvantaged by labor market discrimination and segregation than were any of those other groups. For post-Lieberson writers to fail to appreciate the very different experiences of black migrants from the American South compared with those of European immigrants is to paint an inaccurate picture and do real harm to people in public and political debates.

There are a number of things wrong with the subculture theories of crime. They tend toward tautology, because they tell us that people who engage in violence do so because they have pro-violence norms and values, and we know that because they have engaged in violence. Empirical support for subcultural arguments has been lacking; there have been notable critiques (see, e.g., Ryan 1971; Erlanger 1972; Ball-Rokeach 1973). Another, more fundamental problem, shared by other sweeping, aggregate theories of crime and delinquency, is that these perspectives grossly overpredict criminality. Most poor people, and for that matter most people who live in violent neighborhoods, do not engage in crime. Given the mechanisms that subculture theories describe, more of the people who live in those places should be criminals, and most are not. And, perhaps most importantly, poor and minority people in earlier times did not differ from people in the mainstream on basic norms and values (Ball-Rokeach 1973).

B. Social and Political Context of Theoretical and Methodological Shifts

The most relevant social, political, and methodological shifts precede 1975; they occurred in the turmoil of the 1960s and academics' responses to what was going on in the cities and on campuses. Nanette Davis (1981) argues that consideration of the social and political environment in which scholars were working as they developed explanations for crime and deviance offers a useful tool for understanding theoretical developments. Using her framework, it is not hard to understand why social constructionist and Marxist ideas became popular during a time when people marched and occasionally rioted in the streets, and cam-

puses became centers of social and political activism ranging from non-violence, to building takeovers, to bombings.

Both students and faculty were products of or saw themselves contributing to a new academic and political order. Labeling theory, Marxist theory, and conflict theories more generally provided intellectual explanation and justification for social movements they were supporting or watching. New (and old) left theorists did not look at subordinated racial or ethnic minorities, or the poor, and see in them or their lifestyles justification for their plight, but instead saw them as victims of oppressive states and systems. If these groups were more criminal, the reason was that they were made that way by inequitable social and political arrangements. They were more criminal because of the states' efforts to control and label them or because elites subjugated them and defined them that way. They were poor as a result of these same social arrangements, so any correlations between racial differences and crime and social class differences and crime were spurious and should not be taken seriously.

Both symbolic interactionist and Marxist arguments had been around since the earliest decades of the twentieth century (e.g., Bonger 1916; Tannenbaum 1938) but were not prominent in criminology until scholars and activists challenged the status quo. As a result, these old theoretical approaches became newly popular. Advocates vociferously challenged the status quo explanations of crime, and especially efforts to explain racial differences in crime, and they especially did not embrace subcultural explanations (e.g., Chambliss 1973). More importantly, they challenged the empirical bases for concluding that there were meaningful racial differences in criminality, except those created by the exercise of social control by the state. If there are racial differences, then they are caused by the behavior of state agents, and for that reason, racial distributions of crime observed in data on imprisonment and arrest that earlier theories sought to explain were suspect.

So, at about the same time that Wolfgang and Ferracuti published *The Subculture of Violence* (1967) and Banfield *The Unheavenly City* (1970), critics had already been raising serious challenges to the uncritical use of official criminal justice statistics as a measure of group differences in crime (e.g., Chambliss and Nagasawa 1969; Quinney 1970). Loud critical voices were challenging the very basis for believing that African Americans were more criminal than white Americans.

For the purposes of this essay it is important that these same critics also challenged the proposition that there were real differences between

social classes in criminality. Labeling theorists and Marxists held that the behavior of working people was distinguishable from that of elites only because of how laws were written and enforced. Even if there were racial differences in crime, they should not be explained by the preponderance of the African American population among working classes and poor people, but by the actions of elites that put them there through discrimination and by the creation and maintenance of social structures that oppressed and subjugated people of color, working people, and especially the poor.

Critics challenged the use of arrest statistics to describe the distribution of crime (Chambliss 1964, 1973; Quinney 1977). They argued that official data more accurately reflected the oppressive actions of the state than the behavior of those differentially subjugated by the state's power. Early self-reported crime studies (usually more accurately, self-reported juvenile delinquency studies) seemed to suggest that the critics were right. Using these data, which were not tainted by the actions of police, researchers initially concluded that if there were racial crime and delinquency differences, the differences were small (Schur 1973). Later work indicates that it is likely that arrest statistics exaggerate both racial and class differences in delinquency involvement but that differences do exist.³

The self-report studies also found that social class was unrelated to involvement in delinquency. Middle-class juveniles were as likely to report delinquency involvement as were working- or even lower-class youths. Tittle, Villimez, and Smith (1978) concluded from their meta-analysis of the literature on social class and criminality that if there ever was a relationship between the two variables, it was weak and no longer existed.

Using Davis's framework, one is left to wonder whether the continuing popularity of subculture explanations should be seen as a reactionary effort of the mainstream to assert that the racial differences that they were seeking to explain were real and that their particular theories explained those differences.

³ Later, Elliot and Ageton (1980), studying race, social class, and delinquency in Denver, concluded that significant differences did exist, particularly for more serious violations. Piquero, MacIntosh, and Hickman (2002) concluded that the initial response categories in self-report studies were inadequate, and important differences could be observed when more careful methods were used.

I know of no previous argument that the continuing prominence of either the subculture of violence thesis or the subculture of poverty thesis was a part of the “culture wars” that now dominate much of what passes for public and political discourse in the United States. But that may be. A recurring theme among politicians of both major political parties and some media commentators is the importance of “personal responsibility” (see, e.g., Estrich 2012; Goldman 2013). This point of view has been especially popular among conservatives.⁴ This same theme has been voiced by some academics (e.g., Sowell 1983; Steele 1991).

Subcultural theories, which minimize the effect of social forces and factors that influence behavior and are thus external to the person, are consistent with the “individual, personal responsibility” narrative. I cannot say if any of these commentators endorse subcultural explanations or not, but their popularity is consistent with both the subculture of poverty and the subculture of violence arguments. The rise and success of the welfare reform movement happened in this context. Both subcultural arguments are based on the belief that African Americans and the poor are more engaged in crime as shown by the numbers of both groups who are arrested or are in prison. Both explain how, using these measures, one would conclude that blacks are more engaged in crime than whites because they more heavily populate the lower classes. In light of theoretically based challenges to using official criminal justice statistics to draw conclusions about the distribution of crime, their continued popularity is curious.

The challenge to the use of official data to say anything meaningful about crime led criminologists to make wider use of self-reported and victimization data, information less tainted by the actions of criminal justice agents and the system they work for. Later and better self-report studies generally reported that African Americans engaged in more crime and delinquency than whites but that the gap is considerably narrower than is indicated by arrest statistics.

