Overview of Race, Ethnicity, and Crime

SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

- The Concepts of Race and Ethnicity
- Prejudice and Discrimination
- Race and Crime in American History
- Summary
- Edited Readings

✉ The Concepts of Race and Ethnicity

There remains considerable debate about the concept of **race**. This is despite the fact that racial classifications are more than 5,000 years old. The earliest racial distinctions can be traced to India, but they were also found in China and Egypt and among Jews (Gossett, 1963). Francois Bernier is largely credited with first categorizing humans, but it was Carolus Linnaeus who invented the first system of categorizing plants and animals. The first racial categorization of humans is credited to German Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840; see Photo 1.1). In his 1795 work, *On the Natural Variety of Mankind,* Blumenbach separated the human species into five races: Ethiopian (African or Negro), Mongolian (Asian), American (Native American), Malaysian (Pacific Islander), and Whites (Caucasian). Before long, Blumenbach's typology became the standard across Europe, with Europeans placing themselves at the top of the hierarchy and linking racial differences to biological factors (Feagin & Feagin, 2008).

This ideology led to vociferous debates about the origins of racial differences. For some time, the debates were quashed because it was generally agreed that the racial differences (skin color and other biological differences) were attributable to migratory patterns out of Africa. Such differences were believed to be insignificant. In more modern times, scholars have termed "race" a social construct or a classification scheme that is arbitrary and not based on biological differences. In fact, the U.S. Census Bureau uses the following qualifying statement regarding racial classifications: "The concept of race as used by the Census Bureau reflects self-identification by people according to the race or races with which they most closely identify. These categories are socio-political constructs and should not be interpreted as being scientific or anthropological in nature. Furthermore, the race categories include both racial and national-origin groups" (http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/meta/long_68184.htm). In contrast to the Census Bureau and those that believe race is a social construct, other scholars have argued that the increasing advances in genetics support the notion that race is a biological concept (Sesardic, 2010).

The term *ethnicity* comes from the Greek word *ethnos*, which means "nation." Generally, ethnic groups are defined by their similar genetic inheritances or by some identifiable traits visible among most members of a particular group. Ethnic groups are also generally held together by a common language, culture, group spirit (nationalism or group solidarity), or geography (most typically originate from the same region) (Marger, 1997). Therefore, in the case of race and ethnicity, most anthropologists generally see these terms as more culturally relevant than biologically relevant. Most scholars separate the American population into five groups (as do we): Native Americans, Whites, African Americans, Hispanic/Latino(a)

▲ **Photo 1.1**   Johann Friedrich Blumenbach

Americans, and Asian Americans. We acknowledge that there are limitations to these categories. First, these categories do not take into account the ethnic variation within each group. For example, when we refer to "Latino Americans," there are a number of ethnic groups within this racial classification. This is true of other races as well. Another example is the category of African American/Black. There is also ethnic diversity within this category, with it often encompassing people from the Caribbean (e.g., Jamaica, Haiti, etc.), African countries, and other parts of the world. Because each of these groups has had a unique experience in America, it is, at times, presumptuous for researchers to take for granted that the experience of one African/Black American is representative of so many diverse groups. Nevertheless, although we are aware of the problems with these classifications, the research and data in the social sciences follow this taxonomy. Second, and relatedly, with the use of the multiracial category in the 2000 census, the lines between racial groups have become rather blurred, so population and crime data increasingly have considerable limits.

Since the 2000 census, as has been their tradition, the U.S. Census Bureau has continued to provide population estimates. Nearly a decade later, in 2009, they released figures that revealed that the **minority** population topped 100 million. By this time, Hispanics/Latinos had become the largest minority group (15.4%; see Table 1.1), and Blacks had become the second largest (12.8%). Given the changing demographics of the United States, some have called for the discontinuance of the term *minority* (Texeira, 2005). In place of *minority*, which some believe is a "term of oppression," or a term that seeks to minimize the collective aspirations of a group, the term ***people of color*** has been suggested (Texeira, 2005). Whatever the term to be used, if current estimates are correct, it is clear that one day racial and ethnic groups now considered to be minorities will become nearly half the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). In fact, current estimates are that Whites will represent only 50% of the population in 2050, with Hispanics representing nearly a quarter of the population and other racial and ethnic minorities comprising the remainder of the populace (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).

Table 1.1 U.S. Racial/Ethnic Population Estimates, 2009	
Racial/Ethnic Group	**Percentage of Population**
White persons	79.8
White persons not Hispanic	65.6
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin	15.4
Black persons	12.8
Asian persons	4.5
American Indian and Alaska Native persons	1.0
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.2
Persons reporting two or more races	1.7

NOTE: The percentages are based on a population estimate of 307,006,550.

✇ Prejudice and Discrimination

Even with the growth in the minority population, **prejudice** and discrimination remain a central concern. Prejudice is when someone fosters a negative attitude toward a particular group. This is usually in the form of stereotypes that often result in people making negative generalizations about an entire group. Discrimination is considered the "unequal treatment of a person or persons based on group membership" (Healey, 2007, p. 20). As you can imagine, having prejudicial attitudes toward a particular group can lead to discriminatory actions in areas such as employment, housing, and the criminal justice system. Thus,

determining whether racial prejudice and **racial discrimination** permeates the criminal justice system is critical to understanding the role of race in justice system outcomes.

⊠   Race and Crime in American History

Unquestionably, the American landscape has been shaped by the countless racial and ethnic groups that immigrated to the United States. Yet each group that arrived in America encountered stinging and pervasive resistance—often in the form of discrimination—from earlier arrivals. Notably, even Native Americans, who were living in America before Europeans arrived, were not immune to the discriminatory treatment of the foreigners who came to explore and exploit the land. In addition to discrimination, a large part of the initial American experience involved crime, violence, and doing what was necessary to survive. This section provides a discussion of the experiences of various racial and ethnic groups. In addition to racial and ethnic minorities, the section also reviews the process through which many **White ethnics** followed on the path to **assimilation**.

Native Americans

Prior to the arrival of Europeans in the Americas, people had existed on both continents for thousands of years. It is believed that they originated from eastern Asia. More specifically, it is believed that they have been in North America for the last 30,000 years, having crossed over from Asia into America on glaciers that, due to warming trends, later melted (Polk, 2006, pp. 3–4). Over time, they built complex societies throughout the Americas. Even so, on arrival in the Americas (South America and the West Indies), it is clear from their actions that Christopher Columbus and his followers viewed the native people (then referred to as "Indians," now referred to as "Native Americans" or "American Indians") as inferior (Clarke, 1992). The brutality that followed was painstakingly documented by firsthand observers of the massacres (De Las Casas, 1552/1993). Sale (1990) suggested that, prior to the arrival of Europeans, there were about 15 million Native Americans in North America. According to Healey (2003), nearly four centuries later, in 1890, only 250,000 remained. Today, there are nearly 4.5 million American Indians or Alaskan Natives in the United States. Nonetheless, considering the historical decimation of the Native American population, some criminologists have viewed their massacre as genocide (Barak, Flavin, & Leighton, 2010). Given this history, it is not a surprise that the relationship between Native Americans and the United States government is characterized by mistrust. Thus, while the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was established to handle matters related to this population, the agency had to deal with the competing aims of the federal government. On the one hand, the government created the agency to help Native Americans; on the other hand, the military had a policy of what might be considered genocidal extermination. Nearly 60 years after the creation of the BIA, the 1887 Dawes Act provided that individual families be provided with reservation lands. While well meaning, as Feagin and Feagin (2008) observed, "This new policy soon resulted in a large-scale land sale to Whites. Through means fair and foul, the remaining 140 million acres of Indian lands were further reduced to 50 million acres by the mid-1930s" (p. 144).

In the early part of the 20th century, the government tried to assimilate Native Americans by sending them to Indian boarding schools that were Christian-based and used to indoctrinate Native Americans with American culture. In the process, Native Americans were forced to abandon their native languages and customs. The attempt to assimilate Native Americans culminated during the 1920s with the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, which granted all Native Americans citizenship. The end of this period saw Native Americans calling for new policies, one of which came in the form of the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act. The act, which essentially ended the Dawes Act, allowed Native Americans to "establish Indian civil and cultural rights, allow for semiautonomous tribal governments similar in legal status to counties and municipalities, and foster economic development on reservations" (Feagin & Feagin, 2008, p. 144). As with all legislation, there were problems. Most notably, Native Americans saw this act as giving too much power to the secretary of the interior. In addition, many Native Americans believed the act violated their sovereignty, or their right to govern themselves as provided by previously enacted treaties.

The second half of the 20th century spurred more attempts by Native Americans to rid themselves of governmental control. In the early 1950s, Congress enacted legislation called *termination*, which "call[ed] for an end to the reservation system and to the special relationships between the tribes and the federal government" (Healey, 2004, p. 134). This process also negated previous treaties, a policy that was vigorously opposed by Native Americans. In addition, based on the specifics of the policy, "tribes would no longer exist as legally recognized entities, and tribal lands and other resources would be placed in private hands" (Healey, 2004, p. 134). Because of this policy, many Native Americans moved to urban areas.

The decades following the enactment of the termination policy saw increasing opposition from Native Americans. After about 25 years, the policy was repealed. In 1975, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act "increased aid to reservation schools and Native American students and increased the tribes' control over the administration of the reservations, from police forces to schools and road maintenance" (Healey, 2004, p. 136). This act provided much of the basis under which many tribes now operate. Recent federal legislation has allowed some tribes to open gambling facilities on reservations, which in 2000 generated more than $10 billion in revenues (Spilde, 2001). Other tribes have invested in other ways to generate revenue (e.g., tax-free cigarette sales). Native Americans' move toward self-determination also has resulted in suits against the federal government seeking reparations for past broken treaties. With 561 recognized tribes and a population of more than 4 million, Native Americans remain a notable presence in the United States.

African Americans

African Americans have also had a long and arduous relationship with the United States. With the Native American population nearly completely decimated because of the brutality, enslavement, and diseases that were brought to the Americas by the Spanish, Bartolomé de las Casas, a priest who accompanied Columbus on one of his voyages to America, sought a way to stem their extermination. De las Casas' idea centered not on ending the slave system, but instead on replacing the Native Americans with another labor

force: Africans. As with the decimation of the Native American population, the slave trade involving Africans resulted in genocide that has been referred to as the "African holocaust" (Clarke, 1992).

It is believed that Africans arrived in the Americas in the early 1600s. Yet from their arrival in the 1600s up to the 1660s, Africans were not considered slaves. In fact, many of them fulfilled indentures and were fairly integrated into the life of the colony. After 1660, however, colonial legislation made it clear that Africans were to be considered slaves and were to serve as the primary labor force keeping the southern economy afloat. Southern slaveholders maintained the slave system through a combination of lawless brutality and legislative enactments that did not penalize brutality against slaves who rebelled against the slave system. An elaborate system of slave codes, or laws that pertained to slaves, dictated their lives from cradle to grave (Russell-Brown, 2009). In addition to the slave codes, Whites used psychology to keep the slave system intact. Claude Anderson (1994) wrote that "this process was designed to instill in Blacks strict discipline, a sense of inferiority, belief in the slave owners' superior power, acceptance of the owners' standards and a deep sense of a slave's helplessness and dependence" (p. 165). Moreover, Anderson noted that "the slave owners strove to cut Blacks off from their own history, culture, language and community, and to inculcate White society's value system" (p. 165).

Following the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, which freed the slaves in the Confederate states, and the enactment of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, which ended slavery throughout the United States, many African Americans chose to remain in the South. Others had dreams of going north and starting anew. Unfortunately, southern landowners were unwilling to part so easily with their former free labor force. Therefore, following emancipation, they enacted the "**Black codes**." These codes were an assortment of laws that targeted poor Whites and African Americans. Some scholars have argued that the laws were specifically created so that a significant number of African Americans could be returned to plantation owners through the convict-lease system (Du Bois, 1901/2002; Myers, 1998; Oshinsky, 1996). The convict-lease system allowed states to lease convict labor to private landowners.

The Reconstruction Era (1865–1877) also brought the formal advent of hate groups (e.g., Klu Klux Klan). These groups terrorized African Americans and other citizens, who were the targets of their hatred. **Lynching** became the means used to intimidate and handle those who challenged the racist White power structure. These indiscriminate killings of African Americans (and some Native Americans and Spanish-speaking minorities), usually by hanging, were typically carried out to avenge some exaggerated crime committed by an African American or other "undesirable" minority against a White person (Zangrando, 1980). In most instances, the alleged crime of rape was used to justify these horrific actions. During the height of the era when lynchings were being carried out, the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) "separate but equal" case was decided. The decision was significant in that it gave Whites legal support to enforce some of their ideas concerning White supremacy and the separation of the races. Furthermore, this decision allowed law enforcement officials to take action against African Americans who sought basic services that were reserved for Whites.

Ten years after the turn of the 20th century, African Americans were primarily southerners. Meier and Rudwick (1970) observed that "approximately three out of four lived in rural areas and nine out of ten lived in the South" (p. 213). The Great Migration, however,

changed the landscape of the North and South. By the 1950s, "Negroes were mainly an urban population, almost three fourths of them being city-dwellers" (Meier & Rudwick, 1970, p. 213). During this era, African Americans crowded into northern cities in search of job opportunities; what they found, however, were overcrowded urban areas with assorted European immigrants either seeking similar opportunities or already established in the low-skill, low-wage jobs that African Americans had hoped to receive. African American women were able to secure employment in domestic service, where, unfortunately, White men often sexually assaulted them (Davis, 1981).

During the 1930s and 1940s, there was continued interest in the subject of crime among African Americans. By the early 1950s, African Americans and other ethnic groups were still struggling to survive in an increasingly segregated and hostile America. Some turned to crime, whereas others turned to social activism and joined the civil rights movement.

