
Introduction

Inequalities of Race, Ethnicity, and Crime in America

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This book broadens and deepens our understanding of the way race, ethnicity, and crime are interrelated. It grew from discussions by a small working group who came together because of dissatisfaction with the way race and ethnicity are approached in criminological research. These constructs typically are treated as distinguishing features of the demographic distribution of crime while shaping its popular imagery. Much existing work focuses on etioloical questions such as whether social disorganization, differential association, or strain apply in the same way to people and populations of different colors. Race and ethnicity are infrequently given serious consideration as structural influences creating criminogenic conditions; the responses of actors, groups, and institutions; and the consequences that flow from these. That is, current work often fails to consider how race and ethnicity are themselves central organizing principles within and across societies. Indeed, these dimensions of stratification condition the very laws that make certain behaviors criminal, the perception of crime and those who are criminalized, the distribution of criminogenic conditions and processes, the determination of who becomes a victim of crime under which circumstances, the responses to laws and crime that make some more likely to be defined as criminal, and the way individuals and communities are positioned and empowered to respond to crime. We believe that a fuller understanding of the inequitable sources and consequences of crime and violence can only come when race and ethnicity are taken seriously as organizing principles that explicitly and thoroughly permeate theoretical discussions and empirical analyses.

What are the concrete implications of such an approach? Overall, it will complicate our theory and research. Theoretically, race, ethnicity, and crime are social constructions that should be conceptualized in ways that take into account their broader and changing meaning. Empirical investigations should take these complex conceptualizations seriously while (1) moving beyond the black-white dichotomy to consider the *many colors* of crime and victimization, including among frequently neglected groups; (2) considering the often neglected intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and class; (3) demythologizing both the stereotypes of the *criminalblack-man*¹ and the innocence and integrity of whiteness; and (4) considering the diversity within *and* across groups along the many dimensions of societal stratification.

A fuller understanding also means taking steps to conceptualize, measure, and model the interconnections among race, ethnicity, crime, and criminal justice in ways that embed our work in relation to the multiple contexts and positionings of groups within society. This premise calls for analyses that (1) have a more structural, institutional, and historical focus; (2) capture the multiple dimensions and levels of interaction that undergird social relationships and impact outcomes for groups and individuals; (3) examine the interplay among different central constructs, e.g., structure and culture, race/ethnicity and agency, race/ethnicity and politics; (4) question the normalization of aspects of crime and criminal justice, e.g., violence against girls and criminality or incarceration by race/ethnicity; (5) have a broader comparative dimension, e.g., across multiple groups, societies, and time periods; and (6) examine the collateral consequences of criminal justice and societal policies.

This book provides a series of papers expressly designed to complicate the conceptual and empirical meaning of race and ethnicity as they relate to crime and criminal justice. Each chapter addresses an unanswered substantive question using one or more of the above foci. Authors were asked to begin from the premise set forth above that research and theory must incorporate race and ethnicity as fundamental orienting constructs in contemporary society. The papers are explicit about how this broad view shapes the particular aspect of crime and criminal justice being investigated. Contributors were also asked to focus on their topic of concern from a fresh and innovative perspective in order to set the stage for new directions in theory and research. Therefore, they each explicitly identify the types of investigations that should flow from the concepts introduced and/or the empirical findings. Although the topics are diverse, taken as a

whole they seek to put a new and critical face on analyses of crime and criminal justice in which race and ethnicity take center stage.

The book is comprised of eighteen chapters, with several distinct types of papers. At the outset, Robert J. Sampson and Lydia Bean provide a discussion that orients the reader to the importance of moving the field toward a deeper understanding of the race/ethnicity–crime relationship. In their view, a deeper understanding of race and crime must come from incorporating spatial inequality into concepts of (dis)advantage by race, considering seriously the implications of immigration, and revising the view of culture that dominates current thinking. In developing their perspective, they anticipate a number of the concepts, empirical strategies, and interpretations of findings of the chapters that follow.

