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CULTURAL MECHANISMS AND KILLING FIELDS:
A REVISED THEORY OF COMMUNITY-LEVEL RACIAL INEQUALITY

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Ten years ago, Sampson and Wilson (1995) proposed a theory of race and urban inequality to explain the disproportionate representation of African Americans as victims and offenders in violent crime. The basic idea put forth was that community-level patterns of racial inequality give rise to the social isolation and ecological concentration of the truly disadvantaged, which in turn leads to structural barriers and cultural adaptations that undermine social organization and ultimately the control of crime. According to this perspective, "race" holds no distinct scientific credibility as a cause of violence—rather it is a marker for the constellation of social contexts that are differentially allocated by racial status in American society. Sampson and Wilson (1995) pursued this logic to argue that the community-level causes of violence are the same for both whites and blacks, but that racial segregation by community differentially exposes members of minority groups to key violence-inducing and violence-protecting social mechanisms, thereby explaining black-white disparities in violence. Their thesis has come to be known as "racial invariance" in the fundamental causes of crime.

In this paper we revisit the central arguments of the racial invariance thesis. Our goal is to build on recent findings and articulate new theoretical directions for the study of race, ethnicity, and violence. The good news motivating this effort is that in a short ten-year span many research advances have been made and large-scale secular changes have dramatically reduced the crime problem in American society. Indeed, a veritable explosion of research on race and crime has taken place in recent years, including numerous direct tests of the thesis of relative invariance in the causes of crime by race. At the same time, society has changed in ways that are decidedly for the better, so much so that the United States is now witnessing one of the lowest rates of violence it has seen since the mid 1960s, benefiting blacks and whites alike.

Less noticed in some circles but equally relevant, American society has grown to be more diverse in interesting ways. We have witnessed an increasing representation of ethnic groups

and increasing immigration from around the world, especially among Latinos. These changes have led to what some consider surprising paradoxes, such as the finding that Mexican immigrants, despite their economic disadvantage, experience disproportionately lower rates of violence compared to second and third generation Americans. Concentrated immigrant enclaves also appear to be comparatively safe. Increasing diversity and immigration have thus not meant increasing crime as many imagine—if anything the opposite is true.

The bad news is that the bleak picture of black disadvantage relative to whites (and, Latinos) remains as durable as ever when it comes to violence and the criminal justice system. Sampson and Wilson (1995) wrote that "the evidence is clear that African Americans face dismal and worsening odds when it comes to crime in the streets and the risk of incarceration." These dismal odds are still with us. African Americans are six times more likely to be murdered than whites (Fox and Zawitz 2003) and homicide remains the leading cause of death among young African Americans (Anderson 2002). Both police records and self-reported surveys continue to show disproportionate involvement in serious violence among blacks (Thornberry and Krohn 2002) and nearly one in three black males will enter prison during their lifetime compared to less than 5 percent of white males (http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/crimoff.htm.) Moreover, even as crime continues to decline African-Americans are at increasing risk of incarceration and subsequent weak attachment to the labor force (Pettit and Western 2004), which in turn reinforces black disadvantage and involvement in crime.

The question of race and crime thus remains as salient as ever but its parameters have changed. There is now more empirical evidence on which to assess theoretical claims, and the increasing diversification of society demands that we incorporate ethnicity and immigration more centrally into the theoretical picture along with an apparently robust decline in rates of violence. This paper takes aim at these challenges by revisiting and expanding the theoretical

grounds that were plowed by Sampson and Wilson (1995). One paper cannot do justice to the complexity of the challenge, of course, so we must necessarily be selective in our points of emphasis. For example, it is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in a detailed review of the literature, cover crimes other than violence, or review debates about the correct definition of neighborhood (for discussion, see Sampson, Morenoff and Gannon 2002). Our strategy, then, is to summarize the literature post 1995 by highlighting key findings in a broad-brush format. We are fortunate in this effort to rely on independent assessments of recent research (Krivo and Peterson 2000; Pratt and Cullen 2005) that allow conclusions about the racial invariance thesis.

Once the basic patterns in recent research are laid out, we turn to our sense of promising new directions in thinking about communities, race, and violence. Our argument highlights the implications of (1) "ecological dissimilarity" and spatial inequality by race, (2) ethnicity and immigration, and (3) a revised cultural perspective on violence. Our contention is that research on race and crime has been hampered by its persistent attempts to control for community-level conditions that are not comparable across racial groups and that neglect extra-local processes of spatial inequality, inattention to the implications of increasing ethnic diversity, and an impoverished view of culture. On the latter, we present a critique of cultural modes of theorizing in criminology, followed by a theoretical formulation that draws on recent advances in the sociology of culture.