C. The Resurgence of Subculture Arguments

By 1975, critics were carrying a full-on attack on the views that people of color were more criminal and that this could be explained by social

⁴ Both Mitt Romney (<http://atlantablackstar.com/2012/09/17/romney-obama-supporters-dont-take-personal-responsibility-for-their-lives/>) and Fox News’ Bill O’Reilly (<http://video.foxnews.com/v/2011766333001/america-and-personal-responsibility/?#sp=show-clips>) have made strong statements about individual personal responsibility.

class differences. Nonetheless, the subculture explanations, initially articulated in the 1950s, were restated, repackaged, and revived. Although subculture explanations remained popular in public and political discourse, they appeared only inconsistently in the academic literature, frequently turning up when an aggregate analysis showed that the crime rate, especially the violent crime rate, increased as the nonwhite or poor percentage of a population increased. Curtis (1975) criticized some efforts to attribute crime and urban problems to a subculture of poverty:

Because it contains more powerful directives of policy and has been more influential on decision makers, Banfield's *The Unheavenly City* is a much more unfortunate use of cultural determinism to reach the spurious conclusion that poor blacks have only themselves to blame for their situation. Although he is often factually inaccurate, not uncommonly misinterprets the works of others, and produces little empirical underpinning to justify what is authoritatively called the "Myth of Poverty," Banfield in effect concludes that the manifest and unheavenly matrix of urban America has one basic and latent function—the lower-class (read poor black) value system. "The lower-class forms of all problems are at bottom a single problem: the existence of an outlook and style of life which is radically present-oriented and which therefore attaches no value to work, sacrifice, self-improvement, or service to family, friend, or community." (Curtis 1975, p. 19)

Few things characterize the corporate and political elites of the United States more than "present-oriented" thinking. Wall Street indices dance up and down on the basis of quarterly earnings statements. Investment fund watchers, chief executive officers, and investors make million dollar decisions based on "what have you done for me lately" earnings reports. Members of Congress begin fund-raising for the next 2-year campaign before they are sworn in to their current seat. Curtis concludes his critique by asserting that Banfield failed to take seriously the structural circumstances in which poor, black, urban populations found themselves. "Thus the choice is not necessarily seen as one between immediate and deferred gratification, but probably more accurately as between immediate gratification and no gratification at all" (p. 19).

But Curtis's intent was not to bury subculture explanations, but to resurrect the arguments of his mentor, Marvin Wolfgang, and to breathe new life into this explanatory model using a multicity analysis of violent

crime in 17 large American cities. He argued that subcultural norms and values are the intervening mechanisms between the stratification, discrimination, and disadvantage that urban blacks experience and higher rates of violent crime.

Unfortunately, though Curtis examined more cities than Wolfgang and Ferracuti's Philadelphia, he was still left positing that unmeasured forces, pro-violence norms and values, explain why aggregate African American arrest rates were high. His data gave him no better way than other proponents of the subcultural theses had tried to use to measure differences between those in the subculture and others on critical features of culture, norms, values, beliefs, and ways of behaving and those in the intergenerational transmission of these differences. In the absence of a capacity to measure these critical features of culture, one might think of such retreats to saying "it must be a subculture" as a black-box theory of criminology. Had the research focused on property crime, presumably subcultural values would have been unneeded in his explanations.

Unfortunately, Lieberman's work did not doom such subculture arguments. They kept reappearing. Murray (1984) came to a place similar to Banfield's but via a different route. Murray believed that the majority of poor Americans were hardworking and raised their children to value hard work in school and beyond and to avoid shortcuts like crime. However, that changed in the aftermath of establishment of the welfare state with New Deal programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children and Social Security and subsequent expansion of federal welfare programs in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵ Welfare dependence, Murray argued, fostered an unhealthy dependence on the state, and as a result, recipients no longer conveyed messages about the value of hard work to succeeding generations. The welfare state no longer supported primarily a majority of poor recipients who believed in working hard and a very small minority content to let others care for them, but instead supported a new majority who were content to languish on the dole. As benefits improved, the size of this group, whose values not only were counter to education and hard work but were also criminogenic, grew larger. Essentially Mur-

⁵ Many New Deal programs were instituted in a racialized way that excluded African Americans. Policy changes attempted, with mixed success, to address this (Lieberman 1995). Because a majority of African Americans lived in the South until after World War II, they disproportionately did not benefit from the welfare system because those states provided comparatively less welfare benefits and support (Wilson 1987).

ray argued that welfare made them do it. Like other subcultural theorists, Murray did not make race a central part of his thesis, but he acknowledged that the poor in America were disproportionately African American. It is hard to read *Losing Ground* and not think of black welfare dependents.

Lawrence Mead, also very influential in the 1980s and 1990s welfare reform debates, took a somewhat different tack. In *Beyond Entitlement* (1986) and subsequent books (1993, 2004, 2011), he argued that welfare should be used to develop and strengthen the work ethic among the poor, who he felt had been lulled into passively accepting that they were entitled to support. For Mead it is about jobs: if the poor learned the value of work, they would get good jobs and solve their own problems. Welfare programs should be used to compel poor people to take on employment so that they might come to value hard work. Mead's beginning point, like Murray's, was that the poor had a fundamental problem, undervaluing hard work.

Just as Ball-Rokeach (1973) reported earlier, contemporary scholars still find that the poor do not differ from other people, as most politicians and many in the public suppose, in their views of work and welfare (Harris 2002; Hays 2003).⁶ Where they appear to differ, they usually do so because they adhere to dominant values in unexpected ways. Page (2013) found evidence of parents not discouraging their offspring from drug dealing when this entrepreneurial activity was all that was available. The parents were not pro-crime, they were pro-small business. In some struggling underclass communities, "the hot man" who sells stolen goods fills a supply vacuum that exists because there are few or no stores available.