By the 1960s, according to figures from the Tuskegee Institute (Zangrando, 1980), lynchings were rare events; however, Whites had successfully used the practice to discourage any serious level of integration. Therefore, although Thurgood Marshall and his colleagues were successful in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case, minority communities did not substantially change for decades. Because of "the White strategy of ghetto containment and tactical retreat before an advancing color line" (Massey & Denton, 1993, p. 45), substantial underclass communities were in existence by the 1970s. This bred a level of poverty and despair that fostered the continuation of the African American criminal classes and organized crime. The riots of the 1960s were a response to the long-standing troublesome conditions in some of these cities (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968).

When African Americans were finally able to take advantage of the opportunities forged by the civil rights movement and desegregation, many of them left inner-city areas. Unfortunately, many of those who left had brought an important level of stability to these communities. As a result of this exodus, these inner-city communities are now heavily comprised of those Wilson (1987) described as the "**truly disadvantaged**." They are heavily dependent on the underground economy for survival (see Venkatesh, 2006), which has likely contributed to the overrepresentation of African Americans throughout the U.S. criminal justice system.

Even with the many struggles encountered by African Americans and other Black ethnic groups, and the historical fixation on their criminality, they have contributed to every aspect of American life, from the tilling of the soil in the South and the factory work in the North that produced the wealth that made America what it is today to the innumerable scientific, musical, and artistic contributions that are now considered staples of American culture.

White Ethnics

During the early 1600s, while the slave trade in South America and the West Indies was going on, the British colonized parts of what would later become the American colonies. This led to many of the same kinds of conflicts with Native Americans that the Spanish had quelled elsewhere with unimaginable brutality. Although the British saw the colonies as somewhere they could send criminals and other undesirables, they also saw opportunity for monetary gain, so they encouraged emigration to the colonies. Some went freely,

whereas others used indentures to get them to the New World. These arrangements allowed them to work for a period of time to pay for their travel expenses to the colonies. Once their indentures were completed, emigrants were free to pursue whatever opportunities they desired. In addition to British emigrants, Germans and Italians were among the first to immigrate to America.

Many began to arrive in the early 1600s, settling first in New Amsterdam (New York) and later in Pennsylvania (Sowell, 1981). Given this rich history of European emigration to the United States, we briefly review the process that many White ethnic groups followed on the path to full assimilation. It has been noted that, with some exceptions, many White ethnic immigrants had nearly identical experiences on their arrival in America (Feagin & Feagin, 2008). In fact, one could easily view the early experiences of most White ethnics as following a clear process.

Following the initial arrival of immigrants, who quickly started to consider themselves the new native population, there was generally a four step process toward assimilation. First, the established dominant racial and ethnic group (e.g., English, Scottish, etc.) noticed a large number of immigrants (e.g., Irish, Italian, Polish, etc.) settling into areas previously occupied mainly by the "native" population. The second stage of the process involved the new immigrants becoming despised by the dominant group. This led to the creation of stinging stereotypes and the perpetuation of deviant imagery of the new group. The third stage of the process related to the struggles that the immigrant group encountered. Often, because of the discriminatory treatment encountered by the new immigrants, they had difficulty surviving and might be forced to resort to criminal activities that culminated in their participation in organized crime or gang formation. Notably, after a generation of struggles to survive, the new immigrant moved toward the fourth stage: assimilation.

Milton Gordon (1964) described several phases of assimilation. Cultural assimilation is the first phase, in which the immigrant group abandons some of their cultural traditions to accept those of the dominant group. Structural assimilation is when immigrants begin to penetrate cliques and associations that were previously exclusive to the dominant group. The next phase is marital assimilation, in which the immigrant group has significant intermarriage with the dominant group. When the immigrant group starts to identify with the dominant group, they have moved to the identification phase of assimilation. The attitude-receptional phase represents the point in which the immigrant group is no longer stereotyped and the group assimilates into American life. The next phase is the behavior-receptional phase, which is when the immigrant group no longer encounters discrimination. Civic assimilation is the final phase. At this phase, there are no longer any value or power conflicts among the dominant group and the newest immigrant group. Notably, these phases of assimilation coincide with the general process that immigrant groups encountered as they became full-fledged Americans. Later, as new ethnic immigrants arrived, they followed the same process as previous European immigrants.

There are clear exceptions to this process. First, Native Americans were already here when Whites came and colonized them. Thus, given their unique cultural traditions, it was extremely hard for them to fully assimilate. Second, unlike White immigrants who came here looking for opportunities, as discussed earlier, Africans were brought to America forcibly. In addition, even after they were emancipated two centuries after

becoming the primary labor force in the South, their search for prosperity was hampered by racism. It has been well-established that skin color prevented African Americans from assimilating into the mainstream of American life—something that White ethnics could easily overcome (Allen, 1994; Ignatiev, 1996). Two other groups that have had unique experiences in America are Latino and Asian Americans. A brief overview of their experiences is presented in the next two sections.

Latino Americans

Prior to the 2000 census, the term *Hispanic* was used to refer to persons from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Central and South America. Feagin and Feagin (2008) noted that the term *Latino* emerged because it "recognizes the complex Latin American origins of these groups. It is a Spanish language word and is preferred by many Spanish speaking Americans" (p. 206). Our review of their history focuses on the largest ethnic groups in the Latino category, with a brief overview of smaller Latino ethnic groups.

Mexicans

From 1500 to 1853, the Spanish ruled Mexico. For much of this period, Mexicans were exploited for their labor by the Spanish. Many Mexicans became Americans with the annexation of Texas. Following the Mexican-American War (1846–1848) and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), Mexicans had the option to stay in the United States or to return to Mexico. According to Feagin and Feagin (2008), although many stayed, others returned to Mexico.

Sowell (1981) wrote that Mexicans immigrated to America in three great waves. The first wave of Mexicans came to America by railroad—and ironically, over the years, railroads have become one of the largest employers of Mexicans. Specifically, they were employed "as construction workers, as watchmen, or as laborers maintaining the tracks. Many lived in boxcars or in shacks near the railroads—primitive settlements that were the beginning of many Mexican-American communities today" (Sowell, 1981, p. 249). Before World War I, other industries employing Mexicans were agriculture and mining. Mexican workers in America were paid considerably more than they were in Mexico. As a result, there was a steady flow of seasonal workers crossing the border to earn money to take back home to Mexico. Labor shortages caused by World War I resulted in formalized programs to encourage such practices. About 500,000 Mexicans came to America to work during this period (Tarver, Walker, & Wallace, 2002). Beginning in this period, Mexicans also were subject to negative stereotypes, such as being considered "dirty," "ignorant," and lacking standards of appropriate behavior (Sowell, 1981). But they were tolerated because of the dire need for their labor. With the arrival of the Great Depression, "fears of the unemployed created an anti-immigrant movement, and immigration laws were modified to deport the 'undesirables' and restrict the numbers of foreign-contract laborers" (Tarver et al., 2002, p. 54).

The second wave of Mexican immigrants came to the United States during World War II. Another war had resulted in another labor shortage, which produced the **Bracero Program,** which brought in thousands of agricultural workers to help with the labor shortage. *Bracero* is a Spanish term that was used to describe guest workers coming from Mexico to the United States. By the end of the Bracero Program in 1964, 5 million Mexican workers had been imported into this country (Tarver et al., 2002, p. 54).

The third wave of Mexican immigration is tied to the various immigration laws from the 1970s to the present, which have sought to protect, defend, or curtail Mexican immigration to the United States. One such law, the Immigration and Reform and Control Act of 1986, provided temporary residency for some illegal aliens. Furthermore, those who came to America before 1982 were provided with permanent resident status.

Another law aimed at Mexican illegal immigration is the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. In addition to shoring up the borders in California and Texas, the act "increased the number of investigators monitoring workplace employment of aliens, passport fraud, and alien smuggling" (Tarver et al., 2002, p. 55). Today, the fears concerning illegal immigration continue with the recent passage of Arizona's Immigration Bill SB1070. Most notably, the bill requires immigrants to carry their alien registration information and provides law enforcement officials with the discretion to question those persons who they believe are illegal immigrants. Besides concerns about job competition and the strain on social services caused by the considerable illegal immigration, Americans have continued their fascination with the perceived connection between immigration and crime (Hickman & Suttorp, 2008; Higgins, Gabbidon, & Martin, 2010; Martinez, 2006; Martinez & Valenzuela, 2006; Stowell, 2007).

Puerto Ricans and Other Latino Groups

The island of Puerto Rico was colonized by the Spanish in the late 1400s. It was not until 1897 that Puerto Ricans gained their independence. However, the Spanish-American War resulted in America taking over the island in 1898. In the 1950s, Puerto Rico became a commonwealth of the United States, granting Puerto Ricans more independence in their governance. From 1945 to the 1970s, the high unemployment rate on the island resulted in one in three Puerto Ricans leaving the island (Feagin & Feagin, 2008). Significant numbers of Puerto Ricans headed to New York and other states, such as New Jersey and Delaware. Thus, there was significant Puerto Rican immigration to the United States, which resulted in an increase from 2,000 Puerto Ricans in New York in 1900 to 70,000 in 1940 and 887,000 by 1960 (Feagin & Feagin, 2008). Upon their arrival, as with other immigrants who headed to the "promised land," they were faced with high levels of unemployment and poverty. In fact, these dire circumstances resulted in what has been referred to as *circular migration*. That is, after the opportunities they were seeking did not materialize, Puerto Ricans would head home but then return because of the lack of opportunities in Puerto Rico. Mirroring the experience of other racial and ethnic groups, over time, Puerto Ricans were also saddled with negative stereotypes, such as "lazy," "submissive," "violent," and "criminal" (Feagin & Feagin, 2008). Moreover, because they cannot always "pass" as White, it has been difficult to assimilate like some other ethnic groups. As a result of their varying skin tones and backgrounds, they can be categorized as either White or Black.

Cubans have also been a force among the Latino American population. With much of their immigration coming after Fidel Castro's takeover of the government in 1959, they currently number about 1.5 million in the United States. Combined, South Americans from the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Colombia also represent another 2 million Latino Americans (Healey, 2006). Given these figures, it is no wonder that Latinos have become the largest minority group in the United States. In the process, they have surpassed African Americans, who have long held that title. They have also, however,

suffered from some of the same crime-related concerns as other ethnic groups before them. On the whole, though, they have not experienced the same levels of crime and violence as African Americans (Martinez, 2002). This may reflect the fact that many Latinos have come to the United States specifically seeking opportunities for employment, with a willingness to take the most undesirable jobs in the labor market. For many, these jobs provide much more financial compensation than the available employment in the various Latin American countries from which a substantial portion of Latino immigrants originate. Nevertheless, some Latinos have drifted into gangs and other criminal activities as a way to survive in America. Unfortunately, their criminal activities have been exaggerated by the news media and Hollywood, which has resulted in continuing stereotypes (Martinez, Lee, & Nielsen, 2001).

Asian Americans

Asian Americans provide another interesting case study of ethnic group acculturation in America. Like Latinos, they belong to a number of ethnic groups, such as Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese. We begin our review with a brief discussion of the Chinese American experience.

Chinese Americans

According to Daniels (1988), there were Chinese immigrants in America as early as the late 1700s. However, it was not until the California gold rush of the mid-1850s that any significant Chinese immigration to America took place. Between 1849 and 1882, nearly 300,000 Chinese came to America (Daniels, 1988). However, the **Chinese Exclusion Act** of 1882 limited immigration until the 1940s (Tarver et al., 2002). Most of the early Chinese immigrants were male (90%) and came to work in America temporarily. However, they came in significant enough numbers to represent nearly 10% of California's population between 1860 and 1880 (Daniels, 1988). Those who did stay were subjected to considerable violence due to anti-Chinese sentiment. Chinatowns had existed since the arrival of the Chinese in America; they embraced these areas because there they were free to maintain their own culture without fear of hostility—although some areas occupied exclusively by Chinese inhabitants were "shabby looking, vice-infested, and violence prone" (Sowell, 1981, p. 141).

The Chinese were quite successful as laborers as well as in independent businesses such as restaurants and laundries (Daniels, 1988; Sowell, 1981). Yet as with other immigrant groups, the Chinese were not immune from engaging in illegal activities. Daniels (1988) wrote that prostitution and gambling flourished in the communities of unmarried males that were created by the dearth of Asian women in America. In 1870, "More than 75% of the nearly 3,000 Chinese women workers in the United States identified themselves as prostitutes" (Perry, 2000, p. 104). Brothels and opium-smoking establishments became popular among both Asians and Whites. Regarding opium use among early Chinese immigrants, Mann (1993) suggested that 35% of the Chinese immigrants smoked opium regularly, which "led to the first national campaign against narcotics" (p. 59); the subsequent legislation was aimed at "excluding Chinese participation in American society" (p. 59). On the participation of the Chinese in these illegal activities, Daniels (1988) noted, "Since all of these activities were both lucrative and illegal, it seems

clear that police and politicians in the White community were involved in sanctioning and profiting from them" (p. 22).

Eventually, following the pattern of other immigrants, Asian organized crime emerged, and secret societies such as "tongs" were formed. Describing these organizations, Perry (2000) indicated that such societies were originally created to assist Asian men in adjusting to America. But, as Perry noted, over time, many evolved into criminal organizations or developed links with Chinese triads. Consequently, the tongs came to dominate prostitution, along with gambling, drugs, and other vice crimes. So in addition to providing sexual outlets, they also created other opportunities for recreation and escapist behavior. Despite the profits reaped by Whites from the legal and illicit activities of the Chinese, heavy anti-Chinese sentiment persisted in California, which led to numerous negative campaigns against the population. Pointing to the roots of this negative sentiment, Sowell (1981) wrote, "The Chinese were both non-White and non-Christian, at a time when either trait alone was a serious handicap. They looked different, dressed differently, ate differently, and followed customs wholly unfamiliar to Americans" (pp. 136–137). By and large, the Chinese were generally relegated to the most menial and dirty occupations, such as mining, laying railroad tracks, and agricultural work. As a result of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, unlike other ethnic minorities, the Chinese population decreased from the late 1880s through the mid-1940s. Since then, their numbers have increased, and they have remained the largest segment of the Asian American population.