COMMUNITIES, RACE, AND CRIME

The dominant tradition in criminology seeks to distinguish offenders from nonoffenders, so it comes as no surprise that it is from this tradition the race question has typically been addressed. Sampson and Wilson (1995) promoted instead a community-level of explanation that examined how community structures and cultures produced differential rates of crime. Their

unit of analysis was thus the community and not the individual. Using this strategy as a starting point, they (1995: 39) posed two questions. To what extent do rates of black crime vary by type of ecological area? Is it possible to reproduce in white communities the structural circumstances under which many blacks live? To the first question they responded that blacks are not a homogeneous group any more than are whites. It is racial stereotyping that assigns to blacks a distinct or homogeneous character, allowing simplistic comparisons of black-white group differences in crime. In fact, there is tremendous heterogeneity among black neighborhoods that corresponds to variations in crime rates. Sampson and Wilson (1995) hypothesized that if the structural sources of variation in crime are not unique by race, then rates of crime by blacks should vary with social-ecological conditions in a manner similar to whites.

The data are now in and confirm the wide variability in crime rates across white and black communities along with robust similarity in their basic predictors at the community level—especially the concentration of socioeconomic disadvantage. This conclusion is confirmed in two rigorous assessments of the available literature from 1995 to the present by Peterson and Krivo (2005) and Pratt and Cullen (2005). It is unambiguously the case in meta-analysis, for example, that concentrated neighborhood disadvantage is the largest and most consistent predictor of violence across studies (Pratt and Cullen 2005).

More to the point in assessing the racial invariance thesis is the conclusion by Peterson and Krivo (2005): "One consistent pattern emerges from race-specific studies irrespective of the outcomes, predictors and units under consideration: structural disadvantage contributes significantly to violence for both Blacks and Whites." We would point out that what is important in the racial invariance thesis in addition to the comparability of causal distributions (described below) is the invariance in the effect of an underlying concept or dimension (such as concentrated disadvantage), rather than a specific indicator or variable. This point has often been

misunderstood in recent empirical research (e.g., Ousey 1999). Even so, Peterson and Krivo (2005) further report that the invariance finding is "resilient to the exact configuration of factors representing disadvantage, e.g., differing combinations of poverty, income, family disruption, and joblessness/unemployment." Hannon et al. (2005) also demonstrate that, when properly estimated, concentrated poverty's association with homicide is invariant across racial groups.

Ecological Dissimilarity

We now address the second question raised by Sampson and Wilson (1995). Is it possible to reproduce in white communities the structural circumstances under which many blacks live? Here again the data have been clear for a long time. Consider Shaw and McKay's (Shaw and McKay 1969 [1942]) observation in Chicago from over half a century ago:

> The important fact about rates of delinquents for Negro boys is that they too, vary by type of area. They are higher than the rates for white boys, but it cannot be said that they are higher than rates for white boys in comparable areas, since it is impossible to reproduce in white communities the circumstances under which Negro children live. Even if it were possible to parallel the low economic status and the inadequacy of institutions in the white community, it would not be possible to reproduce the effects of segregation and the barriers to upward mobility (1942: 614).

We still cannot say that blacks and whites share a similar environment—especially with regard to concentrated urban poverty. Consistently over recent decades the vast majority of poor non-Hispanic whites have lived in nonpoverty areas compared to approximately less than a fifth of poor blacks (Jargowsky 1997). Moreover, whereas less than 10 percent of poor whites typically live in extreme poverty areas, almost half of poor blacks live in such areas. Sampson

and Wilson (1995) attribute these patterns to macrostructural factors both historic and contemporary, including but not limited to racial segregation, economic transformation, black male joblessness, class-linked out-migration from the inner-city, and housing discrimination. Segregation and concentrated poverty represent structural constraints embodied in public policy and historical patterns of racial subjugation (Massey and Denton 1993).

The combination of urban poverty and family disruption concentrated by race is so strong that the "worst" urban neighborhoods in which whites reside are considerably better off than the average context of black communities (Sampson 1987:354). The consequences of these differential ecological distributions were the basis of Sampson and Wilson's (1995) hypothesis that correlations of race and crime at the individual level may be systematically confounded with important differences in community contexts. For example, regardless of whether or not a black male juvenile is raised in an intact or single parent family, or rich or poor home, he will not grow up in a community context similar to whites with regard to family structure and poverty. Yet poor whites, even those from "broken homes," live in areas of relative family stability (Sampson 1987). Reductionist interpretations of race and social class miss this key ecological mismatch. As recently pointed out by Peterson and Krivo (2005), it is precisely because of ecological dissimilarity that the types of regression models typically estimated in criminology are counterfactual—they assume what does not exist.

There have been two responses to this problem. One strategy has been to study community-level differences in crime in settings where blacks and whites can be directly and thus properly compared along the distribution of predictor variables. When this has been done, concentrated disadvantage is shown to have similar effects on black and white crime rates (Krivo and Peterson 2000; McNulty 2001).

A second strategy has been to model directly the black-white gap in violence in multi-level studies of individuals where blacks and whites were sampled from the same areas. Few studies have been able to follow this approach because to accurately satisfy critics of the ecological dissimilarity thesis, one must also account for correlated family and individual constitutional differences that might explain racial and ethnic disparities in violence. Restricted variation in disadvantage is another important challenge, as African Americans residing outside inner-city poverty areas tend to be under-represented in criminological studies even though there is a thriving and growing middle-class black population (Farley 1996).