The remaining chapters take a variety of approaches. Some are conceptual, identifying constructs that must be incorporated and outlining issues that must be corrected to facilitate improved research. Others provide illustrative empirical work on populations or intersectionalities that have seldom, if ever, been examined. And still others address the social contexts for the racial and ethnic patterning of crime, or examine the mechanisms and processes by which race and ethnicity are connected to crime and criminal justice. Reflecting this variety, the book is divided into four topical areas: (1) Constructs and Conceptual Approaches; (2) Populations and Intersectionalities; (3) Contexts and Settings; and (4) Mechanisms and Processes.

Chapters on “Constructs and Conceptual Approaches” tackle issues of how race, ethnicity, and crime should be reconceptualized in order to motivate new thinking and analytic investigations. To date, most work has a limited view of race, of crime, and of the criminal justice workforce. For example, research often focuses on contrasts between Whites and Blacks. Doing so oversimplifies inequalities of race, ethnicity, and crime by viewing race/ethnicity as a dichotomy. And, it exaggerates differences by contrasting the most privileged group with the most long-term historically oppressed population. As a result, this limited view of race reinforces stereotypic understandings of group differentiation. Marjorie Zatz and Nancy Rodriguez place this oversimplification in perspective by admonishing researchers not to simply add other racial and ethnic groups and stir, but rather to problematize the way race, ethnicity, gender, class, and crime converge differentially across time and place.

Research on crime has also mainly analyzed the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) seven index offenses of homicide, forcible rape, robbery,

aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft. Emphasizing street crimes that constitute only a fraction of violations of criminal codes in the United States may reify the stereotype of the *criminalblackman* and direct attention away from the full range of criminal activities and the relative representation of participants with less colorful backgrounds. Vernetta Young's conceptual paper warns us of these possibilities and of the way they misconstrue the crime problem, thereby hindering the development of theories and policies that properly address the diverse nature of crime. Finally, racial representation in the occupations of criminal justice are presumed to affect disparities in crime and justice outcomes. Yet, little research explores theoretically or empirically the role of diversity among justice workers in crime and case processing. Geoff K. Ward takes up this issue, presenting an analytic framework concerning the hierarchical organization of the justice workforce to bring the array of occupations into systemic view. Application of the framework highlights the need to define justice workers, conceptualize the substantive representation of ethno-racial groups, evaluate the impact of diversity in the justice workforce on outcomes, and conduct cross-national comparisons.

The next set of chapters on "Populations and Intersectionalities" flows directly from recognition of the need for criminological research to expand the groups explored. For example, several of the chapters investigate understudied populations. María B. Vélez examines the racial invariance thesis as it applies to crime among Latinos in Chicago compared to their African American counterparts, arguing that lower Latino violence results from the distinct structural contexts of their communities. Ramiro Martinez, Jr., and Amie L. Nielsen attempt to elucidate the relative importance for crime of immigrant status versus Black race. They evaluate this by studying neighborhoods in Miami, Florida, and comparing Haitians (a Black and immigrant group) to Latinos (a heavily white and predominantly immigrant group in southern Florida) and to African Americans. Alexander T. Vazsonyi and Elizabeth Trejos-Castillo attempt to broaden our understanding of the role of race in crime and deviance by examining *rural* African American youth in the southern Black Belt. Doing so helps to correct the urban bias that is common in research on race and crime.

Additional chapters assess the consequences for offending and victimization of the intersectionality of race and ethnicity with other critical social statuses, particularly gender and class. De Coster and Heimer assess the literatures on masculinities, femininities, and violent offending and offer a structural interactionist perspective to guide future research. This

perspective focuses on the way individuals make meaning of their social worlds within the context of cross-cutting social inequalities. Toya Z. Like and Jody Miller challenge race and crime researchers to incorporate gender into theoretical and empirical analyses in order to properly comprehend the impact of race and racism. They illustrate the benefits of doing so through their qualitative study of violence against African American girls in a distressed urban community.