Until the last 30 years of the 20th century, Japanese Americans represented the second-largest group among Asians in the United States. Several other Asian groups have now surpassed them in population (most notably, Filipinos). We review the Japanese American experience in the next section.

Japanese Americans

Like the Chinese before them, the Japanese arrived on North American shores as a result of labor needs, and the relatively small number of Japanese men who made it to America (about 2,200 by 1890) filled the continuing need for laborers on California farms (Daniels, 1988). Like the Chinese and other groups, some Japanese immigrants turned to illicit activities, such as prostitution and other petty crimes, to survive.

Over time, the number of Japanese in America began to increase. Feagin and Feagin (2008) wrote that "between the 1880s and . . . 1908, more than 150,000 Japanese entered (America); between 1909 and the 1920s, another 100,000 came" (p. 282). Mirroring the experience of the Chinese, anti-Japanese sentiment arose in the United States, culminating with the arrival of World War II. During World War II, negative sentiment toward the Japanese reached new heights; they were hated and mistrusted by many Americans. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, in December 1941, life for Japanese Americans changed. In February 1942, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 (Dinnerstein & Reimers, 1982). The order, which was upheld by the Supreme Court, required that all Japanese from the West Coast be rounded up and placed in camps called *relocation centers*. In all, about 110,000 people were rounded up on 5 days' notice and were told they could take only what they could carry. The camps were nothing more than prison facilities with armed military police on patrol, watching for escapes.

Following the war, the Japanese population remained low in the United States due to immigration restrictions that were not lifted until the 1960s. At that time, Japanese Americans represented 52% of the Asian American population. However, over the next 20 years, the number of Japanese who immigrated to America declined. This trend was largely a result of the increased need for labor in Japan, which stunted the immigration of the Japanese to America (Takaki, 1989). Those Japanese who were already here or who came after stringent quotas were lifted in the 1960s would go on to become some of the most successful immigrants. Today, economic indicators related to income and

▲ **Photo 1.2**   Posted Signs With Japanese American Exclusion Order

unemployment levels all reveal a positive trend for Japanese Americans. Nonetheless, Japanese Americans "still face exclusion from certain positions in many business, entertainment, political, and civil service areas, regardless of abilities" (Feagin & Feagin, 2008, p. 293).

Two other Asian groups whose numbers have increased over the last few decades are Filipinos and Koreans. We provide brief overviews of their American experiences in the next section.

Filipinos and Koreans

Filipinos have been in the United States since the 1700s. But as you might expect, much of their most significant immigration to the United States occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries. Many headed to plantations in Hawaii due to labor shortages. Unfortunately, when they arrived in America, they encountered violent attacks from Whites. In California, they competed with White farm workers; besides receiving lower wages than their counterparts, they were the target of continuing violence. In fact, in 1929 and 1930, there were brutal riots that were brought on by anti-Filipino sentiment (Feagin & Feagin, 2008). During this same time period, the 1924 immigration law restricted the number of Filipinos that could enter the country to 50 (Kim, 2001). Since this early period, although their population has increased precipitously, they remain the targets of violence, and in post-9/11 America, some have been targeted as potential terrorists.

Like Filipino Americans, Korean Americans headed to Hawaii in the early part of the 20th century to fill labor shortages. Koreans also followed other Asian groups to California. In the case of Koreans, the place of choice was San Francisco. Limited by immigration restrictions, much of Korean immigration followed World War II. Not until 1965 were the stringent immigration restrictions lifted. This policy change coincided with more Koreans (mostly from South Korea) arriving in America. Looking for opportunities, Koreans headed to inner-city communities, where many of them opened small businesses. Unfortunately, the relations between Koreans and other urban residents were, at best, tenuous and, at worst, resentful—due mostly, as some have noted, to
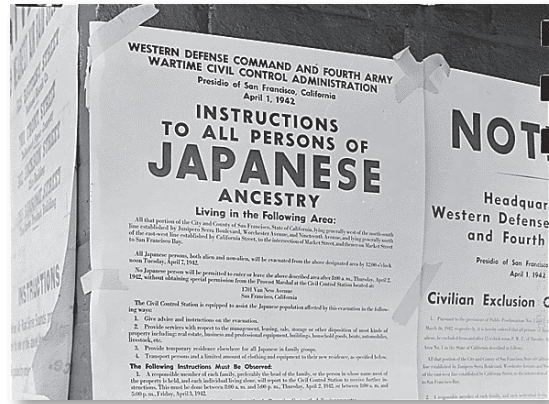
Korean immigrants entering largely African American communities and "setting up shop." Therefore, besides feeling that they were mistreated by clerks in Korean establishments, some felt that such businesses should be owned by community members. This sentiment spilled over in the Los Angeles riot of 1992 (Kim, 1999). In 2007, Korean Americans again received negative attention because the perpetrator of the Virginia Tech massacre was an immigrant from South Korea.

The difference between Asians and ethnic groups who came to be classified as White is that, although they have attained high levels of achievement, Asians have never fully assimilated. This leaves them, as one author put it, "as perpetual outsiders" (Perry, 2000, p. 99). Like African Americans, Native Americans, and some Latinos, Asian Americans have maintained a distinct racial categorization. Gould (2000) suggested that physical characteristics unique to their race (e.g., skin color, facial characteristics, size) have barred them from full assimilation and acceptance in America.

In recent years, Asian Americans have been labeled the ***model minority*** because of their success in education. Some see their success as proof that all groups can succeed if they "put their best foot forward." Others see this label as problematic (Wu, 2002), noting that all Asians are not equally successful. For example, as Perry (2000) noted, "Koreans and Vietnamese consistently lag behind Chinese, Japanese, and Asian Indians on most indicators of socioeconomic status" (p. 100). Furthermore, the continuing discrimination in employment, income, and education are masked by such a label (Perry, 2000). Nevertheless, over the last century, Asian Americans have been a productive force in the United States.

⊠ Summary

- Since the categorization of races in the late 1700s, societies have, unfortunately, used this classification system to divide populations.
- In America, the notion of race was not of considerable use until the 1660s, when color was one of the deciding factors in the creation of the slave system. It was at this time in history that the category "White" began to take on increased importance.
- Our review of the historical antecedents of race and crime in America has revealed that, over the past few centuries, although the level of crime in each group has varied over time, most racial/ethnic groups have committed the same kinds of offenses and have had similar offenses perpetrated against them by the dominant culture.
- Initially, Whites criminally brutalized Native Americans and African Americans. As time went on, ethnic immigrants such as the Germans, Italians, Irish, Jews, Asians, and Latinos also were subjected to harsh treatment and sometimes violence. As "White ethnic" groups assimilated into the populace, they, in turn, became part of the oppressive White population, continuing at times to engage in racial violence against other minority groups.
- In short, the history of race and crime in America is a story of exploitation, violence, and in the case of most racial/ethnic groups, the common use of crime as a way to ascend from the lower rungs of American society. The next chapter examines official crime and victimization data for the various races.

KEY TERMS

assimilation	lynching	racial discrimination
Black codes	minority	relocation centers
Bracero Program	model minority	truly disadvantaged
Chinese Exclusion Act	people of color	White ethnics
colonization	prejudice	
ethnicity	race	

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is there a better way to classify human beings besides using racial classifications?

2. How does racial discrimination in employment impact racial disparities in criminal justice?

3. Do you think Native Americans and African Americans are naturally more criminal than White Americans? Explain your reasoning.

4. Do you think the perception of Asians as the "model minority" influences their treatment by justice system officials?

5. Do you believe that whiteness still matters in succeeding in America?

WEB RESOURCES

U.S. Bureau of the Census: http://www.census.gov

Information on race data from the U.S. Census Bureau:
http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/race/racefactcb.html

American Anthropological Association website: "Race—Are we so different?"
http://www.understandingrace.org/home.html

Bureau of Indian Affairs: http://www.bia.gov/

Information on Ellis Island: http://www.ellisisland.org/

READING

The article reexamines the origins of American organized crime. Once thought to be the cultural contribution of Italian and Sicilian immigrants, Dickson-Gilmore and Woodiwiss illustrate how the accepted notions about the origins of organized crime need to be reconsidered. They locate the beginnings of organized crime with the arrival of French, Dutch, and British colonists. During the **colonization** process, these groups exploited the natural resources and lands of Native Americans. In doing so, they systematically cheated them out of their goods and land. The authors' historical account detailing these practices provides compelling evidence that organized crime has a much longer history in America than previously acknowledged.

The History of Native Americans and the Misdirected Study of Organized Crime

Jane Dickson-Gilmore and Michael Woodiwiss

For more than half a century, countless newspaper and magazine articles, books, films, and television documentaries published and shown across the world have repeated the same perspective on American organised crime history as that of a leading criminological textbook. 'Organised crime', according to *Criminology,* edited by several of the leading lights of the discipline, 'had its origin in the great wave of immigrants from Southern Italy (especially from Sicily) to the United States between 1875 and 1920'. Their section on the problem then proceeds to give brief descriptions of the history of Sicily and the American effort to prohibit alcohol before stating that Sicilian families 'were so successful in their domination of organised crime that, especially after World War II, organised crime became virtually synonymous with the Sicilian Mafia'. The textbook then claims that 'organised crime had become an empire almost beyond the reach of government, with vast resources derived from a virtual monopoly on gambling and loan-sharking, drug trafficking, pornography' and other criminal activities.

An earlier version of this history of organised crime in America was expressed by Senator John McClellan of Arkansas in 1962, when he wrote the following on the origins of the Mafia: 'When Sicilians migrated to the United States in great numbers at the end of the last century . . . many of the new arrivals were members of or closely associated with the secret society'. McClellan was only expressing what had become the conventional wisdom on the origins of organised crime in America by the 1960s. When he made this statement, he was chairman of the influential Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations and he went on to sponsor America's most significant organised crime control measures, including the Organised Crime Control Act of 1970.

As we shall see, this 'foreign origins' version of the United States organised crime history emerged out of the xenophobic assumptions shared by America's leading historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Although without substance, this distortion of the past matters. It reduces the problem of organised crime in America, and by extension the world, to a struggle between good guys in government versus bad guys in crime. The bad guys tend to be almost always portrayed as foreign, bureaucratically organised, almost completely in control of illegal markets, and constituting a threat to legitimate business. They are often said to be 'one step ahead' of the good guys. The only possible solution to this version of organised crime is to give the government good guys more power to get the bad guys. State and corporate criminal behaviour and public and private corruption are thus de-emphasised, and laws such as those prohibiting certain kinds of drugs are unquestioned. Such an understanding of organised crime history lies behind the passage not just of McClellan's Organised Crime Control Act but also of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and countless other organised crime control initiatives in many countries. This is particularly disturbing because, although these initiatives have clearly not controlled organised crime activities in the United States or anywhere else, they have been accepted almost everywhere with very little evaluation by policy makers or the mainstream media.

Tales about the Mafia, accompanied by assertions about its local, national, and global reach, have cast organised crime history into its own, mainly foreign compartment, far away from the 'master narrative' of American history. And yet, insofar as that master narrative is as much one of the noble immigrant as the history of organised crime is that of the ignoble newcomer, both chronicles share origins and important intersections. Both histories begin with the arrival of outsiders to a 'new world'. Those fortunate to have first claimed the right to initiate the identity of 'American', which subsequent generations would claim as their birthright, and which would be selectively granted or withheld from later waves of 'others', were all virtually perceived as posing some threat to the 'American way', by their novelty if not their culture. Within the 'master narrative' of the 'huddled masses' lay the basic ingredients of the chronicle of organised crime: the eternal immigrant, seeking a better life through embracing or perverting 'American values' of industry and profit. According to American organised crime folklore, the latter course was chosen by the Italian and Sicilian immigrants of the late nineteenth century, thus initiating the scourge of organised crime in the United States.

And yet the Italians and Sicilians were hardly the first immigrants to organise crime in America. As we shall see in the second section of this article, the first wave of outsiders, in north-eastern America at least, came in the form of French, Dutch, and British colonisers, and the locals they encountered were the Indian peoples of the Atlantic coast and the territories which would become New France, New Netherland, and New York. Notwithstanding the far later incipience of organised crime assigned by some commentators, there is much within the interactions between the natives and newcomers of the American north-east to suggest that it is in this much earlier historical juncture that the first instances of organised criminal activity in America are witnessed.

⌖ The 'Other' Among Us: Criminality and Complicity in the Colonisation of North-Eastern America

Conventional histories of organised crime in the United States link the rise of this phenomenon erroneously with successive waves of 'immigrant others', including primarily Jewish,

Irish, and Italian newcomers. And yet they were certainly not the first immigrants to arrive in north-eastern America, nor are they the first to be associated with the rise of illicit, exploitative criminal networks. Conspicuously absent in these histories are the activities of the predominantly French, Dutch, and British immigrants who arrived in the north-east as early as 1608, and who in many cases far more aptly reflect the stereotypical immigrant of conventional organised crime chronologies their descendents applied to later newcomers.

The colonisation of the American north-east has been characterised as a form of stealth corporatism, in which outsiders systematically exploited the fish, fur, timber, and territorial resources of the place and, by implication, those indigenous nations which held them. Colonial corporations, created in Europe, arrived on Atlantic shores to exploit whatever profit might be found in the 'new world'. Commonly endowed with 'monopolies' on any resources that were 'discovered', corporations such as the Company of New France, the New Netherland Company, and the Dutch East India Company competed to make whatever they could of those exclusionary rights. Expansion of empire was, in most contexts, a close, but secondary consideration which was largely at the mercy of the primary goals of trade and commerce which were required to support it. And as is the case today, so it was historically: the entrenchment of a so-called legitimate economy and the concomitant regulatory structure carried with it abundant opportunities for the development of illicit—and often far more profitable—counterparts. The emergence of these alternative economies came fast on the heels of the establishment of the state-sanctioned markets, and they flourished with the complicity of local government officials, members of the military, the traders and their aboriginal partners.