To address these issues Sampson, Morenoff and Raudenbush (2005) analyzed the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN), a multi-level longitudinal cohort study that was conducted between 1995 and 2002. The study drew samples that capture the three major race/ethnic groups in American society today—whites, blacks, and Latinos —and that vary across a diverse set of environments, from highly segregated to very integrated neighborhoods. The analysis focused on violent offending reported by almost 3,000 males and females ages 8 to 25 who were interviewed up to three times from 1995 to 2002. Data were also collected from police records, the census, and a separate survey where over 8,000 Chicagoans were asked about the characteristics of their neighborhoods.

The results cast doubt on theories that attribute racial disparities in violence to differences in IQ test scores, impulsivity (or hyperactivity), and even family poverty. "Constitutional" differences between individuals in impulsivity and IQ test scores accounted for only 6% of the disparities in violence between African-American and white youth. Contrary to widespread belief, family poverty is also not a predictor of violence and explains none of the racial or ethnic gaps. Instead the findings showed that residential segregation exposes African American youth to neighborhoods with higher risk factors and fewer protective factors for violence than

neighborhoods where youth from other groups live. Specifically, neighborhoods where more people have professional or managerial jobs are protective against violence, as are neighborhoods with higher concentrations of immigrants. Overall, more than 60% of the black-white gap in violence was explained, with neighborhood (dis)advantage accounting for the largest portion of the gap. Further, Sampson et al. (2005) found no systematic evidence that neighborhood- or individual-level predictors of violence *interacted* with race, and there were no significant racial disparities in trajectories of change in violence.

Using a national survey of adolescents but in a logically similar analysis, McNulty and Bellair (2003a,b) showed that neighborhood disadvantage explains a significant portion of the black-white disparity in propensity to violence. In a study of Pittsburgh youth, Peeples and Loeber (1994) showed also that disadvantage at the ecological level accounts for a substantial portion of the race gap, although as in most studies they could not reproduce in white neighborhoods the disadvantaged conditions that blacks typically call home.

Synthesizing the community-level and multi-level research findings, a reasonably consistent set of 'neighborhood facts' relevant to crime has emerged:

- There is considerable social inequality between neighborhoods and clear evidence that concentrated disadvantage is linked with the geographic isolation of minority groups.
- Durable neighborhood predictors of violence include the concentration of poverty, the absence of professional workers, racial isolation, and single-parent families. Conceptually these indicators tap aspects of neighborhood disadvantage.
- The place stratification of local communities by concentrated disadvantage is a robust phenomenon that emerges for all recent decades and at multiple levels of geography, whether local community areas, census tracts, political wards or other 'neighborhood' units.

- Where studies have compared appropriate points in the ecological distribution, concentrated disadvantage predicts violence rates in a relatively invariant way for blacks and whites. There is no evidence, in other words, that the neighborhood causes of violence are distinct for different racial groups when properly compared.
- Although the empirical base is limited, neighborhood factors correlated with race explain a significant proportion of the black-white racial gap in violence among individuals, and there is little if any evidence of an interaction between race and neighborhood factors.

Mechanisms: Social Organization and Culture

During the 1990s, scholars began to theorize the above set of facts by moving beyond the traditional focus on concentrated poverty and measuring directly how neighborhood social processes bear on crime. Unlike the more static features of socio-demographic composition like race or class position, social mechanisms provide more process-oriented accounts of *how* neighborhoods bring about a change in a given phenomenon of interest (Wikström and Sampson 2003). Although concern with neighborhood mechanisms goes back at least to the early Chicago School of sociology, recently have we witnessed a concerted attempt across studies to empirically measure the social-interactional and institutional dimensions that might explain how neighborhood effects are transmitted. Sampson et al. (2002) refer to this as the 'process turn' in neighborhood effects research.

Sampson and Wilson (1995) posited that the most important process-related factors explaining the relationship between concentrated disadvantage and crime were (a) structural social disorganization and (b) cultural social isolation. Social disorganization was defined as the inability of a community structure to realize the common values of its residents and maintain effective social controls. The structural dimensions of community social disorganization refer to

the prevalence and inter-dependence of social networks in a community—both informal (e.g., the density of acquaintanceship; intergenerational kinship ties; level of anonymity) and formal (e.g., organizational participation; institutional stability)—and in the span of collective supervision that the community directs toward local problems. In general, however, the main concept emphasized in social disorganization and also in collective efficacy theory (Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls 1997) is *social control*. Concentrated disadvantage is hypothesized to weaken the activation of social control, which in turn predicts an increased risk of crime.

Although social disorganization theory is primarily structural in nature, Sampson and Wilson (1995) went on to argue that the ecological segregation of communities gives rise to what Kornhauser (1978) terms cultural disorganization—the attenuation of societal cultural values. Poverty, heterogeneity, anonymity, mutual distrust, institutional instability, and other structural features of disadvantaged urban communities are hypothesized to impede communication and obstruct the quest for common values, thereby fostering cultural diversity with respect to nondelinquent values. Sampson and Wilson (1995) specifically argued that community contexts shape "cognitive landscapes" or ecologically-structured norms regarding appropriate standards and expectations of conduct. That is, in structurally disorganized slum communities a system of values emerges in which crime, disorder, and drug use is less than fervently condemned and hence expected as part of everyday life. These ecologically-structured tolerances in turn appear to influence the probability of criminal outcomes.