For tracing the development of the idea that racial differences in criminality can be explained by racial differences in social class, subculture explanations are interesting in a number of ways. First, they drew direct attention to poverty and not just a linear conception of social class in trying to make sense of racial differences. This is particularly important because they did not have to explain noninstrumental crimes like violence. Most laypeople, and not a few social scientists, assume that a class-

⁶ Harris (2002) found that views on issues such as the value of work and attitudes toward welfare reform varied not by demographic characteristics but by social location. To an extent that might surprise many, Hays (2003) found that women who received welfare payments also endorsed the "personal responsibility" ethic that social commentators and politicians frequently asserted had been lost.

crime connection exists because people steal to satisfy needs and wants. This may at times be true, but that does not help explain why African Americans have comparatively higher rates of homicide and other forms of criminal violence. In any case, it is far less clear that blacks have higher rates of property crime; studies that find such racial differences do not find them to be as large as the racial differences in involvement in violent crimes (Sampson and Lauritsen 1997).⁷

Second, the recurrence of and academic, political, and public embrace of subculture explanations are interesting in their timing. From the 1950s and 1960s, when notable criminological texts using subculture arguments appeared (Cohen 1955; Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967), to the mid-1980s, when conservative arguments (Murray 1984; Mead 1986) were embraced by Republicans and Democrats alike during welfare reform debates, important theoretical and methodological changes were occurring in the scholarly literature, and universities, colleges, and cities were roiled by political conflict. Those conflicts led to the modern reemergence of symbolic interactionism, the labeling theory of deviance, and Marxist criminology. They were critical of mainstream criminology, including subculture perspectives, and the data sources mainstream scholars used.

A little later William Julius Wilson delivered a devastating critique of Murray's arguments, analyses, and policy recommendations in *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987). Central to Murray's thesis is his contention that expanding welfare benefits in the early 1970s and stable benefits after the mid-1970s encouraged recipients to forsake work and subsist on benefits. In reality, Wilson points out, benefits fell substantially during that period.

Before I turn to the theoretical and methodological changes that defined the academic context in which subculture explanations inexplicably continued to flourish, a look at social and political occurrences in cities and on campuses that defined the social and political context is in order.

The continued popularity of subculture arguments into 1990 conversations about welfare reform, in light of academic criminology's near abandonment of these explanations of racial differences in crime, should be seen as a part of the American culture wars. Murray's *Losing Ground*

⁷ Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis (1979) found racial differences in property crime measured with arrest statistics to be smaller than were racial differences in arrest for violent crimes. Crutchfield (1994), examining data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), found no significant racial differences in property crime involvement.

(1984) should be seen as part of a wave of other books that developed similar ideas, including Wilson and Herrnstein's *Crime and Human Nature* (1985). That book sought to link sociobiology and behaviorism to create a grand theory explaining why criminals (not explicitly black and brown criminals, but . . .) were fundamentally and constitutionally different from the rest of us law-abiding citizens. Herrnstein and Murray's *The Bell Curve* (1995) argued that class differences, and racial differences too, were largely a consequence of inherited intelligence.

What these widely read, widely discussed books have in common is that they shift the focus of discussions from the structural economic, social, and criminal circumstances of the poor, the black, and the brown to the individuals themselves. This harkens back to the early-twentieth-century social Darwinists who advocated that individual poor people and families be helped to adjust to their inevitable straitened lots in life rather than attempt to alter the social arrangements in which they lived (Sumner 1952; Spencer 1961).

III. Individual Racial Differences in Criminal Involvement and Social Class

For a time, few researchers used arrest data in studies of race crime and justice in response to the leftist critiques of their use in mainstream criminology to measure the racial or social class differences in criminal involvement. That was short-lived.

Scholars began looking more closely at these data and concluded they were useful after all. Hindelang (1978) examined racial differences in commission of personal crimes using reports of victims in the National Crime Survey (NCS), later renamed the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). Racial differences shown by victims' descriptions of their assailants in the NCS were not the same as those in Uniform Crime Reports arrest statistics, but they were much closer than self-report data indicated. African Americans were significantly more involved than whites in the more serious types of crime most likely to come to the attention of law enforcement.

Arrest data continue to be used in some bodies of research, notably studies of racial disproportionality in criminal justice case processing (Blumstein 1982, 1993; Langan 1985; Bridges and Crutchfield 1988; Crutchfield, Bridges, and Pitchford 1994; Travis, Western, and Redburn 2014; Spohn 2015). This is primarily a matter of convenience be-

cause no other national measures are widely available to investigate whether racial differences in the criminal justice system can be accounted for in part by criminal involvement differences. Langan (1985), like Hindelang earlier, used NCVS data to confirm that measuring aggregate variations by race in serious crimes was defensible. Blumstein (1982, 1993) concluded that racial arrest rate distributions are less error-laden when the focus is on the most serious crimes concerning which police use less discretion when deciding whether to make an arrest.

Scholars had used self-reports of crime and delinquency long before left-wing academics criticized mainstream criminology for using arrest records to study racial differences in offending (e.g., Glueck and Glueck 1940). Self-reports and then victimization studies became the preferred sources of data. Tittle, Villemez, and Smith (1978) published results of a meta-analysis of self-reported crime and delinquency studies and concluded that there was not a real association between crime and class. Researchers subsequently validated the use of well-designed self-report studies and concluded that there were racial differences in delinquency and crime but that they were much less than the stark differences shown in police data (Elliott and Ageton 1980; Morenoff 2005).

Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis (1979, 1981) went further, arguing that there were important racial differences in commission of serious crimes, and there were likely also social class differences. After careful study of self-reported measures of delinquency and official records, they concluded that many of the earliest self-reported delinquency studies examined very minor forms of violation, some so minor that they might better be called "juvenile misbehavior" than delinquency. Scholars had focused too much on minor violations. More serious crimes are relatively rare, and younger and smaller school samples tended to undercount the most at-risk kids. As a consequence, the surveys frequently did not generate data that allowed for meaningful study.⁸

Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis (1979, 1981) concluded that self-reports and official statistics did not differ so much because of errors in one, the other, or both, but because they measured different domains of crime and delinquency. Self-reports are good for examining variations in rel-

⁸ That is, unless the survey has a very large sample. Both the NLSY and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health are sufficiently large. They have included self-reported crime and delinquency items, including some serious violations. Criminologists have used these data sources, but predictably the distributions on the crime variables are highly skewed.

atively minor forms of violation; for some topics, this is quite appropriate. But official records, they argued, provided better measures for more serious criminal activity. They did not dismiss the left's critique of these data. The authors acknowledge that, like nearly all data, official records contain errors, perhaps more errors than in many other data used by scientists, but they are the best widely available measures of serious crime and delinquency.

The NCVS has been used effectively to compare racial differences in criminal involvement, without distortions produced by police decision making and other problems that compromise arrest statistics. The NCVS and other victimization surveys, of course, have limitations. Most importantly, since race and perceptions of crime are intimately linked (Saperstein and Penner 2010; Drakulich 2013), victims of violent crimes, when asked about the characteristics of perpetrators, may guess at the race or ethnicity of the perpetrator and be more likely to guess a person of color if his or her appearance is ambiguous.