The exploitation of the local resource base in both the French and Dutch colonial contexts provides an apposite example to illustrate our argument. The French arrived shortly before the Dutch in the north-east and were the first to attempt to establish relations of trade and commerce with the aboriginal people residing in their midst. The Dutch were far more transparent and successful in their search for profit than were the French, though. In 1608, when Henry Hudson sailed down the river that would take his name, he did so as a representative of the Dutch East India Company and in the company of a number of traders and merchants. The latter were quick to initiate trade with local indigenous peoples on the Hudson River, along the Atlantic coast and inland. By 1614, the Dutch Van Tweenhuysen Company had erected a permanent post at Fort Nassau, and the corporate colonialism of north-eastern America had begun in earnest. Fort Nassau was soon abandoned due to flooding; the Dutch East Indian Company overtook the Tweenhuysen Company and built the more enduring Fort Orange by 1624.

The Dutch merchants at Fort Orange, although they dabbled briefly—and rather disastrously—in aboriginal politics, adopted a clear focus on trading and commerce with local Indians. The Indians, initially Mohicans but later primarily Mohawk Iroquois, seem to have been content with such a purely mercantile association, despite their general preference for more multi-faceted alliances. This relationship would not be altered significantly when the British defeated the New Netherlanders in 1664 and assumed control of their post at Fort Orange, which remained predominantly Dutch.

To the north, the French made much more of the idea of empire, but were also keenly interested in developing a prosperous trade in support of their new settlement. The French explorer Samuel de Champlain had established a fragile settlement at Québec in 1608, as one part of his mandate to 'manage the colony, to explore, to maintain alliances with the Indians and to forge new ones'. Managing the colony required paying for it, and alliances were largely matters of commerce and warfare pursued largely as a means of protecting trading partners and relations. Champlain entered the wilderness around the settlement, seeking alliances with the Iroquoian and Algonquin nations on its borders, working

assiduously towards the trade that would sustain his colony.

Once exposed to the luxury of European goods brought by the trade, aboriginal nations were prepared to fight to retain access to them. Merchants and traders cared little with whom they traded, as long as they could obtain the raw resources (primarily furs, notably beaver) necessary to sustain their profits. Traders, many of whom were quite happy to venture deep into the frontier to ply their craft, were generally rough, violent men who had little regard for business ethics or 'compassionate capitalism'. They worked for, or were connected with, merchants located in trading centres and settlements, who shared their rather mercenary approach to doing business. As framed by Francis Jennings, 'a "good" trader was one who could cheat Indians without getting caught at it, and the trouble with "that sort of fellow was that he would cheat the merchant too, if he could. Merchants who, for the most part, remained at the centre—at the posts or settlements—relied upon a network of traders who fanned out from the centre to the peripheries of the surrounding aboriginal communities to obtain furs from Indian trading partners. At least some of those partners were silent, or unseen, as aboriginals holding territories closer to the posts quickly adopted roles as 'middlemen'. In this capacity, the Mohawk Iroquois especially excelled.

Travelling upriver from their settlements on the southern shore of the Saint Lawrence River near Montreal, Mohawk warriors would intercept shipments of furs on their way to the post at Montreal and purchase (at quite reduced prices) or steal furs from outer nation traders. The Mohawks would then deliver these furs to whomever would offer the best price; regrettably for New France, the presence of Dutch and, later, British traders at New York meant that there was always an alternative market, and often a more profitable one, within a day or two's journey from Montreal. The reality of competing markets gave rise early on to an 'illicit trade' between Montreal and Fort Orange/Albany, which was plied primarily by the Mohawks residing on the Saint Lawrence. That waterway, referred to as the trading 'superhighway' of the north, was intersected by the Richelieu River, which flowed south through Lake Champlain, into Lake George and down the Hudson River past Albany to New York. As this watershed, referred to as the 'Mahican channel', was largely controlled by Mohawk Iroquois, it provided a convenient access between competing, alternative markets for Mohawk middlemen.

The Montreal-Albany trade appears to have begun in earnest shortly after the English conquest of New York. It was made inevitable by the hard realities of the north-eastern colonial economics: Albany offered superior trade goods, most notably the coveted English stroud (woollen cloth or blanket), and were willing to pay higher prices, while Canada contained more and better peltries, for which lower prices and lesser quality goods were offered. An accommodation was presupposed by the desire of both Mohawks and French merchants and settlers for English goods, the greed of the traders and the complicity of everyone from Indian to intendant and Governor.

The French were the first to feel the ill effects of the underground trading economy. Losing profits and, just as dangerously, the Indian allies which generated and protected them, to the south, the French struggled to control the trade by a series of regulatory measures which rendered participation in the trade first, illegal and, that failing, unprofitable. The earliest of the controls resided in the system of granting trade monopolies, whereby a single company became the only legitimate recipient of peltries. Later, however, as this restriction proved inadequate to stay the tide of French furs south, the prohibitions became many and varied. Initially, these extraordinary measures focussed on the Indian trade and attempted to end the loss of beaver to Albany by reproducing in French mills the English strouds which the Mohawks appeared unwilling to live without. This policy failed and led to the importing of original strouds to Montreal, but

this effort suffered from the same problems of expense already characterising the majority of French goods.

Because the greater part of the trade between Montreal and Albany was conducted via the 'Mahican channel', later controls were designed to impede as much as possible traffic on those pathways. These were equally ineffectual, owing in no small measure to the reality that those manning the controls were often also involved in the trade. There is evidence to indicate that French soldiers stationed at posts situated along the most common routes of the illicit trade refused to thwart the trade and may well have been actively involved, as were their British counterparts in New York. In an effort to compensate for this, other additional controls were created, but they were all of uniformly minimal effect; there were far too many key hands in the Montreal-Albany trading pot, and none of them were willing to come out empty. As a result, controls on the trade were largely fruitless, and business thrived. Documentary evidence suggests that, at one juncture in the history of the Montreal-Albany trade, as much as two-thirds of the peltries harvested in Canada per year were diverted to New York for considerable profit of those involved in the trade.

The extent to which the rich and powerful were complicit in the Montreal-Albany trade is evident in the records, which are especially illuminating regarding the impact of the trade on the ongoing battles between French and British to control the north-east. At the Seven Years' War, which would ultimately decide the contest that arose on the horizon, considerable ambivalence was apparent on the part of key colonial players. William Johnson, the British trader-turned-diplomat who was charged with managing Indian Affairs for the New York government prior to the outbreak of the war after 1756, was advised by an official that

> You cannot be) ignorant yt many in (ye Province,) and its Neighboring Traders, and ye Richest Men (in Albany) do not

wish well to the Success of any Expedtn (against) Canada, & this from a view which a few Men of considerable estates & influence by their family relations have to their private advantage gained by a Trade with France, & which (for ye Common good) I hope I have effectualy Stopt, I must therfore tell you yt I am Suspicious yt all ye Difficulties I met with in ye War, arose chiefly from this Source; For it these men could have prevented ye Indians joining in ye War, & could have prevailed with them to declare for a Neutrality . . . without an open declaration of their Intentions were lay'd in ye way of every preparation that became necessary for ye Success of any Enterprise against Canada.

It is doubtful that this communication came as much surprise to Johnson, however, given his own connections to the trade. Johnson was related by marriage to the powerful DeLancey family of Albany, whose wealth was founded virtually entirely upon the Montreal-Albany trade network. When William Shirley, in his capacity as Governor of Massachusetts and Commander-in-Chief of the British Royal Forces, attempted to squelch the trade, which many viewed as a traitorous association, Johnson retaliated by convincing the Iroquois not to support Shirley's military aspirations, and the DeLanceys withheld funds for the same. The irony is not lost that the Saint Lawrence River and the Mohawk communities which dot its southern shores have been actively and openly implicated in the 'buttlegging' of contraband cigarettes and other commodities, both licit and illicit, through parts of the waterways which once defined the Montreal-Albany trade. Nor is it much surprising that, as the Montreal-Albany trade once carried the protection of the rich and powerful, the 'contraband corridor' through which modern Mohawks smuggled cigarettes had the complicity and support of the wealthy and powerful R. J. Reynolds

Company. There is thus a long tradition of well-organised, well-connected criminal enterprise in north-eastern America, and one that certainly predates the arrival of immigrants from Italy or Sicily.

Indeed, it seems likely that, if we wish to place blame for the rise of organised crime in America at the feet of immigrants, the most likely culprits are the French, Dutch, and British, who openly defrauded their aboriginal trading partners (who also seemed less than unwilling to exploit each other) and who together openly engaged in the illicit Montreal-Albany trade.

While the Montreal-Albany trade was probably the most conspicuous and well-organised illicit activity of the era, it is important to recognise that the interactions between native and newcomers in licit trade were also characterised by their own forms of lawlessness. To the degree that these practices worked to the benefit of the colonial empires and the economics that supported them, however, they were overlooked by officials, who were also willing to turn a blind eye to the degree to which these activities worked to the detriment of aboriginal communities. For example, in north-eastern America, no trader travelled without a good supply of liquor (brandy in New France, rum in New York), and any trade included a good dose of 'firewater'. To maximise profit, traders would regularly water down the liquor, but their Indian trading partners quickly caught on. Setting a match to the barrel or bottle became a standard part of any exchange—if the spirits ignited, the liquor was not watered and the trade was good; if it did not catch fire, the watery offering was likely to be rejected immediately. This was fraud, of course, but no official would have responded to it as such, largely because especially in New France, the official position of both Indian and non-Indian governments was opposed to the use of liquor in the trade—not that this official position translated into much effect in practice.

The situation in New France is a good example. For much of the history of the French regime in Canada, governance of the colony was subject to ongoing power struggles between the powerful Catholic Society of Jesus and their Jesuit missionaries, and colonial officials. The Jesuits, who spent much time in aboriginal communities, were well aware of the disastrous impact the brandy trade had on those communities and exerted pressure both on the Sovereign Council at Quebec and their own bishopric to stem the flow of liquor into aboriginal communities. In response, the colonial government, unwilling to press too strongly to control an essential aspect of the trade, sanctioned the sale of alcohol to the Indian people, but forbade those purchasing it to get drunk. For their part, Church condemned the sale of liquor to Indians and threatened with excommunication anyone caught defying this prohibition. Almost without exception, the controls amounted to nothing. Company and colonial officials turned a blind eye to the illicit trade in brandy, which Devine informs was merely 'winked at by the French officials'. Liquor always had been, and would continue to be, a central commodity of the trade, and therefore of the colonial enterprise in New France.

Traders brought impacts other than liquor and European technologies into communities, including fundamental shifts in their traditional economic, social and political structures. Epidemics and famines vastly exacerbated warfare over access to the trade, and participation in their colonial allies' conflicts effectively undermined traditional ways. Epidemics may perhaps be seen as the collateral damage of colonial corporatism, and most of the other consequences—warfare, famine, socioeconomic and political disruption—were a direct result of the practices that came to inform and underpin most legitimate capitalist—and non-legitimate—exchanges between aboriginal and non-aboriginal trading partners.

It is clear that there was much that was organised criminality in the early moments of contact and colonisation of North-eastern America; it is also apparent that this systematic abuse of power toward aboriginal people did

not end with the fur trade. Indeed, in any comprehensive history of such activity America must acknowledge the systematic criminal activity against Native Americans by citizens of the newly created United States during the nineteenth century. Numerous government commissions appointed to investigate Indian affairs acknowledged that white crimes against Indians far outweighed Indian crimes against whites and that white crimes were both ruthless and systematic. Nineteenth and early twentieth century historians and school history textbooks until the 1960s reflected and perpetuated stereotypes of Native Americans. Francis Parkman, for example, a prominent representative of the first generation of American historians, characterised all Indians as 'rigid, inflexible, and unprogressive', a race that was inevitably and rightly doomed. He was followed by a succession of popular historians uniformly dismissing Indians as savages on their way to extinction due to racial deficiencies. These included the aforementioned Frederick Jackson Turner, Theodore Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson. Turner's thesis on the significance of America's frontier experience had made him one of the primary shapers of America's understanding of its past, not least through its influence on the narratives of Hollywood western films. Roosevelt and Wilson wrote influential survey histories before becoming the presidents who dominated national politics in the early twentieth century. All shared a belief in what became known as American exceptionalism, the idea that the United States offers hope for the democratic future of humanity due to the special historical circumstances of the spread of democracy across the North American continent. By accepting this belief in a universally benevolent exceptionalism, they had to ignore or downplay what Richard Hofstadter called the 'shame' of America, involving such aspects of Western development as 'riotous land speculation, vigilantism, the ruthless despoiling of the continent, the arrogance of American expansionism . . . even the near savagery, to

which men were reduced on some portions of the frontier'.

These historians also ignored the impact of systematic criminality on America's native population, not least the wholesale corruption and fraud that followed the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887, which involved carving up the Indian Reservations into fee simple plots owned by individuals and families, in the same way that whites owned their land and in a way contrary to centuries of native tribal tradition. The allotment processes that followed allowed government officials and white land purchasers to cheat unsuspecting natives out of millions of acres of their land, helping to account for the reduction of Indian landholdings in the United States from 138 to 52 million acres. The main result of allotment, according to Cherokee rancher Richard-Martin, was 'to turn this illiterate people into the Shark like Jaws of the greedy grafter who are here in great numbers with the one Thought and that is gain'. Given the ignorance and bias of popular and academic history, the thought that native Americans might have been among the most significant victims of organised criminal activity would not have occurred to many Americans when they began to confront the problem of 'organised crime' at the end of the nineteenth century.

The descendents of the French, Dutch, and British immigrants, who may be understood as the first real perpetrators of organised crime in America, constructed and believed in revisionist histories which reified the colonial newcomers and cast native Americans as thwarters of progress and 'the American way'. It was but a small leap from there to see the efforts of native nations to move out of state-induced and reinforced poverty, largely through economic activities such as casinos, on-line gaming, and high-stakes bingos which remain associated with vice, as marginal, possibly criminal, activities. Generations of Americans, getting their knowledge of the past from Eurocentric textbooks and less than scholarly press accounts, would be kept ignorant of the fact that their pioneering forebears were involved in much activity that would

qualify as organised crime in even the most restrictive definition. Indeed, some of the most prominent of early Americans may be seen as setting a precedent for well-organised, profit-motivated state lawlessness first involving and then victimising the Native Americans whose nations long predated that of the United States. It would prove to be a difficult precedent to break, as would the conceptualisations of organised crime which insulated influential elites and officials by characterising organized crime as essentially the province of the 'other'.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are your reactions to the argument made by Gilmore and Woodiwiss that organized crime began in the United States when the first wave of immigrants, primarily of French, Dutch, and British descent, arrived in the early 1600s? Do they make a compelling argument? Why or why not?