This conceptionalization of the role of cultural adaptations is congruent with Wilson's (1987) notion of social isolation—lack of sustained interaction with individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society. The social isolation fostered by the ecological concentration of urban poverty deprives residents not only of resources and conventional role models, but also of cultural learning from mainstream social networks that facilitate social and economic

advancement in modern industrial society. Social isolation is distinguished from the culture of poverty by virtue of its focus on *adaptations to constraints and opportunities* rather than *internalization of norms*. The concept of social isolation implies that contact between groups of different class and/or racial backgrounds is either lacking or has become increasingly intermittent, and that the nature of this contact enhances effects of living in a highly concentrated poverty area. Social isolation does not mean that ghetto-specific practices become internalized, take on a life of their own, and therefore continue to influence behavior no matter the contextual environment. Rather, reducing structural inequality should ultimately decrease the cultural role of social isolation and adaptation.

There is little research to date that directly tests how social and cultural mechanisms at the community level explain the race gap in violence, especially in conjunction with concentrated disadvantage. The wheels are set in motion, however, because the measurement of social processes at the community level is no longer a rare phenomenon, offering the promise of an enriched and stronger set of tests of the main tenets of Sampson and Wilson (1995) and other macro-level theories. For example, there is some indication that social control, in the form of collective efficacy, does not explain the race gap in violence once concentrated disadvantage is controlled. On the other hand, cynicism about norms of law does explain a significant portion of the racial gap (Sampson, Morenoff and Raudenbush 2005).

We thus turn to an assessment of new directions that we believe should be pursued in the next generation of research on race and crime. Against the backdrop of a more concerted effort to understand social mechanisms at the community level, we advocate for (a) pushing the logic of ecological dissimilarity to its next logical step, (b) extending the focus of inquiry to the increasing ethnic diversification of the United States, and (c) perhaps most challenging and important, reshaping the concept of *cultural* mechanisms in criminology.

SPATIAL INEQUALITY AND ECOLOGICAL DISSIMILARITY

The reality of ecological dissimilarity by race means that to compare predominantly-minority neighborhoods to white neighborhoods is to compare apples and oranges on key social predictors of violence. Krivo and Peterson (2000) get around this problem by limiting their analysis to a selection of Black and White neighborhoods that are comparable on the distribution of structural disadvantage (see also McNulty 2001). They find that white and black neighborhoods comparable in their distributions of socioeconomic disadvantage exhibit comparable levels of crime. To test the racial invariance thesis this strategy makes sense but it necessarily sets aside the majority of black and white neighborhoods that have no racial counterpart and thus selects for comparison neighborhoods those that are in a real sense "outliers." Nor does this approach tell us *why* black and white neighborhoods as a whole occupy such different places on the distribution of economic advantage and crime.

We therefore suggest that research needs to attend more directly to the sorting processes that create ecological dissimilarity in the first place. In essence we are calling for studying how race organizes the spatial dynamics of communities in a larger entire metropolitan system. In one sense this is the age old question of how racial segregation comes about and we do know a lot (Massey and Denton 1993), but in a fundamental and surprising sense the question has never been satisfactorily answered because most research focuses on *intra*-neighborhood processes that are assumed to be independent of adjacent neighborhoods and larger processes of city change.

There are good reasons to revise this approach. Neighborhoods are interdependent and characterized by a functional relationship between what happens at one point in space and what happens elsewhere. Setting aside the problematic definition of neighborhoods in most studies, spatial dependence of the crime process is implicated by the fact that offenders are disproportionately involved in acts of violence near their homes, such that a neighborhood's

exposure to homicide risk is heightened by geographical proximity to places where known offenders live. Moreover, to the extent that the risk of becoming an offender is influenced by contextual factors such as concentrated poverty, spatial proximity to these conditions influences the risk of violence in a focal neighborhood. Interpersonal crimes of violence are also based on social interaction and thus subject to diffusion processes. For example, a homicide in one neighborhood may provide the spark that eventually leads to a retaliatory killing in a nearby neighborhood. In addition, violence occurs among persons known to one another, usually involving networks of association that follow geographical vectors.

Unlike traditional community studies, then, we argue that the characteristics of surrounding neighborhoods are crucial to understanding violence in any given neighborhood. Recent research supports this claim. Controlling for measured characteristics internal to a neighborhood, violence in a given neighborhood is significantly and positively linked to the violence rates of surrounding neighborhoods (Baumer 2002; Morenoff, Sampson and Raudenbush 2001). This suggests a diffusion or exposure-like process, whereby violence is conditioned by the characteristics of spatially proximate neighborhoods, which in turn are conditioned by adjoining neighborhoods in a spatially linked process that ultimately characterizes the entire metropolitan system.