Victimization data afford important opportunities to get a better handle on the racial distribution of some serious crimes. Lauritsen and Heimer (2010) used NCVS data to examine racial differences in nonfatal violence and found that blacks and Latinos were the perpetrators of violence more frequently than whites, but this association is linked differentially to macroeconomic conditions.⁹ This and other studies demonstrate the efficacy of using victimization surveys to get less biased views of racial distributions in offending, but most such studies do not help us understand to what extent differences can be accounted for by social class differences.

An interesting by-product is that we have learned that things are different than arrest data seemed to show. Police data suggest that African Americans and Latinos engage in more crime than do whites and that this does not appreciably vary by crime type. It is more complicated than that. The race/crime correlation for individuals is strongest for violent crime, weaker for property crime, and pretty much nonexistent for drug-related offenses (Felson, Glenn, and Armstrong 2008).

So, we should ask, what exactly are we trying to explain when using social class to make sense of racial differences in criminality? This is complicated by the weak social class and crime association. For instance,

⁹ Lauritsen and Heimer found that nonfatal serious violent victimization was falling for Latino, African American, and white males; but while declines for whites are steady, those of men of color declined less during economic slowdowns.

notwithstanding higher minority conviction and imprisonment rates, there is no reason to believe that there are significant racial differences in drug use and drug sales (Tonry 2011). There is reason to believe that drugs of choice of users may vary by social class but that there are not significant differences in which groups use illegal substances (Mosher and Akins 2007). Among young people, substance use is equally distributed across racial and ethnic groups in the United States, and if any group is higher, it is, slightly, whites (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 2015).

Violent crime is different. Victimization surveys (US Department of Justice 1994), public health system vital statistics (Reiss and Roth 1993; National Center for Health Statistics 1995), and even some self-report instruments that include serious offenses are consistent with arrest data in showing general racial differences in violent crime arrests data. Neither victimization studies nor vital statistics provide data on social class differences among perpetrators, but they do indicate that victims of violent crime are disproportionately from the lower classes, which is suggestive of the class of perpetrators. And, it is clear, no matter how scholars measure crime, for both class and race, crime most frequently occurs within groups (O'Brien 1987; Parker and McCall 1999).

These racial patterns have also been noted in studies that seek to examine racial differences in imprisonment. Blumstein (1982, 1993) and Tonry (1995, 2011) concluded that racial differences in arrest for violent crimes tracked well with racial differences in involvement, were unrelated to drug offenses, and have intermediate accuracy with property crimes. All of this leads me to conclude that efforts to disentangle racial differences in crime from racial differences in social class should focus primarily on violence.

IV. Aggregate Racial Differences in Criminal Involvement and Social Class

Some social scientists think that aggregate data are a poor substitute for measuring social reality when "better" individual data are not available. That is not the case. Some important questions are best answered using aggregate data. Simply adding up responses from a survey is not the same; to answer some questions doing so is fine, but for other issues it is not. A better example can hardly be found than the association of poverty rates with violence rates. The aggregate poverty rate is substantively

different from individuals' status of being in poverty. The latter can be learned by asking survey respondents about their income and estimating local costs of living. If a person's or family's poverty status affects his or her lifestyle and life chances, warrants examination, and may provide partial explanation for the likelihood of criminal involvement.

But a group's level of poverty, and especially collective poverty of geographically isolated or segregated groups, has properties above and beyond the sum of the individual poor people in the group. This point has been made repeatedly by sociologists (Wilson 1987, 1996; Massey and Denton 1993). Its relevance for discussions of race and crime has also been prominently noted (Sampson and Wilson 1995; Peterson and Krivo 2009, 2010). And also, as Wikström and Loeber (2000) find, the effects of living in severely disadvantaged neighborhoods can overwhelm protective factors of good kids (good family, doing well in school, etc.), causing them to become involved in delinquency, even serious crime.

William Julius Wilson, in his widely cited books *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987) and *When Work Disappears* (1996), identifies crime as one of the unhappy effects of the social and ecological isolation and concentration of the urban poor that resulted from deindustrialization of American manufacturing cities. When those books were published, the urban underclass was nearly completely black. Wilson hypothesized that these neighborhoods would have high levels of crime. It was not individuals' SES or poverty status that Wilson linked to higher levels of crime, but the group's. The context of concentrated social and economic disadvantage, social isolation, and living among large numbers of others in the same precarious circumstances, over a spatially extended area, was criminogenic. Because Wilson was writing about the urban poor, he was silent on the effects of low SES on people of whatever race living outside of underclass neighborhoods.

Massey and Denton's *American Apartheid* (1993) emphasized racial residential segregation, another feature of urban life that led to concentrated poverty and elevated criminality. A large proportion of the African American population has lived and continues to live in cities that Massey and Denton characterize as hypersegregated.¹⁰ Their analyses

¹⁰ Massey and Denton (1993) defined cities as hypersegregated when they display high segregation on four of five dimensions: unevenness, isolation, clustering, centralization, and concentration. Sixteen metropolitan areas were hypersegregated in 1980: Atlanta, Baltimore, Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Gary, Indianapolis,

demonstrate that a high level of urban racial residential segregation concentrates and exacerbates social problems, including poverty and crime. Other scholars have reinforced aspects of Massey and Denton's thesis (Crowder, Pais, and South 2012; Quillian 2012).

Some social scientists have focused on how Wilson and Massey and Denton differ in the social structural forces they emphasize that make segments of urban America poorer and more dangerous. For my purpose their differences are not important. What is important is their focus on structural conditions—job losses for Wilson, residential racial segregation for Massey and Denton—that offer explanations for higher black crime rates and for how poverty contributes to that elevated rate. Neither specifies the mechanisms that produce crime in underclass, racially segregated places, but others have.

Sampson and Wilson (1995) explain the connection between underclass neighborhoods and high levels of violent crime. Using a contemporary version of social disorganization theory, they argue that disadvantaged, underclass black neighborhoods have more violence because their capacity to regulate what happens there is compromised by low levels of collective efficacy. They hypothesize that violence rates will be higher when collective efficacy is weak and populations living in underclass places face social and economic stresses. For them, SES composition, notably very high levels of poverty in the neighborhoods where many urban African Americans live, accounts for higher rates of violent crime.

Bursik and Grasmick (1993), writing about gang crime and violence and focusing on a different aspect of social organization, came to essentially the same conclusion. For them, it is the incapacity of deeply disadvantaged neighborhoods to get key institutions to work with them or on their behalf. Violence is a product of failures of law enforcement, other criminal justice factors, schools, city offices, and other important institutions to work with and on behalf of those neighborhoods as they do in economically better-off places, especially those populated by whites. Sampson and Wilson, and Bursik and Grasmick, while focusing on different aspects of social disorganization, both help explain how high

Kansas City, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York, Newark, Philadelphia, and St. Louis. Since then, racial residential segregation has diminished a bit, but it remains a major force in American social life.

violent crime rates are generated in black disadvantaged communities. A central feature for both is the social, economic, and political marginalization of very poor black neighborhoods.