2. Why do you think criminologists studying organized crime have overlooked or dismissed the colonists' exploitation of Native Americans as a form of organized crime?

3. How does this article contribute to the understanding of organized crime not only in the United States, but also throughout the world?

❖

READING

Professor Gans' article provides a historical overview of how the American class structure has influenced the racial hierarchy in America. Beginning with an overview of how the lay public views race, he dissects the role that skin color plays in judgments about superiority and inferiority and also about who are the dangerous populations. Inevitably, those with dark skin color (African Americans and other Blacks) have been reduced to being both inferior and the most threatening population. He considers the way in which early White ethnic immigrants were able to use class mobility to rise out of their racially undesirable status. This, however, has not been the experience of African Americans. Because of discriminatory practices, they remain, in large part, unable to completely ascend the class ranks that provide the proven avenue for movement up the racial hierarchy.

Race as Class

Herbert J. Gans

Humans of all colors and shapes can make babies with each other. Consequently most biologists, who define races as subspecies that cannot interbreed, argue that scientifically there can be no human races. Nonetheless, lay people still see and distinguish between races. Thus, it is worth asking again why the lay notion of race continues to exist and to exert so much influence in human affairs.

Lay persons are not biologists, nor are they sociologists, who argue these days that race is a social construction arbitrary enough to be eliminated if "society" chose to do so. The laity operates with a very different definition of race. They see that humans vary, notably in skin color, the shape of the head, nose, and lips, and quality of hair, and they choose to define the variations as individual races.

More important, the lay public uses this definition of race to decide whether strangers (the so-called other) are to be treated as superior, inferior, or equal. Race is even more useful for deciding quickly whether strangers might be threatening and thus should be excluded. Whites often consider dark-skinned strangers threatening until they prove otherwise, and none more than African Americans.

Scholars believe the color differences in human skins can be traced to climatic adaptation. They argue that the high levels of melanin in dark skin originally protected people living outside in hot, sunny climates, notably in Africa and South Asia, from skin cancer. Conversely, in cold climates, the low amount of melanin in light skins enabled the early humans to soak up vitamin D from a sun often hidden behind clouds. These color differences were reinforced by millennia of inbreeding when humans lived in small groups that were geographically and socially isolated. This inbreeding also produced variations in head and nose shapes and other facial features so that Northern Europeans look different from people from the Mediterranean area, such as Italians and, long ago, Jews. Likewise, East African faces differ from West African ones, and Chinese faces from Japanese ones. (Presumably the inbreeding and isolation also produced the DNA patterns that geneticists refer to in the latest scientific revival and redefinition of race.)

Geographic and social isolation ended long ago, however, and human population movements, intermarriage, and other occasions for mixing are eroding physical differences in bodily features. Skin color stopped being adaptive too after people found ways to protect themselves from the sun and could get their vitamin D from the grocery or vitamin store. Even so, enough color variety persists to justify America's perception of white, yellow, red, brown, and black races.

Never mind for the moment that the skin of "whites," as well as [that of] many East Asians and Latinos, is actually pink; that Native Americans are not red; that most African Americans come in various shades of brown; and that really black skin is rare. Never mind either that color differences within each of these populations are as great as the differences between them and that, as DNA testing makes quite clear, most people are of racially mixed origins even if they do not know it. But remember that this color palette was invented by whites. Nonwhite people would probably divide the range of skin colors quite differently.

Advocates of racial equality use these contradictions to fight against racism. However, the general public also has other priorities. As long as people can roughly agree about who looks "white," "yellow," or "black" and find that their notion of race works for their purposes, they ignore its inaccuracies, inconsistencies, and other deficiencies.

Note, however, that only some facial and bodily features are selected for the lay definition of race. Some, like the color of women's nipples or the shape of toes (and male navels), cannot serve because they are kept covered. Most other visible ones, like height, weight, hairlines, ear lobes, finger or hand sizes—and even skin texture—vary too randomly and

frequently to be useful for categorizing and ranking people or judging strangers. After all, your own child is apt to have the same stubby fingers as a child of another skin color or, what is equally important, a child from a very different income level.

Race, Class, and Status

In fact, the skin colors and facial features commonly used to define race are selected precisely because, when arranged hierarchically, they resemble the country's class-and-status hierarchy. Thus, whites are on top of the socioeconomic pecking order as they are on top of the racial one, while variously shaded nonwhites are below them in socioeconomic position (class) and prestige (status).

The darkest people are for the most part at the bottom of the class-status hierarchy. This is no accident, and Americans have therefore always used race as a marker or indicator of both class and status. Sometimes they also use it to enforce class position, to keep some people "in their place." Indeed, these uses are a major reason for its persistence.

Of course, race functions as more than a class marker, and the correlation between race and the socioeconomic pecking order is far from statistically perfect: All races can be found at every level of that order. Still, the race-class correlation is strong enough to utilize race for the general ranking of others. It also becomes more useful for ranking dark-skinned people as white poverty declines so much that whiteness becomes equivalent to being middle or upper class.

The relation between race and class is unmistakable. For example, the 1998–2000 median household income of non-Hispanic whites was $45,500; of Hispanics (currently seen by many as a race) as well as Native Americans, $32,000; and of African Americans, $29,000. The poverty rates for these same groups were 7.8 percent among whites, 23.1

among Hispanics, 23.9 among blacks, and 25.9 among Native Americans. (Asians' median income was $52,600—which does much to explain why we see them as a model minority.)

True, race is not the only indicator used as a clue to socioeconomic status. Others exist and are useful because they can also be applied to ranking co-racials. They include language (itself a rough indicator of education), dress, and various kinds of taste, from given names to cultural preferences, among others.

American English has no widely known working-class dialect like the English Cockney, although "Brooklynese" is a rough equivalent, as is "black vernacular." Most blue-collar people dress differently at work from white-collar, professional, and managerial workers. Although contemporary American leisure-time dress no longer signifies the wearers' class, middle-income Americans do not usually wear Armani suits or French haute couture, and the people who do can spot the knockoffs bought by the less affluent.

Actually, the cultural differences in language, dress, and so forth that were socially most noticeable are declining. Consequently, race could become yet more useful as a status marker, since it is so easily noticed and so hard to hide or change. And in a society that likes to see itself as classless, race comes in very handy as a substitute.

The Historical Background

Race became a marker of class and status almost with the first settling of the United States. The country's initial holders of cultural and political power were mostly WASPs (with a smattering of Dutch and Spanish in some parts of what later became the United States). They thus automatically assumed that their kind of whiteness marked the top of the class hierarchy. The bottom was assigned to the most powerless, who at first were Native Americans and slaves. However, even before the former

had been virtually eradicated or pushed to the country's edges, the skin color and related facial features of the majority of colonial America's slaves had become the markers for the lowest class in the colonies.

Although dislike and fear of the dark are as old as the hills and found all over the world, the distinction between black and white skin became important in America only with slavery and was actually established only some decades after the first importation of black slaves. Originally, slave owners justified their enslavement of black Africans by their being heathens, not by their skin color.

In fact, early Southern plantation owners could have relied on white indentured servants to pick tobacco and cotton or purchased the white slaves that were available then, including the Slavs from whom the term *slave* is derived. They also had access to enslaved Native Americans. Blacks, however, were cheaper, more plentiful, more easily controlled, and physically more able to survive the intense heat and brutal working conditions of Southern plantations.

After slavery ended, blacks became farm laborers and sharecroppers, de facto indentured servants, really, and thus they remained at the bottom of the class hierarchy. When the pace of industrialization quickened, the country needed new sources of cheap labor. Northern industrialists, unable and unwilling to recruit southern African Americans, brought in very poor European immigrants, mostly peasants. Because these people were near the bottom of the class hierarchy, they were considered nonwhite and classified into races. Irish and Italian newcomers were sometimes even described as black (Italians as "guineas"), and the eastern and southern European immigrants were deemed "swarthy."

However, because skin color is socially constructed, it can also be reconstructed. Thus, when the descendants of the European immigrants began to move up economically and socially, their skins apparently began to look lighter to the whites who had come to America before them. When enough of these descendents became visibly middle class, their skin was seen as fully white. The biological skin color of the second and third generations had not changed, but it was socially blanched or whitened. The process probably began in earnest just before the Great Depression and resumed after World War II. As the cultural and other differences of the original European immigrants disappeared, their descendants became known as white ethnics.

This pattern is now repeating itself among the peoples of the post-1965 immigration. Many of the new immigrants came with money and higher education, and descriptions of their skin color have been shaped by their class position. Unlike the poor Chinese who were imported in the 19th century to build the West and who were hated and feared by whites as a "yellow horde," today's affluent Asian newcomers do not seem to look yellow. In fact, they are already sometimes thought of as honorary whites, and later in the 21st century they may well turn into a new set of white ethnics. Poor East and Southeast Asians may not be so privileged, however, although they are too few to be called a "yellow horde."

Hispanics are today's equivalent of a "swarthy" race. However, the children and grandchildren of immigrants among them will probably undergo "whitening" as they become middle class. Poor Mexicans, particularly in the Southwest, are less likely to be whitened, however. (Recently a WASP Harvard professor came close to describing these Mexican immigrants as a brown horde.)

Meanwhile, black Hispanics from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and other Caribbean countries may continue to be perceived, treated, and mistreated as if they were African American. One result of that mistreatment is their low median household income of $35,000, which was just $1,000 more than that of non-Hispanic blacks but $4,000 below that of so-called white Hispanics.

▲ **Photo 1.3** Not Quite White: Early 20th-Century Immigrants

Perhaps South Asians provide the best example of how race correlates with class and how it is affected by class position. Although the highly educated Indians and Sri Lankans who started coming to America after 1965 were often darker than African Americans, whites only noticed their economic success. They have rarely been seen as nonwhites, and are also often praised as a model minority.

Of course, even favorable color perceptions have not ended racial discrimination against newcomers, including model minorities and other affluent ones. When they become competitors for valued resources such as highly paid jobs, top schools, housing, and the like, they also become a threat to whites. California's Japanese-Americans still suffer from discrimination and prejudice four generations after their ancestors arrived here.

✉ African-American Exceptionalism

The only population whose racial features are not automatically perceived differently with upward mobility are African Americans: Those who are affluent and well-educated remain as visibly black to whites as before. Although a significant number of African Americans have become middle class since the civil rights

legislation of the 1960s, they still suffer from far harsher and more pervasive discrimination and segregation than nonwhite immigrants of equivalent class position. This not only keeps whites and blacks apart but prevents blacks from moving toward equality with whites. In their case, race is used both as a marker of class and, by keeping blacks "in their place," an enforcer of class position and a brake on upward mobility.

In the white South of the past, African Americans were lynched for being "uppity." Today, the enforcement of class position is less deadly but, for example, the glass ceiling for professional and managerial African Americans is set lower than for Asian Americans, and on-the-job harassment remains routine.

Why African-American upward economic mobility is either blocked or, if allowed, not followed by public blanching of skin color remains a mystery. Many explanations have been proposed for the white exceptionalism with which African Americans are treated. The most common is "racism," an almost innate prejudice against people of different skin color that takes both personal and institutional forms. But this does not tell us why such prejudice toward African Americans remains stronger than that toward other nonwhites.

A second explanation is the previously mentioned white antipathy to blackness, with an allegedly primeval fear of darkness extrapolated into a primordial fear of dark-skinned people. But according to this explanation, dark-skinned immigrants such as South Asians should be treated much like African Americans.

A better explanation might focus on "Negroid" features. African as well as Caribbean immigrants with such features—for example, West Indians and Haitians—seem to be treated somewhat better than African Americans. But this remains true only for new immigrants; their children are generally treated like African Americans.

Two additional explanations are class-related. For generations, a majority or plurality

of all African Americans were poor, and about a quarter still remain so. In addition, African Americans continue to commit a proportionally greater share of the street crime, especially street drug sales—often because legitimate job opportunities are scarce. African Americans are apparently also more often arrested without cause. As one result, poor African Americans are more often considered undeserving than are other poor people, although in some parts of America, poor Hispanics, especially those who are black, are similarly stigmatized.

The second class-based explanation proposes that white exceptionalist treatment of African Americans is a continuing effect of slavery: They are still perceived as ex-slaves. Many hateful stereotypes with which today's African Americans are demonized have changed little from those used to dehumanize the slaves. (Black Hispanics seem to be equally demonized, but then they were also slaves, if not on the North American continent.) Although slavery ended officially in 1864, ever since the end of Reconstruction subtle efforts to discourage African-American upward mobility have not abated, although these efforts are today much less pervasive or effective than earlier.

Some African Americans are now millionaires, but the gap in wealth between average African Americans and whites is much greater than the gap between incomes. The African-American middle class continues to grow, but many of its members barely have a toehold in it, and some are only a few paychecks away from a return to poverty. And the African-American poor still face the most formidable obstacles to upward mobility. Close to a majority of working-age African-American men are jobless or out of the labor force. Many women, including single mothers, now work in the low-wage economy, but they must do without most of the support systems that help middle-class working mothers. Both federal and state governments have been punitive, even in recent Democratic administrations, and the

▲ **Photo 1.4** Mid-20th Century African American Youth

Republicans have cut back nearly every anti-poverty program they cannot abolish.