Perhaps more important, spatial dynamics are implicated in the sorting of neighborhood risk factors in the first place. The mechanisms of racial segregation manifest themselves in spatial inequality, explaining why it is that despite similar income profiles, black middle-class neighborhoods are at greater risk of violence than white middle-class neighborhoods. To understand how spatial externalities are situated against a regime of racial and ethnic segregation, Sampson et al. (Sampson, Morenoff and Earls 1999) examined Chicago neighborhoods divided into three categories: (1) at least 75 percent white, (2) at least 75 percent

black, and (3) other, consisting mainly of Latino immigrant and mixed areas. White neighborhoods were 4.5 times more likely than black neighborhoods and 2 times more likely than mixed neighborhoods to have high levels of child control. Although this finding is not so surprising, the spatial vulnerability of black neighborhoods and Latino/mixed neighborhoods was much more pronounced and unexpected in magnitude. Among neighborhoods with high social control, black neighborhoods were some *37 times more likely* and mixed neighborhoods *11 times more likely* than white neighborhoods to face the spatial vulnerability of being in ecological proximity to neighborhoods with low levels of social control.

Seen from the opposite perspective of what might be called "free rider" spatial advantage, among neighborhoods with *low* child-centered social control, white neighborhoods were almost 9 times more likely than black neighborhoods and 6 times more likely than mixed neighborhoods to be near neighborhoods with high social control. The implication is sobering: *When* African American neighborhoods generate social control, their residents nonetheless face the added challenge of being situated in a wider spatial environment characterized by extreme disadvantage (Pattillo-McCoy 1999). The situation of white neighborhoods is nearly the opposite – even when they are at high risk because of internal characteristics, their residents benefit from high levels of child control in nearby areas. In a real sense these white neighborhoods are benefiting from their neighbors despite low internal contribution to the collective good.

Ecological dissimilarity is thus apparently even more profound than previously thought, with the evidence suggesting that the differing spatial environments of black neighborhoods and white neighborhoods play a role at least equal to that of internal structural characteristics (i.e., concentrated disadvantage) in generating racial inequalities. It behooves researchers to better understand how these inequalities are produced and socially reproduced as a way of understanding racial disparities in crime. The relevance of social-psychological mechanisms for

understanding urban inequality may be a key to further advance in this area (Bobo and Massagli 2001). Neighborhoods with high concentrations of minority and poor residents are stigmatized by historically correlated and structurally induced problems of crime and disorder. These historically resilient and psychologically salient correlations have deep roots in American social stratification that help perpetuate a self-confirming structural prophecy whereby all actors are likely to disinvest in or move away from black areas viewed as having high risk for disorder, but with whites more sensitive in the first place and consequently more likely to move (Sampson and Raudenbush 2004). In this way, implicit bias in perceptions of crime and disorder may be one of the underappreciated causes of continued racial segregation and spatial disadvantage, and hence ecological dissimilarity in the United States.

ETHNICITY AND IMMIGRATION

The United States is becoming increasingly diverse ethnically, not just in our nation's cities but in suburban and rural areas as well (Saenz 2004). Latino Americans are now the largest minority group at almost 14 percent of the population and immigration has neared peak levels historically. Some 12% of the current population is foreign-born and over half are from Spanish-speaking Latin America. Yet the Sampson-Wilson (1995) story was mainly about race. Can their "racial invariance" thesis be applied to ethnicity and crime?

The data are not sufficiently in but initial results are intriguing. Martinez and colleagues find that homicide among Latino Americans follows the same general pattern as among blacks and whites in terms of the predictive power of concentrated disadvantage, even though other predictors of Latino violence are somewhat unique (Martinez 2002; Nielsen, Martinez and Lee 2005). In particular, the basic links among deprivation, disorganization and homicide are similar for blacks, Haitians, and Latinos (Martinez 2002; McNulty and Bellair 2003a; McNulty and

Bellair 2003b). Thus it appears that the racial invariance thesis may be extended to ethnic invariance in terms of community-level causes of violence, especially disadvantage.

Ethnicity, and its counterpart, immigration, bring in new issues that transcend race, however (Hagan and Palloni 1999; Morenoff 2005). The main challenge is the so-called Latino paradox, whereby Latinos do much better on various social indicators, including violence, than blacks and apparently even whites given relatively high levels of disadvantage (Martinez 2002; Morenoff 2005). The concentration of immigrants also appears to tell a very different story with respect to violence than the concentration of African Americans. Martinez (2002) for example, challenges the stereotype that increasing immigration is linked to increasing violence. Overall, the weight of evidence suggests that concentrated immigration has little if any association with aggregate homicide, whereas the concentration of blacks has long predicted homicide rates.

Using the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods, Sampson et al. (2005) extend this line of inquiry through a simultaneous examination of individual and neighborhood immigration status, along with ethnicity. They report that the lower rate of violence among Mexican Americans as compared to whites was explained by a combination of married parents, living in a neighborhood with a high concentration of immigrants, and individual immigrant status. Interestingly, first generation immigrants have lower violence rates than second generation immigrants, who in turn have lower rates of violence than third generation Americans. This is even true for blacks. Living in a neighborhood of concentrated immigration is also associated with a reduced risk of violence even after taking into account a host of factors including the immigrant status of the person. Thus immigration status exhibits individual *and* contextual effects, both protective in nature.