An accumulating literature emphasizes structural consequences of class differences to explain racial differences in crime. Bruce (1999) found little support for cultural explanations of racial differences in criminal involvement but found that structural differences were linked to observed patterns. Wright, Entner, and Younts (2009) report that family disruption, lowered educational attainment, and living in disrupted communities are linked to higher crime rates in African American neighborhoods. Peterson and Krivo (2010) use both effects of social and economic disadvantage and racial residential segregation to examine the correlation between race and crime. Examining variations in census tract crime rates in 88 American cities of varying size, they conclude that segregation leads to differential access to the labor market and to social and economic disadvantage; both increase levels of crime and delinquency. Their study is distinctive because they looked at the association between crime and the concentration not only of black and white residents but also of Latinos. Latinos are not nearly as segregated as are African Americans but also suffer from residential segregation, exclusion from equal occupational opportunities, and resulting poverty. Peterson and Krivo conclude that segregation creates, perpetuates, and exacerbates disadvantage by walling off residents in isolated minority communities from social networks that connect people to job opportunities. They show how this causes crime in select neighborhoods:

Neighborhoods that are highly disadvantaged have heightened crime rates for two broad reasons. First, processes that encourage criminal behavior are particularly prevalent in areas where disadvantage abounds. . . . Within a context of limited opportunities, theft and other property crimes may occur in an effort to secure resources, and luxuries that are not otherwise attainable. Activities such as prostitution, drug trafficking, shoplifting, theft and sale of stolen property, and other opportunistic crimes may become regular sources of "income" and a means of acquiring wanted goods and services. . . . Violence as "self-help" may also be used in these crimes, or in other social situations where conflict arises, as participants seek to protect themselves and their possessions rather than engage the police or other authorities. (Peterson and Krivo 2010, p. 33)

Parker (2008) focused on the uneven crime decline in the United States since 1991. African American violence rates have dropped precipitously, but less than they would have because of high levels of joblessness and inequality in inner-city black neighborhoods. Shihadeh (2009) notes that with decreases in racial residential segregation, modest though they may be, more prosperous African Americans have been able to move out of ghettos, leaving more disadvantaged portions of the black population living in more concentrated poverty. And this increases violent victimization in such places.

These scholars recognize that racial residential segregation was created and is maintained by decisions by governments, banks, the insurance industry, and individuals systematically to deprive African Americans of housing opportunities enjoyed, and likely taken for granted, by most white Americans. African American employment was more negatively affected by deindustrialization and the consequent job losses, and labor disadvantages continue because of exclusion from labor markets and housing opportunities and racialized inequalities in education.

The emphasis on continued racial oppression of very poor blacks distinguishes contemporary social disorganization arguments from early-twentieth-century conceptions of social disorganization theory. Those early Chicago School sociologists (see, e.g., Park, Burgess, and McKenzie 1925; Shaw and McKay 1942) did not much focus on the experience of black migrants from the rural South. Instead their efforts to understand the experiences of Poles, Italians, Irish, and other immigrants from Europe who moved into Chicago enclaves inspired them to adopt Durkheimian notions of social solidarity, community organization, and social disorganization. They noted that blacks moving to the city were constrained to live in the "Black Belt" on the South Side. When predicting that migrants from Europe over generations would be assimilated and move from ethnic enclaves into "better" communities, they did not explore the social forces that kept African Americans locked into a narrow, crowded, dense, impoverished strip of land.

Rigid residential segregation was maintained by landlords, rental agents, banks, and realtors who blocked blacks from moving into white areas (Lieberson 1981; Massey and Denton 1993). Many neighborhood associations and deed restrictions forbade new buyers to sell their properties to people of color, especially African Americans, members of some white ethnic groups, and Jews (Gotham 2000).

Federal fair housing law and judicial decisions striking down racial covenants have ameliorated racial bias in housing, but residential segregation in American cities continues. It remains a fact of urban life. The causes include people's preferences about where and with whom they want to live (South and Crowder 1998; Emerson, Chai, and Yancey 2001) and, to a lesser extent, social class (Adelman 2004). Early to mid-twentieth-century European immigrants did better economically in succeeding generations and moved to less disorganized, lower crime rate places.

By contrast, no other ethnic group has been more segregated and more restricted in where they live than African Americans (Massey and Denton 1993). Racial residential segregation and job discrimination kept a large percentage of African Americans in what Wilson would call underclass neighborhoods a half century later. Today, black, brown, and poor segments of the population are faced with gentrification, the movement of the middle and upper classes into the central city, displacing poor and minority residents (Zukin 1987).

Large American cities are increasingly likely to resemble large European cities, with poor and marginalized populations living in portions of the suburban ring but still in ghettoized communities. Those who argued that poor, black places had high levels of violence because of crime-conducive subcultures stepped into the intellectual space created by housing patterns and accompanying problems.

An appreciation of how macrostructural conditions explain racial differences in crime rates has emerged from research published in recent years. These explanations are fundamentally different from early, strain theory attempts to account for the observed patterns. Those early views were largely instrumental—people of color are disadvantaged, which led them more frequently to commit property and other crimes to satisfy wants and desires—and assumed that straightforward conceptions of social class helped explain crime: the working class committed more crimes than middle-class people, and the lower class committed even more, possibly even most street crime. This view was called into question by Tittle, Villemez, and Smith (1978) and disputed by Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis (1981).

We need not resolve or even revive that debate. Linear notions of a monotonic relationship between SES and crime are weak at best. That connection does not aid understanding of racial differences in involve-

ment in common crime, especially violent crime. But poverty as the focus, especially hyperpoverty, provides a better handle. And if that focus is narrowed more to the social and economic disadvantage of inner-city communities, where still too many black people, and a large number of Latinos, must live, we have an explanation for why people of color have higher crime rates, especially higher violent crime rates.

There remain, though, three very interesting issues: heterogeneity of Hispanics in the United States and the low rates of violence of some groups, particularly among immigrants; links between macro- and micro-level processes in understanding individual behavior in context; and the role of culture.