Daily life in a white-dominated society reminds many African Americans that they are perceived as inferiors, and these reminders are louder and more relentless for the poor, especially young men. Regularly suspected of being criminals, they must constantly prove that they are worthy of equal access to the American Dream. For generations, African Americans have watched immigrants pass them in the class hierarchy, and those who are poor must continue to compete with current immigrants for the lowest-paying jobs. If unskilled African Americans reject such jobs or fail to act as deferentially as immigrants, they justify the white belief that they are less deserving than immigrants. Blacks' resentment of such treatment gives whites additional evidence of their unworthiness, thereby justifying another cycle of efforts to keep them from moving up in class and status.

Such practices raise the suspicion that the white political economy and white Americans may, with the help of nonwhites who are not black, use African Americans to anchor the American class structure with a permanently lower-class population. In effect, America, or those making decisions in its name, could be

seeking, not necessarily consciously, to establish an undercaste that cannot move out and up. Such undercastes exist in other societies: the gypsies of Eastern Europe, India's untouchables, "indigenous people" and "aborigines" in yet other places. But these are far poorer countries than the United States.

Some Implications

The conventional wisdom and its accompanying morality treat racial prejudice, discrimination, and segregation as irrational social and individual evils that public policy can reduce but only changes in white behavior and values can eliminate. In fact, over the years, white prejudice as measured by attitude surveys has dramatically declined, far more dramatically than behavioral and institutional discrimination.

But what if discrimination and segregation are more than just a social evil? If they are used to keep African Americans down, then they also serve to eliminate or restrain competitors for valued or scarce resources, material and symbolic. Keeping African Americans from decent jobs and incomes as well as quality schools and housing makes more of these available to all the rest of the population. In that case, discrimination and segregation may decline significantly only if the rules of the competition change or if scarce resources, such as decent jobs, become plentiful enough to relax the competition, so that the African-American population can become as predominantly middle class as the white population. Then the stigmas, the stereotypes inherited from slavery, and the social and other arrangements that maintain segregation and discrimination could begin to lose their credibility. Perhaps "black" skin would eventually become as invisible as "yellow" skin is becoming.

The Multiracial Future

One trend that encourages upward mobility is the rapid increase in interracial marriage that began about a quarter century ago. As the

children born to parents of different races also intermarry, more and more Americans will be multiracial, so that at some point far in the future the current quintet of skin colors will be irrelevant. About 40 percent of young Hispanics and two-thirds of young Asians now "marry out," but only about 10 percent of blacks now marry nonblacks—yet another instance of the exceptionalism that differentiates blacks.

Moreover, if race remains a class marker, new variations in skin color and in other visible bodily features will be taken to indicate class position. Thus, multiracials with "Negroid" characteristics could still find themselves disproportionately at the bottom of the class hierarchy. But what if at some point in the future everyone's skin color varied by only a few shades of brown? At that point, the dominant American classes might have to invent some new class markers.

If in some utopian future the class hierarchy disappears, people will probably stop judging differences in skin color and other features. Then lay Americans would probably agree with biologists that race does not exist. They might even insist that race does not need to exist.

Recommended Resources

David Brion Davis. *Challenging the Boundaries of Slavery* (Harvard University Press, 2001). A historical account of the relation between race and slavery.

Joe R. Feagin and Melvin P. Sikes. *Living with Racism: The Black Middleclass Experience* (Beacon, 1994). Documents continuing discrimination against middle- and upper-middle-class African Americans.

Barbara Jeanne Fields. "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America." *New Left Review* 181 (May/June 1990): 95–118. A provocative analysis of the relations between class and race.

Marvin Harris. "How Our Skins Got Their Color." in *Who We Are, Where We Came From, and Where We Are Going* (Harper Collins, 1989). An anthropologist explains the origins of different skin colors.

Jennifer Lee and Frank D. Bean. "Beyond Black and White: Remaking Race in America." *Contexts* (Summer 2003): 26–33. A concise analysis of changing perceptions and realities of race in America.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your reaction to the idea that the general public uses race to decide how a person should be treated and whether or not they should be viewed as a threat? Do you agree with this idea? Why or why not?

2. How does the controversial history of race relations within the United States affect how people view race?

3. Discuss how the color of one's skin in the United States can directly impact how a person is treated even in today's world.

❖

READING

Webster discusses how White ethnicity is often overlooked in discourse on race and crime. He correctly asserts that much of the discourse on race and crime centers on racial and ethnic groups other than Whites. This is despite the fact that Whites, in both the United Kingdom and the United States, commit a large share of the criminal offenses. In shaping the debate about racial and ethnic minorities other than Whites, such groups are painted as the more criminal races. In short, they *are* the crime problem. The author turns the tables on the traditional race and crime debate by focusing on the racial and class hierarchy within the White race and how it racializes crime among certain segments within the White population. Noting that terms such as *White underclass* and *new immigrants* represent code words for the segment of the White population deemed troublesome and criminal, Webster discusses the nuances of this understudied aspect of race and crime.

Marginalized White
Ethnicity, Race and Crime

Colin Webster

⊠   Introduction

> The white English working class is
> now the only group of people that the
> chattering classes are happy to hear
> mocked and attacked.
>
> Julie Burchill (cited in Collins, 2004: 225)

Burchill's iconoclastic view of class relations in modern Britain can be read at a number of levels, not least its veracity and reductionism. Yet it is striking, that while sexist and particularly racist language has become taboo in official discourse, the language of class contempt has not (Sayer, 2005). Class contempt varies from the subtlest forms of aversion to visceral revulsion, disgust and sneering that serves to project all that is bad and immoral onto the other, while reciprocally enhancing and confirming the goodness, self-regard and status of one's own class. Class contempt 'through distance, denigration and disgust towards the disadvantaged white working class also serves darker and more disturbing purposes that racialize this group too (Skeggs, 2004: 118). Class distance is drawn from setting moral boundaries between different sorts of whiteness, especially through ascriptions of the body and appearance. The white working class is denigrated for their 'excessive artificial appearance' and behaviour, vulgarity, 'letting go' and moral irresponsibility. Designations such as 'white trash' or 'chav' perfectly encompass feelings of class contempt. Contempt can lead to the criminalization of the black and white working class, and the condoning of middle-class crime, and the whole effect is to reinforce and reproduce class hierarchy. At the same time it is important in making these and other claims, developed later, not to create simply inverted binaries of class and ethnic identity that posit the respectable as bad and demands for respect automatically valid (Sayer, 2005).

It is remarkable how white ethnicity and class retain their anonymity in discussions of ethnicity and crime—especially as self-report studies suggest that 'whites' disproportionately offend compared to other ethnic groups and obviously commit the vast bulk of crimes. After all, 85 per cent of offences involving children and young people were committed by those who classify their ethnicity as white, and 92 per cent of black young people and children are not subject to disposals in the youth justice system (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2007). Similarly, recent studies have found white working-class boys living in disadvantaged areas are the lowest performing group of pupils in schools after the small population of Traveller children (Curtis, 2008). And of course, school failure is a strong predictor of delinquency, crime and antisocial behaviour.

In a sense these sorts of cultural, criminological and class issues make it all the more puzzling why white ethnicity has remained unaddressed in discussions of ethnicity, race and crime. The key problem seems to be a general difficulty in social science in conceiving whiteness or white ethnicity other than in terms of privilege, power and superiority over *other* ethnicities. Whiteness as an ethnicity appears as an empty signifier devoid of content or meaning *except* insofar as it racializes *other* 'visible minorities'. That is not to say that the racial persecution of some white groups goes unrecognized as the case of Jewish, Irish and Gypsies amply shows. It is, rather, that these examples are sometimes seen as distant, exceptional or atypical and there is a focus on the recent past and the present. When studies do uncover counter-intuitive forms of discrimination, for example, Mooney and Young's (1999) study of stop and search in North London, they tend to be ignored. This piece of research found that foot stops of Irish men were higher than for African-Caribbean and that African stops

were lower than white English ones, because the police focus on groups that are disproportionately working class and/or male as well as visible ethnic groups. In a different mixed ethnic context, Waddington et al.'s (2004) observation study of stop and search arrived at not dissimilar conclusions, arguing that white urban lower-class men who were available to be stopped suffered disproportionate stop and search regardless of visible ethnicity.

As a final preamble for the discussion to follow, it is likely that ethnic and racial categories in the British context that are limited to 'Black', Asian', 'White', 'Other', and more recently, 'Mixed', hardly capture the increasingly complex demographic make-up of a society that has experienced recent large-scale immigration. Apart from the inability of these categories to capture diversity within them, descriptions of a white majority and ethnic minorities in some urban areas seem increasingly outmoded (Dorling and Thomas, 2007). Some of this immigration from 'white' EU countries, high levels of racist violence experienced by asylum seekers and the fact that many immigrants are exploited in unregulated jobs, trafficked or enslaved in the sex trade, all puts a new complexion on inter- and intra-ethnic group relations in European societies (Goodey, 2003; Melossi, 2003; Garner, 2004, 2007b; Stenson and Waddington, 2007).

These are some of the more obvious ways we can begin to think afresh about white ethnicities. The next section asks what constitutes 'whiteness' and white ethnicity, its peculiarities and how it can be said to exist as a distinct entity in its own right and in relation to other ethnicities. The following section discusses historical legacies of how marginalized white ethnicities have been represented in ways that give potency to the idea of their deviancy and criminality. The continuities and discontinuities of this legacy found in contemporary representations are explored, again drawing out the ways in which racialized 'white' groups such as the 'unfit', 'the antisocial', 'criminals', the poor, 'white trash' and the 'underclass' were and are elided around marginalized white ethnicity often associated with criminality (Webster, 2007). Classed, raced and gendered marginalized white ethnicity is spatialized as well through the creation of moral boundaries and disciplining within hierarchies of whiteness.

⚑ What Is White Ethnicity?

Ethnicity like class is relational, productive and active in social relationships rather than a mere fixed or passive descriptor or category. Whiteness conjures up other ethnicities while at the same time is often rendered invisible, 'normal', 'neutral'. It is an identity and a lifestyle, and a set of perspectives on social relationships, marked by varying degrees of self-awareness. Acquired in the course of collective and individual history, white ethnicity is about becoming, being and staying 'white', and its distinctiveness becomes realized in specific social and spatial locations. Certain locations are sought out, others are avoided, becoming one thing and not being something else (Ball, 2003). The relational and interdependent aspects of white ethnicity arise from it defining others as belonging to a different race or ethnicity and thus implicitly or explicitly defining itself as belonging to a race or ethnicity also. Changes in the situation, power or status of each group influence the position of the other (Scotson and Elias, 1994; Webster, 1997).

White ethnicity possesses peculiarities and powers that often mark it out from other ethnicities that can confer superiority or dominance even among whites who are themselves in positions of relative powerlessness. Garner's (2006, 2007a) survey on the uses and meaning of 'whiteness' shows how hierarchies of whiteness and class serve to reproduce social hierarchies by creating and maintaining internal borders between the more and less white. Another peculiarity is that white people frequently construct themselves as not possessing

race or ethnicity even when they are beneficiaries of their whiteness, accrue 'white' privileges and racialize others. Like all ethnicities, whiteness is fluid and contingent rather than an essential or reified category. The focus here on marginalized white ethnicities encompasses the fact that whiteness has historically functioned as a racial supremacist identity—even when the main victims were 'white', that it is a normalizing, dominant and controlling ethnicity, and we cannot assume that whiteness operates on 'a level playing field' of inter-ethnic competition over scarce resources (Garner, 2007a: 9). Nevertheless, if whiteness is the norm by which measures and judgements about difference, deviance or criminality are made then we need to interrogate its nature and status critically rather than accept its 'normality' and 'invisibility' (Dyer, 1997). If whiteness has always been visible from the perspective of people of 'colour' creating a 'double consciousness' of always looking at and judging oneself through the eyes of others, then it needs to be rendered visible to whites too (Du Bois, [1903] 1996; Garner, 2007a). Indeed, some writers in the USA and increasingly Britain have argued that whiteness is excessively visible (and racialized too) and that there is a very high degree of 'colour-coding' of issues and in places to do with safety, fear of crime and the prospect of meeting violence (Webster, 1996, 1997, 2007).

Today increasingly, the emergence of linked academic, journalistic and popular discourses about whiteness are of significance for debates about ethnicity, race, crime and justice, and in particular for understanding the racialization and criminalization of marginalized white ethnicity. Debates cannot be left to dichotomous and gross over-simplifications of the 'threat' said to be posed by a de-industrialized white 'underclass' accused by liberals of harbouring endemic white racism and racist violence, and by conservatives of harbouring endemic amoral, family-breakdown-ridden, welfare-sponging and crime-prone behaviour, nor to the 'threat' that 'new' immigration and asylum are said to pose to stability, order and social cohesion (Garner, 2007a).

✄ Emergence of Marginalized White Ethnicity: Immigrants, 'Abject Whites', 'White Trash' and Other 'Degenerates'

The emergence of 'whiteness' and white ethnicity as a focus of study is best exemplified in the United States with its long tradition of European immigration and codification of the idea that some whites are 'whiter' than others. The struggle of white working-class immigrant groups to be conferred white 'privileges' and membership of the 'white race' easily displaced their class interests (Allen, 1997). The example of Irish migrants is a case in point. For Irish-Americans their white-skin privileges were crucial to maintain their position against African-Americans, with whom they were aligned in the racial hierarchy of the time (Allen, 1994). As in Britain, where relatively recently 'Paddy-bashing' was only ever a stone's throw from 'Paki-bashing', so in the United States, nativist folk wisdom held that 'an Irishman was a "nigger", inside out' (Roediger, 2007: 133). Despite sharing neighbourhoods, poverty, criminalization and common experiences of racism with blacks, this denial of their 'whiteness' only resulted in their insisting all the more on their own whiteness and on white supremacy in opposition to blacks. The key was gaining better work, winning acceptance and political rights. 'White niggers' were white workers in arduous, unskilled manual work or subservient positions, and in part Irish-American whiteness took shape attempting to sever any racial connections to blacks and 'nigger work', i.e. the burden of doing unskilled work (Roediger, 2007). The role that labour competition and conflict was said to play in

processes of becoming white among European immigrant groups has not gone unchallenged, and in any case labour competition was intense within each group—black and white (Ignatiev, 1995). Nevertheless, it was much easier for the Irish to defend jobs and rights as 'white' entitlements, that is, in racial terms instead of as Irish, ethnic or class ones, to gain access to better jobs. Between 1890 and 1945 eventual assimilation—best understood as 'whitening as a process'—saw how an initial status of 'inbetweenness' (neither securely white nor non-white) became 'fully white' (Roediger, 2007: 8).