The emerging story is therefore complex but provocative. Although concentrated disadvantage and neighborhood characteristics associated with social organization appear to

predict rates of violence in similar ways for all race and ethnic groups, the patterns for Latino Americans and immigration go against the grain of popular stereotypes. Following media stereotypes (and in line with the original Chicago school of thought) we would expect areas with large concentrations of recent immigrants to have higher homicide rates since these groups tend to settle in disorganized and economically disadvantaged communities. Immigration should also affect Latinos more than other groups since immigrants in recent decades largely originate in Spanish-speaking countries (Martinez 2002). Yet immigrants and Latinos are less violent, even more so when they live in concentrated immigrant areas (Nielsen, Martinez and Lee 2005).

A major task for future research is to solve the so-called Latino paradox and explain what about immigration makes it such a strong predictor of lower violence. This task is made more difficult by the radically different but textbook-familiar pattern that dominated early 20th-century America, where immigration was indeed linked with increasing crime and therefore became a founding motivator for the social disorganization theory of crime. By contrast, in today's world it is no longer tenable to assume that immigration and diversity automatically lead to social disorganization and consequently crime (Hagan and Palloni 1999). In fact, an implied thesis, perhaps the most intriguing of all, is that the broad reduction of violence in the United States over the last decade was due in part to increasing diversity and immigration. To our knowledge this possibility has never been included among the usual suspects in the crime drop, but the broad pattern of secular declines in violence at the same time that immigration skyrocketed suggests to us a plausible hypothesis to be added to the race/ethnic theory of invariance.

TRADITIONAL APPROACHES TO CRIME AND CULTURE

We turn now to perhaps the biggest challenge in the study of race and crime—culture. Three contrasting views of culture have dominated the literature. One view relies on the notion

that delinquent or criminal values are merely "pseudo" cultures—ad hoc rationalizations that have no causal import. A second position, derived mainly from social disorganization theory, posits culture as endogenous to structural constraints. Culture is an *adaptation*, in other words, and would erode or change under differing structural conditions. The third imbues enduring causal power and hence authenticity to subcultures. By this logic even if subcultures may have stemmed from structural differences they ultimately take on an independent life of their own. This section briefly reviews these traditional yet vying approaches to race and crime before introducing a revised framework that draws on recent advances in the sociology of culture.

1. Culture doesn't matter. In a blistering critique, Kornhauser (1978) argued that so-called "deviant cultures" are entirely epiphenomenal. No one truly values crime, chaos, and misery. The cultural particularities of criminals are pseudo-cultures, the stories people tell to account for their disgrace after the fact. The real causes of petty crime, violence, and unemployment operate in the structural realm of networks, labor markets, and human capital. When hardened criminals glorify their choices and disavow the straight life, their words are only sour grapes. Obviously, the causal power of culture in this view is weak to nonexistent.

*2. Culture is endogenous to structure***.** Researchers on race and violence more often theorize culture as an *adaptation* to structural circumstances (e.g., Wilson 1987, Massey 1995; Sampson and Wilson 1995). The basic story runs something like this: In a violent, high-crime neighborhood, with few legitimate opportunities, people learn that it is expedient to be violent oneself. The social learning of violence is passed on to children through role modeling. Ultimately, however, crime is driven by the structural forces of high unemployment, concentrated poverty, and accompanying family disruption. Culture is an endogenous variable, a mediating mechanism that shapes people's subjective experiences and responses to these hard facts of life. Thus deviance is not positively valorized; rather it is accepted as part of the

"cognitive landscape" of everyday life (Sampson and Wilson 1995). Violent neighborhoods are also culturally heterogeneous, with residents who gravitate mainly towards the mainstream but switch between competing sets of cultural values depending upon the situation.

The key concept then is cultural attenuation—residents may share mainstream cultural values, but these values become existentially irrelevant in certain structural contexts (Kornhauser 1978; Sampson and Wilson 1995). Moreover, crime is caused primarily by the *absence* of "good", pro-social culture, not by the presence of "bad" culture. This last view is widely adopted by recent research on crime, and goes by a variety of names: "cultural social isolation," "cultural disorganization." Ironically, this kind of explanation also gives little causal power to culture to explain violence, working as a softer version of "pseudocultures."

3. *"Culture" acquires causal force, independent of the structural circumstances that generated it.* This position holds that, once a culture is created, it takes on a life of its own. For example, white southerners from herding traditions (Cohen and Nisbett 1996) and 19th-Century Corsicans (Gould 2000) have been argued to perpetuate "honor cultures" that endorse the use of violence. Honor cultures were originally developed under contexts where reputations for toughness were deemed necessary to defend family and property from endemic threats. Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967) famously argued that the harsh circumstances of slavery generated a "subculture of violence" among Black Americans, which persists to this day long after changes in structural circumstances. More recently, Anderson's (1999) "Code of the Street" argues that high-poverty neighborhoods generate an oppositional culture that inverts the values of mainstream (white) society. Mainstream culture is said to value hard work, education, and civility, but the "code of the streets" valorizes violence, callousness, and anti-intellectualism. At points Anderson appears to stipulate that the street code would wither away if structural conditions improved, but this is neither emphasized nor necessarily implied by his argument.