Fundamental to the role of race and ethnicity in U.S. society is the fact that diverse populations are differentially situated with respect to a host of social and economic conditions that vary across group, time, and place. This is strikingly evident in terms of residential segregation, with large portions of Blacks and Whites living in distinct and racially homogeneous neighborhoods. To varying degrees, the experience of Latinos and different immigrant groups follows the same pattern. Racial and ethnic residential segregation is further interconnected with economic segregation, resulting in complex patterns of racial, ethnic, and class segregation. Along with residential differentiation, groups are often segregated in the types of schools attended, workplaces, social circles, and religious institutional memberships. Our third group of chapters considers the importance of these and other aspects of “Contexts and Settings” as sources of crime and its collateral consequences. Gary LaFree, Robert M. O’Brien, and Eric Baumer consider differential trends in arrest rates for Blacks and Whites in light of changing U.S. macrosocial and economic conditions. They mainly observe convergence in these trends consistent with racial assimilation views. Robert D. Crutchfield, Ross L. Matsueda, and Kevin Drakulich examine whether differences in social disorder and the local labor market context help to explain why African American, Latino, and Asian communities have high levels of violent crime.

Avelardo Valdez explores the interrelationships among drug markets, economic change, and involvement in the illegal economy among Mexican Americans in San Antonio. He highlights the devastating consequences of the spread of drug use and sales within this group, and the way they result from long-term social, economic, and policy changes that isolate select communities. Alex R. Piquero, Valerie West, Jeffrey Fagan, and Jan Holland consider the consequences of disproportionate incarceration of African Americans and Hispanics for the well-being of neighborhoods in New York City over a twelve-year period. The last paper exploring contexts and settings is by Lauren J. Krivo, Ruth D. Peterson, and Diana L. Karafin, who analyze perceptions of crime and safety in four racially and

economically distinct neighborhoods. They emphasize the potential significance of internal and external conditions that differentiate unique race-by-class areas, particularly privileging the White middle-class community.

Chapters examining “Mechanisms and Processes” comprise the fourth section of the book. The papers take as a starting point that a deeper understanding of the meaning of the race-crime link involves not only assessing different patterns and contexts but also explicating the mechanisms by which the link occurs. This requires a focus on the way race and ethnicity are interconnected with structural conditions, cultural orientations, individual agency, and other factors that result in crime or different outcomes of criminal justice. Doris Marie Provine uses the crack cocaine saga to elucidate the way negative racial stereotypes animate policy thinking and influence policy choices to the disadvantage of subordinate populations. Doing so should encourage critical, race-sensitive thinking about the policy-making process. Wenona Rymond-Richmond explores how cognitive maps serve to organize the activities of neighborhood residents to maintain their safety and avoid conflict. She also highlights the significant harm that results when policymakers ignore these cognitive maps in their quest to improve communities.

Carla Shedd and John Hagan outline a comparative conflict theory that articulates the way the nature of police contact influences the development of differentiated youthful perceptions of criminal injustice across racial and ethnic groups. These adolescent perceptions are critical because they are enduring and may extend to perceptions of other types of injustice and to criminal behavior. Finally, Ross L. Matsueda, Kevin Drakulich, and Charis E. Kubrin explore a key mechanism that has been argued to link race/ethnic with violent crime—cultural codes of violence. They use data for Seattle to capture neighborhood codes, as distinct from individual codes, of violence, and investigate whether variation in these codes exist across African American, Latino, and Asian communities.

Taken together, the fine set of chapters in this volume offer keen and varied insights into the ways in which race and ethnicity permeate views and actions of crime and the criminal justice system in the United States. The meaning of race and ethnicity in crime and criminal justice is important but underinvestigated. Indeed, progress in expanding knowledge in this area has been hampered by a lack of a coherent approach and a failure to put forth race and ethnicity as core concerns in their own right rather than as simply dichotomous independent variables in analyses of aggre-

gate and survey data. The papers in this volume offer correctives to these limited approaches. However, we acknowledge an important shortcoming of the chapters. They are almost entirely directed to the United States, though there obviously is much to be learned about race and crime beyond this nation's borders. As scholars continue to investigate the complex interrelationships among race/ethnicity, crime, and criminal justice, it will become increasingly important to situate the United States in the context of other diverse societies. In the meantime, the chapters herein offer starting places for a more holistic approach to the study of race/ethnicity, crime, and criminal justice that centers analyses in the positioning of groups within society. As such, these works should push forward a new agenda that accords race and ethnicity status as central orienting components of crime and criminal justice research and theorizing.

N O T E

1. Russell 1998; see also Young in this volume.