In this sense, whiteness is nearly always salvageable in a way that black, Mexican, Asian and Native American ethnicity is not. Although denigrated and likened to blacks, marginalized white groups were, in law, white. Nevertheless a contingent white racialized hierarchy designated a number of white 'races', although in the end being white was not just about a certain range of phenotypes, but claims on culture and values (Garner, 2007a: 68). Other themes such as nativist fears about proximity to marginalized white groups were contradicted by complaints that these groups 'segregated themselves' on 'racial' grounds, and threatened 'white men's wages'. The greatest complaint, however, was of the fecundity of white working-class new migrants (Roediger, 2007). Of key importance here was the ways that the idea that 'white' was a racial identity became enshrined in the new racial science, and later the eugenics movement, from the mid- to the late 19th century (Webster, 2007). The new science produced complex schemas and typologies of subdivisions of whiteness, often associated with degeneration and criminality as well as racial superiority. In fact those who were phenotypically white were not equally incorporated into the dominant groups because they were disadvantaged by class and culture. The most intriguing case was the designation 'white trash', which has historical parallels with representations of some sections

of the white working class in Britain (Webster, 2007; Wilson, 2007). Like the figure of the 'chav' in Britain today, the figure of 'white trash' represented pollution, excess and worklessness far from respectability.

A number of characteristics were attributed to the 19th-century working classes including fecundity and criminality as well as shared physical qualities so that the language of 'race' overlapped with that of class seen in tropes that fixed on the body and culture. Hartigan's tracing of the development of the phenomenon of 'white trash' from the mid-19th century onwards concluded that the 'objectifications of this group . . . arose from this moral categorization of those who will and will not work' (2005: 67)—poor whites and white trash respectively. The racial connotations of 'white trash' combined the following: natural habitat, blood lines to do with prolific sexuality, their designation as threat from below because weaker blood was multiplying faster than stronger, their moral incapacity to labour because of their racial status, all connected to anxieties about urbanization, crime and the migration of poor southern whites to northern cities. The main themes though were 'degeneration', debasement, worklessness and respectability— that later inform representation of lower-class whites throughout the 20th century. In some accounts they were upheld as a bulwark against black inferiority, in others as sacrificing the superiority of whites to the inferior race, yet in others as a contamination that could bring down the future of the white race (Hartigan, 2005: 69). In the southern version their origins were said to lie in British migration to the United States of paupers and convicts.

The particular problem that 'white trash' posed for racists, racial scientists and eugenicists was that they were both white and 'degenerate', in which the latter reflected not only a moral state but a phenotypical one of physical taints, stigmata and in some sense 'colour'. Turn-of-the-century eugenics and criminal family field

studies—the 'Jukes' family, 'the tribe of Ishmael' and many others—perfectly embodied these concerns (Hartigan, 2005; Webster, 2007). Their image as incestuous, crime-ridden families associated with the range of social problems of urbanization profoundly impacted upon white middle-class audiences. Although these 'odd tribes' were constantly referred to by their supposed distinctive and telling physical appearance and behaviour, they were palpably white. The ways that eugenicists got around this was to argue that despite the fact these families were obviously white, poor whites were 'the worst of the race' through their hereditary (Hartigan, 2005: 88). Hereditary degeneration was seen in the physical markers of race—although emphasizing 'stature' and 'comportment' rather than skin colour—ensuring that class distinctions were encompassed by racial discourse. This also marked a shift from explanations about poor whites that had largely drawn on newly developing discourses on sexuality and criminality to the racial constitution of 'good' and 'bad' families, and the threats posed by the latter to the race posed by the breeding habits of poor whites and their sexuality. This shift in criminal family studies from class otherness to racial sameness had as its colloquy concerns over uncontrolled sexuality reconstituted as attention to hereditary and race.

Of course, criminology from its foundations in the 19th century had been mired in the racialization of white criminality, notably in the work of Lombroso whose main innovation was to equate the white European criminal with non-white races (see Webster, 2007). As Garland (1985) observed, criminological texts at the turn of the last century, in linking disparate themes and categories of the 'unfit', most commonly drew together criminality, degeneracy, the nation and 'the race' in an open appeal to the concerns about racial deterioration which were widespread in Edwardian Britain. This eugenicist 'population problem' contrasted the abundant fertility of the 'unfit' (criminals, alcoholics, imbeciles, etc.) with a lower birth rate of the better classes. The proposed solution was the forced sterilization of the lower classes, the physically and mentally 'unfit', the criminal, the degenerate among a panoply of individuals and populations considered socially undesirable. Differentiating whites into bio-social groups formed an important basis to subsequent attempts to distinguish the criminal from the noncriminal. In Britain, eugenicist discourse was always weaker than moral discourse about the marginalized white working class, particularly their pleasures and 'excess' and the blurring of these pleasures with criminality. The perceived problem in the early Victorian period, as it is now, was the working classes' prodigious consumption of alcohol, their lack of saving and a life lived day-to-day without care for what the future may bring (Wilson, 2007). Even Marx referred to the lower classes as 'social scum'.

⊠ Contemporary Representations of Marginalized White Ethnicity: The 'Social Scum' as 'White Niggers'

As Hartigan (2005) argues, the confidence with which people continue to be labelled white trash derives from a long tradition of social contempt, racial and class stereotyping sustained by ascriptions of naturalness, social difference and inferiority, far exceeding white supremacist or racist ideology's focus on non-whites. If anything, the mythic role of white trash and its reproduction through popular culture has greater salience today in post-industrial America. Instead of diminishing, contemporary representations of white trash have taken a different turn in that 'it is possible to read images of white trash as a carnivalesque aesthetic, a transgressive celebration of the *grotesque* body (with its illicit sexuality

and propensity for cathartic emotions) that will not be restrained by (white) middle-class social decorums' (Hartigan, 2005: 121–2, emphasis in original). If those who use the term do so as a means of self-designation to transgress and resist designations of social contempt and tenuous economic standing, then this appears only to amplify inscriptions of social difference, even among members of the white working class (Hartigan, 2005: 122). Beyond self-designations, popular representations of white trash also take ironic forms. The American hip hop artist Eminem described himself as 'white trash' adopting the identity of 'wigger' (an oxymoronic 'white nigger', i.e., both white and lower working class, living in Detroit, described in another oxymoron as 'America's first Third World city') (cited in Taylor, 2005: 148). Eminem's ironic evocations of 'White America' neither romanticized blackness nor denied white privilege. They provided a trope on being white and poor in the richest country in the world. Clearly, and again, some people are 'whiter than others'.

In a British context, journalistic and popular representations—whether implicit or explicit—focus on consumption patterns, tastes and expression and where people live. Here are offered two contrasting tropes—one from *The Economist*, the other from a local newspaper—illustrative of our themes. In a generally sympathetic article, *The Economist* (26 October 2006) asked its readers to consider the plight of 'The forgotten underclass' and how white residents of a working-class neighbourhood in Dagenham in East London resented both white and multiethnic new arrivals to their neighbourhood, complaining that the new arrivals were more qualified and had better prospects than the people among whom they had settled.

Leaving aside the veracity of these claims for the moment, let's examine the *nomenclature* of these sorts of discussions. After identifying the aspirant and 'respectable' white working class who had left the area for the fringes of Essex, those left behind—the white

underclass—are accorded and judged a social status *between* similarly disadvantaged visible minority ethnic groups and the 'respectable' white working class who have embraced mobility and opportunity. *The Economist* article implies or states that: first, poor whites lack aspirations themselves or for their children but are racist towards similarly positioned but more aspirant minority ethnic groups in their midst; second, that poor whites lack 'taste', i.e. appropriate consumer patterns and aspirations, particularly their 'choice' to live in council housing; third, that poor whites are disproportionately criminal compared to any other group; finally, that poor whites make poor choices and have bad judgement impairing their ability to take up opportunities of mobility, affluence and respectability.

Turning to an altogether different nomenclature that identifies and isolates the 'social scum' as an object of humour and ridicule, Hanley quotes a local newspaper:

> A Wood (local council estate) man found himself in hot water after asking his estranged partner to fill up his Pot Noodle. The 30-year-old admitted putting his hands around his partner's neck and pulling out her earring, causing a cut ear and lip and a scratched neck. Colin Doyle, defending, said that his client lived opposite the house where his partner lives with their two children, and he had gone over to ask for some hot water after his own home had been burgled, leaving him with no food. (2007: 10)

Hanley rightly comments on how the emblematic Pot Noodle—'the slag of all snacks'—is used 'as a fun insult by those who have grown tired of disguising their snobbery' (2007: 10). The quotation manages to juxtapose Pot Noodles, wife-beating, burglary and council estates in one overall 'joke'. As Hanley adds 'Poor taste, bad grammar, the

betrayal of family history beyond that which is conveniently aspirational: all these traits are now deemed "council estate behaviour"' (2007: 10). The 'joke' does little to hide what is really going on here: contempt, fear and loathing of the white poor.

These tropes coalesce in the 'chav' phenomenon. The notion of respectability can be clearly observed as a racialized ascription here in the generation of class boundaries between respectable, poor whites and 'visible' minorities. These classifications offer potent and differing versions of whiteness based on entitlement and respectability (Garner, 2007a). For example, in Nayak's (2003) study of white youth subcultures in Newcastle, family and/or occupational histories based on 'hard work' were key signifiers of respectability among the 'Real Geordies' against the racialized and criminalized 'Charver Kids' with whom they compared themselves. And here a residue of earlier popular ideas that groups are criminal in their looks, including their 'racial' looks, survive today:

> If the postures of *Charver Kids* are 'ape-like' and pronounced, other body-reflexive practices such as smoking, spitting, swearing loudly and drinking alcohol from bottles and cans in public further served to authenticate their 'roughness'. . . . Like many minority ethnic groups before them, charvers were associated with street crime, disease, drugs, over-breeding (many came from large families) and the seedy underbelly of the 'black economy'. (Nayak, 2006: 823–4)

Here, poor whites are popularly identified and stigmatized as a 'race apart' by their *visible* comportment, body shape, dress and physical looks.

According to Hayward and Yar (2006) the popular reconfiguration of the underclass idea in the epithet 'chav' pathologizes class dispositions in relation to consumption rather than employment. In the wider public imagination the relationship between consumption and classification appears to shift from an explicit concern with 'race' and social marginality to one of 'class' and social marginality. Previous concerns about the underclass possessing a distinctive set of *cultural* pathological dispositions that inform behavioural patterns and choices—to be unemployed and give birth outside of marriage, have been joined by a shift that accords consumption a central role in the production of social distinctions and classifications of 'us' and 'them'. Popular discussion of the 'chav' focuses not on the inability to consume because of poverty, but on the excessive participation in aesthetically impoverished forms of consumption. Here stigmatization processes become analogous to, and substitute for, now 'discredited' racialization processes. The synonym 'chav' takes various popular forms including, '[C]ouncil [h]oused [a]nd [v]iolent', but it owes its origins to the Romany dialect word for small child ('chavo' or 'chavi'). An altogether more sinister nomenclature describes the fecund, primitive, animalistic, 'sub-human' and criminal nature of the 'chav'. This symbolic marginalized white ethnicity has become a 'legitimate' target of displaced racism, and popular websites and commentary classify and judge 'chavs' according to their *appearance*—their 'tribal dress code' and ostentatious displays that liken them to 'pikeys'—and *location* and the consumer outlets they are said to frequent (see, for example, www.chavscum.co.uk, www.chavtowns.co.uk). Hayward and Yar conclude that

> the "chav" phenomenon partakes of a social process in which consumption, identity, marginality and social control converge; consumption practices now serve as the locus around which exclusion is configured and the excluded are classified, identified and subjected to (increasingly intense) regimes of management. (2006: 24)

The emphasis here on representations of 'excessive' consumption underestimates the continued salience of employment as a marker of class and respectability. Young people labelled as 'chavs' or 'charvas' affiliate on the basis of social class which directly affects and limits their subculture 'choice' as does their locality (McCulloch et al., 2006).

These themes are also heavily gendered. Skeggs' study of white working-class women in north-west England shows how respectability and the body are the most ubiquitous signifiers of class, and that respectability 'is usually the concern of those who are not seen to have it'; and is 'one of the key mechanisms by which people are othered and pathologized', something to 'desire, to prove and to achieve' in order to be valued and legitimated (1997: 1). The issue of being and appearing respectable pervaded the lives of the women she spoke to. Skeggs notes how these women, although inscribed and marked by their denigration as degenerate, attributed respectability and high moral standing to themselves. Here appearance was the signifier of conduct; to look was to be. Appearance worked as a sign of moral evaluation, of excessive sexuality just as modesty and propriety have been central to the formation of middle-class femininity.

White Racism? 'Respectability' and the Fearful Proximity of Poor Whites

Today, the 'problem' of the white working class is often posed in terms of their supposed endemic racism. Indeed, the few studies of white ethnicity available within debates about racism, crime and justice have focused exclusively on white identity as a source of support for the perpetration of racist violence (Webster, 1996, 2007; Sibbitt, 1997; Bowling, 1999; Ray et al., 2003, 2004; Ray and Smith, 2004). Less attention has been given to wider processes influencing the formation of white ethnicity and the relationship of white ethnicity to fear of crime and decline within neighbourhoods.