TOWARD A RELATIONAL THEORY OF CULTURE

Since the late 1980s, sociologists have adopted less transcendent definitions that capture the role of "culture in action." Swidler (1986) opened the floodgates with her idea of the "cultural toolkit," a repertoire of evaluative schema, scripts, and cultural models that people use to construct and justify lines of action. While crime researchers have experimented with this new vocabulary of culture (Heimer 1997; Morrill *et al* 2000) there has not yet been a decisive theoretical reformulation of the old culture/structure debate. New definitions of culture are being poured into old paradigms, like new wine into old wineskins.

It is important to actively tease out the implications of new work in cultural sociology for research on crime and violence, especially given the strong influence of Kornhauser (1978) on this field. To remedy this situation, it is helpful to review the differences between traditional cultural arguments in criminology and the post-1980s culture-in-action paradigm. The following chart provides a conceptual scheme that organizes our effort.

New: "Culture in Action"	*Old: "Culture as Values"*
Intersubjective	Personal
Performative	Authentic
Affective-Cognition	Value-Rationality
Relational	Consensual
World-Making	Worldview

Intersubjective, not Personal

In the "culture as values" paradigm, culture is conceptualized as the switchman that directs the train of action toward ultimate goals (Swidler 1986). Culture is *personal*, something embedded deep within each of us. The methodological challenge in past research was to extract this deeply personal culture from a complete stranger. In the "culture in action" paradigm, culture is *intersubjective*. Cultural repertoires provide resources for coordinating social action. Culture is not embedded *within* each of us—it is created *between* us in everyday social interaction (Matsueda and Heimer 1997). For example, people use frames to reach a shared definition of the situation, account for their behavior, or interpret other's intentions (Goffman 1956, 1974). People activate symbolic boundaries, or highlight inter-group distinctions, to mobilize people for collective action (Tilly 2004; Lamont and Molnár 2002).

Different methodologies can lend themselves to either old or new paradigms of culture. When researchers measure culture with a survey, they standardize the stimulus (situation) and tend to assume that culture operates primarily within the individual. If culture is personal, then it makes sense to ask people what their individual "culture" is. But if culture operates in interaction, than researchers need to measure culture using additional methods, such as ethnography, focus groups, and the coding of intersubjective social texts and performances.

Performative, not Authentic

Erving Goffman (1956) introduced the idea of "facework," the presentations of self that we make for various audiences. He even denied the existence of the "true self," the essential center of moral choice within each of us. Rather, each of us is a series of performances where we scramble to maintain worthy, competent selves as we move from audience to audience. By implication, people do not behave morally because they are essentially moral. Rather, they stick

to the straight-and-narrow to impress others and save face. By this logic, when people act morally alone, they are performing before the mirror, to "save face" in their own eyes. If we adopt such a performative notion of culture, then it makes no sense to ask if "decent" people are truly decent, and "street" people are truly street. It makes more sense to ask which audiences people are performing for, and in what venues. Every storefront preacher knows people who perform a “decent” identity at church on Sunday morning, and perform a “street” identity when they sell drugs on Monday night.

Unlike previous frameworks, then, identity in this view is performed and is thus more than a *posthoc* rationalization of one's behavior. People elaborate their identities to make sense of their past actions and circumstances, but this identity also takes on a projective life of its own, as when someone experiences a social event that they make sense of by elaborating a particular identity at a later time. When this identity is threatened, violence may erupt, suggesting that the performance of identity can play a role in precipitating contentious encounters.

Affective-Cognition, not Value-Rationality

The culture-as-values paradigm assumes a fundamental split between ends and means. It was often implied that only one's ends were truly cultural, while the means were "non-cultural," driven by rationality, habits, and other non-cultural mechanisms. This means-ends split is exemplified by Merton's classic theory of deviance (1938, 1957). In Mertonian strain theory, deviants were actually directing themselves towards mainstream American values (in particular, the acquisition of wealth), through the only means that were available to them (theft and participation in the underground economy).

Swidler's "culture in action" paradigm breaks down the opposition of means and ends. People often adopt the course of action that uses the practical skills and cognitive tools they have

at hand, without thinking of their preferred ends. For example, if students lack the "cultural capital" that they need to navigate the academic world, they may direct their efforts into the social games that they know how to play: e.g., street fighting, popularity contests. Ultimate ends are invented in retrospect, to justify their course of action after it has been completed. When people attempt rationality, culture guides the construction of both means and ends, by providing heuristics, metaphors, and models for action. When behavior is driven by impulse or habit rather than calculation, people often construct legitimate *post hoc* accounts of their behavior. Since the 1990s, this more nuanced view of culture and rationality has been influenced by developments in cognitive science that show how emotion and psychological mechanisms shape our decision-making. The *affective-cognition* approach has become influential in the new Behavioral Economics as well as sociology (Camerer 2003), but has barely penetrated criminology.

Relational, not Consensual

Older cultural perspectives often assumed that culture was consensual, where we might have different preferences and tastes but agree on a set of shared values. This consensual culture helps people achieve collective goals. While this culture may be personal, it is directed toward the common good. This consensual view of culture underlies most research in the "social disorganization" tradition and in the literature on social capital, trust, and informal social control.