A. Confronting New Issues in Race, Class, and Crime Debates

A growing literature indicates that we should not readily link the Latino or Hispanic population and crime. That literature emphasizes that there is considerable complexity in the associations between Latino ethnicity and crime. Immigrants and nonimmigrants need to be distinguished, and there are different patterns for first and subsequent immigrant generations. National-origin groups have different experiences of immigration, assimilation, and crime. Most importantly for the subject of this essay, Hispanics are not a population segment that is necessarily predominantly lower SES. Martinez and Stowell (2012) find that increases in immigration from Latin America are linked to decreases in homicide, not the increases that xenophobes assume. Sampson (2008) reports that Latino communities have large immigrant populations and lower, not higher, rates of violence than other places. Some of these immigrant groups are among the lowest-SES, highest-poverty groups in the United States.

Complicating the picture more, Jennings et al. (2013) find that there are four distinct trajectories of crime involvement within the US Latino population, including a disproportionate number of low-rate offenders among early immigrants but others who, in varying patterns, offend at higher levels. Historically, Cubans had low levels of criminal involvement, but this changed recently, and they have also not been as economically disadvantaged as other Hispanics. More recently the criminal involvement of Cuban Americans, at least in acquaintance homicide, has increased (Martinez, Lee, and Nielsen 2001). Puerto Rican and perhaps Dominican communities tend to have economic and social experiences

similar to those of African Americans, and their criminal involvement is more comparable (Felson, Deane, and Armstrong 2008; Tran 2012).

Two things are clear when examining the growing literature on Latino criminality and social class. First, it is neither simple nor monolithic. Second, both the immigration and the assimilation experiences of peoples and cultures play important roles, likely more than do social class positions. To the extent that social class matters, it seems to override culture in later generations when groups do not easily assimilate and thereby avoid the perils of living in long-term disadvantaged communities.

Sullivan's *Getting Paid* (1989) focused on labor markets, communities, race, and crime. The ethnographic study examines the effects of the distribution of job opportunities in three different, low-income communities in Brooklyn. Sullivan and his team found that young people's job opportunities were influenced by neighborhood characteristics: the work prospects in their immediate vicinities, the networks that were available to them, and the linkage between the employment of adults and where they worked. The Latino neighborhood, which he called La Barriada, was more isolated from the legitimate labor market than Hamilton Park, where white ethnic boys lived. This was a consequence of a lack of nearby job opportunities and the marginalization of La Barriada adults in the legitimate labor market. The African American juveniles living in "Projectville" came from even more impoverished households and were even more distant, both geographically and socially, from opportunities in the legitimate economy. The Latino boys, and especially the African American boys, were more involved in crime for longer periods than were the white boys. This study, though not focused on social class and crime, illustrates how the social structure of disadvantaged places connects, or fails to connect, individual outcomes to labor market organization and other macro processes.

Pager (2003, 2007) examined how incarceration influences employment and interacts with job aspirants' race and contributed to understanding of how class is linked to race. She found that African American men without criminal records were less successful in procuring interviews than whites with a record. Her findings suggest that racial job discrimination is alive and well in the American labor market. As long as this continues, blacks will disproportionately remain in the lower classes.

Juxtaposing Pager's findings with Sullivan's suggests that African American young men from underclass neighborhoods are handicapped by the continuing stigmata of race when they seek employment. This is

not unlike the patterns reported by Kirschenman and Neckerman (1991) decades earlier. They found that employers in suburbs, where the jobs were, routinely elected not to hire blacks, using the logic that they were likely to be products of Chicago public schools, which were inferior to the suburban schools attended by white applicants.

Crutchfield (2014) linked macro, city, and community levels of labor market inequality, and long-term high levels of social and economic disadvantage in inner-city neighborhoods, to the labor market experience of individuals to explain why higher levels of crime persist in the places where poor black people live.

Lauritsen and Heimer (2010) using NCVS data studied the differential effects of economic downturns on victimization of white, African American, and Latino males. White men were not significantly affected, but Latino and African American victimization fluctuated with consumer sentiment; these men were more susceptible to negative fluctuations in the economy. This may be a by-product of both groups living closer to the margins. These groups suffered more job and housing losses in the recent Great Recession. Life on the economic margins may have caused them to experience more nonfatal violent victimization too.

B. Bringing Culture Back In

The earlier versions of theories about crime-conducive subcultures are often associated with Oscar Lewis's notions of "culture of poverty" or oppositional culture. Lewis (1959) saw these patterns as emerging from the social and economic circumstances in which the poor lived. For Lewis, oppositional culture arose because segments of the population were subjugated by social structure and social stratification, without opportunities and resources, and marginalized in their poverty. His initial work was in Mexico City. He came to believe that some segments of the poor developed the traits others later used to explain high inner-city crime rates, because of where they were in the class structure and because they were systematically marginalized in capitalist economies. For Lewis, these beliefs and behavior patterns emerged from the social positions the poor occupied. People were not poor because of their patterns of life; their patterns of life were adjustments and accommodations to the realities of their existence. Their social position was not the result of their beliefs.

In recent decades, ethnography has reemerged as an important tool for studying crime. A central theme has been the link between race and disadvantage. Small and his colleagues (Small and Newman 2001; Small, Harding, and Lamont 2011) have called for serious considerations of culture in scholarly discussions of poverty. What distinguishes recent ethnographies is their recognition of the critical roles of social structural factors as determinants of the patterns of life and behaviors of the poor. This is not unlike Curtis's (1975) view, but with a real effort to observe and chronicle the workings of culture in day-to-day life.

Too often conflict divides scholars who use quantitative methods and those using qualitative methodologies. This is not helpful to efforts to understand the role of economic forces in the relations between race and crime in the United States. Social structural explanations of the effects on crime of the emergence of underclass neighborhoods in the wake of deindustrialization, racial residential segregation, and labor market conditions tell only a portion of the story.

Left unexplained is the criminogenic culture that emerges in deeply socially and economically disadvantaged places. Ethnographers have studied and attempted to explain what happens in such places and how cultural patterns emerge that perpetuate disadvantage and encourage criminality.

What distinguishes these more recent ethnographies, in contrast to earlier subcultural theorists, is the central place they give to the structured inequality, segregation, and discrimination that have resulted in large numbers of African Americans and Latinos having to live in places where crime occurs all too frequently. They portray these social and economic forces as the creators of disadvantaged places and the crime-conducive belief systems, values, and norms that emerge as consequences of this structured disadvantage. For example, Anderson (1994, p. 81) writes, "Of all the problems besetting the poor inner-city black community, none is more pressing than that of interpersonal violence and aggression. It wreaks havoc daily with the lives of community residents and increasingly spills over into downtown and residential middle-class areas. . . . The inclination to violence springs from the circumstances of life among the ghetto poor—the *lack of jobs that pay a living wage, the stigma of race*, the fallout from rampant drug use and drug trafficking, and the resulting alienation and lack of hope for the future" (emphasis added). This acknowledgment that cultural adaptations emerge

as a result of marginalization from good jobs and racial discrimination is critical. Here Anderson is not, using the phrasing of Ryan (1971), "blaming" the black poor for their circumstances by suggesting that they would not be where they are if not for their values. Instead, their structural circumstances create where they live, the plight in which they live, and the unfortunate crime and violence that plague their communities.¹¹

In the past, some criminologists attributed racial patterns of criminality to subcultures, with no capacity, and too often with no effort, to measure or observe the values or beliefs that purportedly caused those patterns. Contemporary ethnographers, because they left their offices and libraries and went into the field, documented patterns of behavior from informers, interviews, and their own observations. They heard from people living in disadvantaged places and struggling to make it in a difficult, impoverished, challenging environment. They observed and measured the cultural patterns of which they write.