Seen as a 'disorganised, racist and sexist detritus' (Haylett, 2001: 358, cited in Garner, 2007a: 73), the white working-class poor are blamed for a 'decline' in the working-class, pathological masculinities, backwardness, degeneracy, crime, over-fecundity, fecklessness and above all are seen as an anachronistic remnant of an industrial culture blocking a full move to modernization and progress—just as they were accused of being in Victorian England (Wilson, 2007). This somewhat overwrought portrait has been interrogated by numerous studies of the lived realities of white working-class life both in the United States and Britain. Only some of the nuanced findings of these studies are rehearsed here drawing out some common themes and findings, again with a focus on marginalized white ethnicity. Hartigan's (1999, 2005) study of white enclaves in overwhelmingly black Detroit challenges academic and journalistic characterizations of white working-class communities as either the sole source of racism, or as the most stubbornly racist section of society. Instead, working-class whites are far more ambivalent about their class location and their relationships with whites and minorities from better and worse-off neighbourhoods. Whites made class as well as race distinctions about other poor whites living in their neighbourhood and whites were not simply in opposition to blacks. More often than not, issues of maintaining respectability overrode those of race. Similarly, Kefalas' (2003) comparable ethnographic study of a white working-class neighbourhood in Chicago's Southwest Side unpicks the construction of white racism in a 'white enclave' contiguous with Chicago's African-American West Side ghetto:

> Beltwayites' racism then can be seen as a byproduct of their efforts to fortify the cultural and moral boundaries

between themselves and more stigmatized groups. Class-bound ideologies and boundaries make it difficult for garden [a local colloquialism for the area] dwellers to reconcile themselves to [the] existence of *white* teenage mothers, *white* drug addicts, *white* gangbangers, *white* single mothers, and poor *whites*. Whites are respectable, and respectability keeps people safe from the dangers posed by destructive social forces. (Kefalas, 2003: 155, emphases in original)

In a British context too the formation of white ethnicity at neighbourhood level sets itself not against visible ethnicity per se, but against *any* marginalized ethnicity including poor whites (Scotson and Elias, 1994). It is this proximity to *the poor* rather than visible ethnicity per se that so unsettles locals, leading to anxiety and fear—fear of crime and fear of 'falling' through downward mobility into the ranks of the poor. Spatial and social polarization occurs through prominent themes—'narratives of urban decline' and characterizations of 'respectability' contrasted with physical decay, disorder and nascent criminality. Watt, for example, concluded that the main preoccupation of white working-class council house tenants in Camden was to maintain respectability: 'The result was a permanent underlying urban anxiety about being *too close*, socially and spatially, to concentrated poverty' (2006: 788, emphasis in original).

What then of white working-class racism? Writing of the 1950s—a period which saw a second wave of white race riots against black areas—Burke (1994, cited in Collins, 2004: 185) argued that everyday white working-class racism did not seek justification in notions of biological inferiority, but in the fight for scarce resources around the body, the home and the marketplace. By the time Enoch Powell gave 'public' voice and vision to a certain sort of white working-class fear of being 'swamped' by 'immigrants' and 'foreigners' in Birmingham in 1968, the terms of

a fully fledged racist white ethnicity had been laid. These misplaced fears grew from the more vulnerable, unskilled sectors of the white working class in a context of growing insecurity and nascent economic restructuring. Many others accepted the new multiracial environment in which they found themselves (Collins, 2004). Nevertheless, and especially in London's east end, the acute shortage of affordable housing and disruption of the white working class' intergenerational 'inheritance' of 'respectable' social housing, as well as its stigmatization, continues to make struggles over housing almost synonymous with inter-ethnic competition and conflict (Dench et al., 2006). The formation of 'confident', exclusive forms of racist white ethnicity in some neighbourhoods seems to occur when most areas of people's lives overlap a great deal at the local level—from work to family. Where residents tend to be dependent on family and local social networks for information about housing, jobs and leisure opportunities, they tend to exclude 'outsiders' more compared to people living in more 'open' neighbourhoods; that is, where most people have connections of different sorts outside it, their ties are spread more widely and are more able to pull in resources from other areas of their lives (Wallman, 1982, 1986).

As we have seen, the marginalization of white ethnicity is always mediated by notions of respectability. Marginalization and respectability are simultaneously formed by negatively assigning local poor, stigmatized or minority populations blame for perceived community decline and unwelcome social and economic change; bolstered, it is believed, by state immigration and welfare policy and local government multicultural policies. Garner (2007a) summarizes this trope as: respectability plus work leads to entitlement, and the white underclass, minority groups, migrant communities, asylum seekers, the unemployed and single mothers are accused of not paying their dues, and are perceived as feckless, fecund, hedonistic, excessive, queue-jumpers.

�ⁱ The Isolation and Segregation of the White Ghetto: 'People Living on Council Estates Aren't Like the Rest of Us'

The spatial confinement of marginalized white ethnicity to the habitus of the white council estate, the white rioting of these estates in 1991 and 1992 and their stigmatization as places of political and physical neglect, low incomes, high welfare dependency, poor job prospects and low educational attainment, mark the *prime* spatial location of marginalized white ethnicity (Power and Tunstall, 1997; Webster et al., 2004; MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; Stenson and Waddington, 2007). The much greater polarization and spatial concentration by social class rather than visible ethnicity in Britain compared to the United States greatly reinforces the marginalization and ghettoization of white ethnicity (Dorling et al., 2007; Thomas and Dorling, 2007). The objective trajectory and decline of social housing estates as white—or, in London, multiethnic ghettoes—is well known. What are less known are the subjective effects of this isolation and segregation. Seen as 'Little more than holding cages for the feral and the lazy' (Hanley, 2007: 140), white estates can be likened to the sorts of abandoned, isolated and segregated places usually attributed to black ghettoes in the USA.

The emergence and isolation of the white ghetto is vividly described by Hanley from her first-hand experience:

> To be working-class in Britain is also to have a *wall in the head,* and, since council housing has come to mean housing for the working class (and the non-working class), that wall exists unbroken throughout every estate in the land. . . . Your knowledge of what's out there, beyond the thick glass walls, is entirely reliant on what you can glean from the lives of the people you know,

which usually means your own family members. If your family and friends all live on the same estate, that's a little wall built for you right there. . . . The world seems to stop on the edge of every estate. (2007: 149, emphasis added)

The ghettoization of the white working-class estates that she eloquently describes represents a novel reconfiguration of class reproduction through geographical entrapment—spatial segregation by class—where the internal wall coexists with external invisible barriers of class. Walled people are happily described as 'chav scum', estates as places of 'last resort' and as 'dumping grounds' for those who have no choice in where they live compared to the apparently abundant choices of everyone else. Their 'failure' is not only contagious but morally repugnant and, of course, people do not have to live on them, so those who do are accused of self-segregation (Hanley, 2007). Most of all they serve to give concrete spatial reality to the existence of marginalized whiteness in the eyes of everyone else and as irredeemably associated with dangerous and criminal places.

✈ The Disciplining of Marginalized White Ethnicity

When asked what might be expected of daily life in 'lower-class Britain', the conservative American political scientist Charles Murray replied, 'based on observations and knowledge of the US underclass':

> The New Rabble will be characterised by high levels of criminality, child neglect and abuse and drug use . . . will exploit social benefit programmes . . . will not enter the legitimate labour force when economic times are good. . . . The children . . . unsocialised in the norms of considerate behaviour . . . the New Rabble will dominate, which will be

enough to make life miserable for everyone else. (1994: 12)

There is little here that is new compared to the long-standing historical iconography of the disreputable white working class, their pleasures and the blurring of these with criminality (Wilson, 2007). What is perhaps more novel is the way that Murray presaged the transition from more relaxed to more puritan times. The tools and targets of moral censure may have changed—ASBOs and *people living on council estates*—but the sense of the contemporary poor as a recalcitrant drag on appeals to 'modernization' is palpable in popular and policy discourse (Hughes, 2007).

The same obsessions—with 'dysfunctional' families, lone mothers and absent fathers—found in 'moral underclass' discourses remain but are given a more benign twist in the notion of 'antisocial behaviour'. The 'progeny' of 'dysfunctional' families are to be met with an amalgam of authoritarian measures such as child curfews, antisocial behaviour orders and parenting orders, deployed in poor communities to regulate children and parents. The vindictiveness of local media provides dramatic illustrations of public humiliation of the targeted group—poor whites (Scraton, 2007). In May 2005 Tony Blair talked of antisocial behaviour as derived in irresponsible, undisciplined and improper parenting from 'generation to generation' (cited in Scraton, 2007: 145). This coded obsession with progeny and implicit concern with hereditary marks the group in terms of its deficient biological and/or cultural reproduction.

Much (rightly) has been made of the policing of black young men. Accounts of the policing of marginalized white ethnicities in some of the 'whitest' urban areas in Britain also deserve attention. One study of white young people in Edinburgh concluded that the police make distinctions about the respectable and unrespectable based on social class status—that do not always take account of serious and persistent offending—to construct a population of permanent suspects. This works in two ways:

first, the lifestyles of lower-class young people make them more 'available' for policing and more likely to experience adversarial contact; second, police officers consistently elide moral status with affluence and are consistently more likely to pick on youngsters from less affluent backgrounds as individuals rather than on the basis of police targeting of deprived areas. Although less deferential in their manner to the police than more affluent young people, those who are less affluent tend to be 'baited' by the police. They are judged about their 'respectability' on the basis of their dress and physical appearance (typically 'charva' dress) and comportment, rendering an individual more suspect in the eyes of the police (McAra and McVie, 2005). Another study of police culture and nomenclature in Newcastle City Police revealed how the police reflected *in extremis* the contempt and fear of the wider white population towards poor whites living in certain areas (Young, 1991). 'Real criminals' were identified by their supposed genealogy—'racial' origins and places of residence—wherein certain working-class areas were deemed places that housed families of criminals. 'Real criminals' lived in the 'jungle' in and around the derogatorily termed 'African villages' where the residents were all said to be Bridewell regulars. Famous 'criminal' families were 'second generation gypsy horse thieves', illegitimate—socially and by birth—dirty and tattooed.

◰ **Conclusion and Discussion**

'Whiteness' is most 'visible' and most likely to be racialized and criminalized in its marginalized or subordinate forms. Hegemonic white ethnicity—typical of powerful white elites—tends to retain only an implicit view of itself as 'white'. Whiteness is rarely evoked or mobilized as an ethnic resource or as a target of racialized discourses other than in situations of scarcity, competition or rapid social, economic and demographic change. It is here *in extremis* that white ethnicity comes to have salience, and form an identifiable shape, profile and presence.

Representations of marginalized white ethnicity, despite their claims to the contrary, give away the 'hidden injuries of class' (Sennett and Cobb, 1977). As Sayer (2005) argues, if class damages, then this implies that people themselves are damaged, often in ways that not only limit their potential but may in extreme cases lead to antisocial behaviour. This seems particularly the case concerning attitudes towards poor white working-class males (Haylett, 2001). If class inequalities generate shame, and sometimes rage, among the most disadvantaged, then their racialization (whether recognized or not) compounds the felt contempt and denigration.

Contemporary popular, political and policy discourses about the white working class have lost none of their historical legacy and potency to stereotype, stigmatize and blame social exclusion on the culture of this group rather than as something that is done to them (Skeggs, 2004: 86). The conditions of existence of marginalized white working-class ethnicity unleash a 'chain of signifiers': familial disorder and dysfunction, dangerous masculinities, dependency, fecund and excessive femininities, antisocial behaviour, moral and ecological decay and quick to resort to criminality, and all spatialized. Culture becomes segregated by territory and place, seen in the naming and shaming of 'sink estates' or 'the worst housing estates' (Haylett, 2001; Hanley, 2007). Most of all—strangely echoing Lombroso— the unifying theme is of the atavistic backwardness of the white working class as a burdensome barrier and break on the development of a modern, 'multicultural' nation—a role previously projected onto 'black youth'—and as a 'detritus of the Industrial Revolution' (Daley, 1994: 16, cited in Skeggs, 2004: 91). Political rhetoric now distinguishes between different sorts of whiteness: the respectable who can be incorporated into the nation and the non-respectable who cannot.

A key objection to many of the arguments presented here will be that some cultural and racial characteristics fix some groups and enable others to be mobile. For example, Skeggs (2004) makes the point that black working-class masculinity as it operates in popular culture is available to be appropriated by black or white in ways that black boys cannot easily perform being white, because they are always inscribed as black and cannot move between black and white in the same ways. The mobility of white attachment and inscription are not equally available to all. In this sense the couplet 'black male/criminal' is said to be always stronger and more deterministic than the couplet 'poor white/criminal'. The argument presented here suggests that this may not be the case.

Class contempt towards economically and socially marginalized 'white' groups reveal features of discourses and representations previously reserved for visible minorities. This moralistic targeting of the disadvantaged white working class—through tropes of moral culpability, laziness, aesthetically impoverished consumption and housing 'choices'—works as a displacement activity and 'legitimate' outlet for racist social opprobrium. The racist undertone risks accusations of racism circumvented because the targets are 'degenerate whites'. Race and ethnically based class contempt is shown, however, to have a long history both in Britain and the United States. Drawing distinctions between different sorts of 'whiteness' deemed inferior or superior according to attributions of 'degeneracy', 'respectability', antisocial behaviour, criminality, the body, appearance and hereditability, class contempt is shown to be social and racial. The use of derogatory designations by the white middle class and even by the white working class—'family dysfunction', 'white trash', 'chav underclass', 'living on a council estate'— denigrates and distances (mostly) poor whites to justify and reproduce social hierarchies. Feared and disciplined because of their supposed inherent criminality, racism and distance from respectability, resented as 'detritus' of deindustrialization and a burden on 'progress', blamed for their self-exclusion and 'self-segregation', there is, finally, avoidance of any serious critical engagement with what is done to marginalize white ethnicity.

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D I S C U S S I O N   Q U E S T I O N S

1. Does Webster make a strong argument about why different white ethnicities should be discussed when examining issues of race, ethnicity, and crime? Explain why or why not.

2. How do the experiences described by Webster differ or relate to forms of racism that have been committed against working-class minorities?

3. Discuss Webster's assertion that the racism and classism acts committed against white working-class ethnicities have led to the criminalization of such groups in a similar way to the criminalization of visible working-class minorities. Why is this an important assertion?