Anderson (1999) wrote of the code of the street that emerged in the context of street life in inner-city, disadvantaged, African American, Philadelphia neighborhoods. Central features of those places were the joblessness, hopelessness, and marginalization of many who lived there. The code of the streets is a response to crime and a cause of crime, but fundamentally this criminogenic cultural adaptation is a consequence of a deep, hyperpoverty of place.

Anderson's and Sullivan's analyses were not exclusively about males, but much of the focus was on boys and young men, who are most frequently the perpetrators and victims of inner-city criminality. Anderson's student, Nikki Jones (2010), focused on young African American women and their struggle to balance contradictory cultural expectations of them as women in the context of extreme social and economic dislocation. Miller's (2008) study of inner-city St. Louis examined the norms, values, and belief systems in communities and schools of girls and young women and the men and boys in their environment, and how all this contributed to the women's victimization. The social isolation and concentrated disadvantage resulting from long-term, collective economic marginalization and poverty are at the center of her narrative.

These studies focused on African Americans. Rios's (2011) examination of gang-involved kids in Oakland, California, included black and Latino boys. He too documents cultural patterns produced by structural

¹¹ Others have written about the importance and centrality of social structure as the basis for emergent belief systems (Miller 2008; Jones 2010; Rios 2011).

inequalities facing residents of inner-city neighborhoods. These and other studies describe processes that to the casual reader may seem to resemble earlier versions of subcultural theories that sought to explain why communities of color had higher levels of crime. What differentiates them is the evidence from in-depth ethnographies and the central role of social structure in the narratives they construct.

Three other ethnographies that focus on particular aspects of place are also relevant. Venkatesh (2000) and Rymond-Richmond (2007) write about how public policy, poverty, and gangs come together in Chicago housing projects to link race with crime. Patillo-McCoy's *Black Picket Fences* (1999) takes on what for some is a troubling question: "If it is about poverty and disadvantaged neighborhoods, why is crime also higher in a middle-class African American neighborhood?" Her answer is straightforward and illustrates the power of social and economic disadvantage. African American middle-class people generally do not live in communities like those occupied by whites of the same social standing (and generally black middle-class economic standing is not nearly as high). White middle-class communities are socially separated from places where poor people live, but they are also geographically separated.

This is not the case for middle-class blacks, who often live near distressed inner-city, sometimes underclass, neighborhoods. That was true of "Groveland," the site of Patillo-McCoy's ethnography. Negative influences spill over from underclass places to middle-class communities, and their children may go to the same schools and share the same parks as children who live in the ghetto. Crime is not higher in middle-class African American communities than in white communities because of some negative trait of the race of people who live there, but because of proximity to deeply poor, socially and economically disadvantaged sections of cities.

These three ethnographies bring the consideration of culture squarely back to the disadvantage and segregation that Sampson and Wilson and Peterson and Krivo conclude are the causes of higher crime rates among African Americans and to some extent of any observed higher criminal involvement among some segments of the Latino population.

C. *Where Are We Now?*

America in the second decade of the twenty-first century is not a postracial society. People of color are disproportionately arrested and

incarcerated. Some of those differences can be attributed to higher rates of crime, but they cannot all be (Travis, Western, and Redburn 2014). There is now good evidence for believing that we should not uncritically accept police data when examining crime in black and brown communities (cf. Davies and Fagan 2012). There is reason to believe that African Americans are more involved in violent crime but even better evidence to believe that blacks and Hispanics are no more likely to use or sell drugs than are whites even though they are heavily overrepresented among those arrested and imprisoned for drug offenses. But what of the elevated rates of violence among African Americans and some Hispanic groups?

Mass incarceration is a social force of uniquely damaging proportions. Early in this essay I described how racial differences in imprisonment were long accepted as evidence of higher levels of criminal involvement among African Americans. The growth of American incarceration has been disproportionately experienced by communities of color (Tonry 2011; Travis, Western, and Redburn 2014). A sizable literature shows that some of those differences can be traced to higher levels of crime among African Americans and some segments of the Latino population, but all of the observed differences in police processing cannot be justified by this greater involvement. The increase in imprisonment after 1973 was in part due to the war on drugs. The disproportionate imprisonment of black and brown men and women for drug violations cannot be justified by higher levels of use or sale of drugs (Tonry and Melewski 2008).

A growing number of scholars have demonstrated that mass incarceration has major negative consequences for the political health of communities of color and the basic political rights of those locked up (Manza and Uggen 2006), increases and sustains economic inequality between blacks and whites (Pettit and Western 2004; Western 2006), damages the earning capability of former prisoners (Pettit and Lyons (2009), and harms long-term social and economic prospects for the convicted (Harris 2015). Pager (2003, 2007) has demonstrated that the experience of incarceration negatively affects men's ability to find employment and is especially damaging to African American and Latino former prisoners. Lack of success in the job market in turn increases the probabilities of returning to crime after release (Crutchfield 2014).

Rose and Clear (1998) and Clear (2007) have argued that the coerced mobility of mass incarceration, the population churning that occurs

when large numbers of people, usually young men, are removed from communities and imprisoned and then returned to the same or similar communities, disrupts those places. They argue that it harms the collective efficacy of those sections of cities, making them even more criminogenic than they had been. Communities of color, and especially many African American neighborhoods, are the most disadvantaged by mass incarceration and are the hardest hit when black and brown men and women are disproportionately locked up.

Rose and Clear (1998) and Clear (2007) have provided empirical support for their argument, but the National Academy of Sciences Committee on the Causes and Consequences of High Rates of Incarceration could not validate it. There are too few highly disadvantaged white neighborhoods to be used for comparisons. But the committee did find evidence in ethnographic studies consistent with the coercive mobility argument (Travis, Western, and Redburn 2014, pp. 289–98).

It is likely that mass incarceration is criminogenic and increases black, brown, and white differences in criminal behavior. The agencies of the criminal justice system, charged with protecting society from crime, are now a major source of racial differences in criminal involvement. This happens because they disadvantage already heavily disadvantaged populations and communities.

People of color continue to face discrimination in the labor market, in housing, and in education. As a consequence, larger portions of the black and brown populations live in poverty and in socially and economically disadvantaged neighborhoods that spawn crime and violence.¹² Sampson and Lauritsen (1997) two decades ago called for researchers to examine macrostructural disadvantage to improve our understanding of crime differentials. Since then, Sampson and his colleagues have demonstrated that racial differences in violence can be explained by the greater frequency of African Americans living in underclass, disadvantaged neighborhoods (Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush 2001; Sampson 2009). Racial differences in values or orientations, such as legal cynicism, are products of concentrated disadvantage (Sampson and Bartusch 1998). Ulmer, Casey, and Steffensmeier (2012), studying New York and California, report that racial differences in violent crimes among African Americans, whites, and Latinos can be accounted for by differential dis-

¹² See the Civil Rights Project (<http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/school-discipline>) for recent reports of continuing inequality in school discipline and suspension.

advantage. There remains some debate whether poverty or income inequality is the real force generating increased violence (Sampson 1985; Hipp 2007), but there is no disagreement that economic marginalization of African Americans is the source of high crime rates in black communities.

Racial differences in violence can be explained by social class differences when underclass neighborhoods and social and economic disadvantage are used as measures of social class. Unnever and Gabbidon (2011) argue that African Americans, in response to discrimination experienced by individuals and life in segregated places, develop a worldview that leads to higher levels of criminal involvement. They cite data consistent with this perspective. Their provocative micro-macro causal sequence will be challenging to test, but it is not inconsistent with a growing micro and macro literature on the causes of crime.

To make the case that higher African American criminal involvement results from structured economic and social disadvantage, we have to take seriously the things we teach students. Key concepts must be observable. The best data to be used are defined not by what we usually use or prefer to work with or is most convenient, but what is most appropriate for the questions to be answered. Research methods must flow from research questions. If we take these basic notions seriously, we cannot possibly posit that subcultural values carried by individuals living in particular neighborhoods and passed on intergenerationally account for racial differences in criminal violence. We should not retreat to the black-box theory and say or write, "It must be a subculture." As recently as the 2013 meetings of the American Society of Criminology, some scholars in prominently presented papers made just that retreat. By contrast, aggregate studies of neighborhood-level inequality and disadvantage have provided compelling evidence that these are the actual forces accounting for racial differences in violent crime.

If we allow for a more complex understanding of race/ethnicity, crime, and social class, we may make real headway in understanding the processes that shape the lives of criminals and noncriminals. Consider, for instance, Moffitt's (1993) distinction between adolescent limited and life course persistent delinquents. I imagine that a great many criminologists think only in terms of these categories distinguishing people with differential personality or other internal traits. But perhaps communities where generation after generation of people are marginalized

from the labor market, quality schools, and decent housing, and feel subjugated by a social, political, and economic order that is not of their making or influence, are producing people who are at especially high risk of becoming life course persistent offenders.

Moving further away from traditional criminology, how might environmental insults that disproportionately affect disadvantaged places contribute to differential crime rates? Unnever and Gabbidon (2011) conclude that African Americans are far more likely to live in areas in which they are exposed to lead poisoning and other toxins. There is evidence that this is linked to higher levels of offending. An editor for *Chemical and Engineering News* has suggested, on the basis of work by social scientists (Stretsky and Lynch 2001; Nevin 2007) and medical researchers (Cecil et al. 2008), that banning leaded gasoline and lead in paint may be one cause of the crime decline (Wolf 2014). Lead has been linked to learning disabilities and reduced impulse control.

It is premature to endorse such ideas with the limited available evidence. We should, though, take seriously the observation that African Americans and to an extent Latinos engage in more violence because they live in disadvantaged neighborhoods. That would move us away from the lazy intellectual gymnastics involved in simply positing unobserved norms and values and take seriously the influence of circumstances outside of poor people's control.

Instead we should explore other mechanisms that connect race, disadvantage, and crime. Even in the most disadvantaged places, most children do not become delinquents and most adults are not criminals. Most African Americans and Hispanics are no more likely to engage in crime than are most white and Asian Americans.

Why, even in the face of discrimination and disadvantage, do not more people resort to crime and violence? Probably because most people who suffer those obstacles focus their energies on living their lives just as other people do, but with the added burden of overcoming the special difficulties that come with their position in the social structure.

Many parents in underclass neighborhoods work hard to shield their children from challenges and dangers on the streets. Anderson (1999) writes about these parents and labels them, using the vernacular of the ghetto, "decent families." They try to protect their children from the code of the street and other negative norms and values (Larzelere and Patterson 1990). Hirschi (1969) and others who have tested his version

of control theory have reported that children who establish close bonds to their parents are less likely to become involved in delinquency (Gove and Crutchfield 1982; Leiber, Mack, and Featherstone 2009). Poverty, however, presents additional challenges for families, at times leading to family disruptions, inconsistent parenting, and low levels of supervision, which can lead in turn to more delinquency (Sampson and Laub 1994; Wadsworth 2000).

Perhaps it is the lack of collective efficacy in desperately poor places, or the lack of jobs for adults who live there, or the frustrations of their children, or unequal educations that limits their options, or the inevitably negative consequences of mass imprisonment. Scholars have observed value and normative differences. They have also observed that the structural conditions that generate such values are intergenerationally present. That is evidence that structural conditions, disadvantage, and isolation are the fundamental causes of continuing social and economic plight, including elevated crime rates. Distinctive values and behaviors are recreated in each new generation by the continuity of ongoing structural circumstances. Perhaps the progressives and Marxists of the 1960s and 1970s (and now) were correct when they asserted that people of color engage in more crime because of the actions of the state and elites.

Where might discussions of race, crime and social class go in the years ahead? I suggest three answers. First, the effects of mass incarceration will be brought increasingly into the discussion.

Second, income inequality is growing in the United States. This will likely increase the social distance between the poor and the wider society. If the socially and economically disadvantaged portion of the population grows appreciably, and it likely will, those who live in underclass neighborhoods will experience more marginalization and stress, which will affect crime patterns.

Third, though this prediction dismays me, publications will continue to appear and conference papers to be presented in which scholars advance traditional subculture of violence or subculture of poverty arguments. Those arguments resemble the zombies and vampires that populate books and movies popular among some young people. Like zombies and vampires, those arguments are already dead. Our disciplines have not yet found the crosses, silver bullets, or stakes to drive into the heart that will finally end the reappearances of the "undead" traditional subculture arguments.

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