The French sociologists Pierre Bourdieu debunked this rosy picture with the idea of culture as "symbolic violence." Culture is not the glue that holds society together; it is a weapon to reproduce social hierarchies and exclude social challengers. People use culture to define themselves and their friends as uniquely worthy, and to draw symbolic boundaries between worthy selves and unworthy others. These symbolic boundaries help groups defend their exclusive access to networks and resources against usurpers (Bourdieu 1984). Culture is not

consensual (a basis of social solidarity), but instead relational (the map that people use to position themselves in social space.) The “Culture Wars” in the U.S. serve as a prime example.

This conceptualization implies that morality is not just a matter of adhering to abstract principles; it is about locating yourself in social space and defending your position from challengers. For example, being a good person necessarily requires an invidious comparison to bad people. Instead of assuming that communities have common standards of morality, the empirical goal is to map the ways that people within a community divide themselves into moral categories and rank people by relative worthiness. Of course, different people and different groups may disagree about who among them is most moral of all. Each party might elaborate available cultural notions of worthiness in a way that place themselves on top (Lamont 2000).

Wacquant (2002) draws our attention to the finely differentiated hierarchies elaborated at the very bottom of society, between people with slightly differing resources, network locations, and opportunities. As an example, the "working poor" draw strong boundaries against the "nonworking poor" to emphasize their commitment to hard work and mainstream respectability (Newman 1999). Unemployed neighbors return the favor, defending their worthiness against the "chumps" who take "slave jobs." Even homeless men resist a low-status identity by drawing symbolic boundaries between themselves and the *real* bums (Snow and Anderson 1987.)

The insight we take away is that individuals draw symbolic boundaries not reducible to fixed categories of people. These moral labels become ammunition in ongoing cultural warfare between people trying to establish a worthy identity by drawing symbolic boundaries. Bourdieu claims that such symbolic violence defends people's exclusive access to valued social networks, jobs, and resources. The idea of symbolic violence further implies that culture does not *constrain* conflict, so much as *structure* it. Battles over worthiness and rank are endemic to all societies, not just in the "honor cultures" of Appalachia, inner-city St. Louis, or 19th Century

Corsica. Neither is conflict for honor limited to the private sphere; it clearly occurs in the workplace and even in so-called "arms-length" economic transactions (Morrill 1995). Yet some social contexts produce higher rates of open, *physical* violence than others. The task for criminology, we argue, is to think harder about how culture plays out in these processes.

World-Making, not Worldview

In early critiques of the culture-as-values paradigm, it was conceded that culture guided our understanding of "what is" as well as what "should be" (Young 1999, Gould 1999). People always recognized a difference between their values and hopes, and their mundane pursuits and expectations. Berger and Luckmann (1967) introduced an influential concept of culture as worldview, a deeply structuring mythology that people used to make sense of the mundane world. In some times and places, people lived within a "sacred canopy," a coherent socially-constructed world. In other times and places, they struggled to construct a meaningful existence, in a social environment torn between competing worldviews (Berger 1967). Unfortunately, crime researchers distilled these rich foundational statements of Social Constructionism into the narrower formulation of "culture as worldview." The idea of worldview is too static, cognitive, and unitary, reproducing a false dichotomy between social structure (the "hard facts" of life) and culture (the soft reflection of reality that informs our choices.)

In contrast, cultural sociologists conceive of culture as world-*making*. The hard facts of social structure—the economy, the state, violence—are themselves continually produced and enacted by our skillful and purposive social action (Hays 1994; Sewell 1992; Emirbayer and Mische 1998). Culture plays a structural role in the making of this world.

To understand the difference between culture as worldview, and culture as world-making, it is helpful to consider Bourdieu's idea of the social field. A field is a distinct social

space consisting of interrelated and vertically differentiated positions, a 'network, or configuration of objective relations between positions' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 97). Unlike a worldview, a social field doesn't exist in our heads. A field exists only in interactions with other people. A social field is practiced, not "believed." A field is therefore both a feature of one's social environment, and continually reconstructed by agency--an essential point to which we will return. Relatedly, a *habitus* is the embodied set of dispositions and classificatory schemas that structure people's responses to social situations. In relation to a field, the habitus provides the "sense of the game": who the relevant players are, what's in play, and how the game is played. In this game, different players bring different amounts of capital to the field. Capital comes in many forms: economic, cultural, and social. *Cultural capital* consists in the mastery of performances, styles, language, and familiarity that can be used to gain access to status or resources. *Symbolic capital* consists in accumulated honor or prestige that resides in the person, analogous to charisma in positive forms and stigma in negative forms.

Importantly, there can be dominant and nondominant forms of cultural capital, defined in relationship to different social fields that are played out in different social spaces. Many ethnographers have noted that subordinate groups often develop nondominant cultural capital, which accrues to people who give masterful performances of an alternate cultural style (Carter 2005). However, marginalized people have little dominant capital with which to gain entrée to networks and resources. This is not to say that marginalized people lack competence or interpersonal skill—it takes a great deal of skill to navigate their worlds. The point is that not all cultural patterns in marginalized communities should be described as cultural capital, a concept distinct from *competence*, *script, or schema*. Capital can only be defined in relationship to a social field, in which the capital can actually be converted into status, resources, or access.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CULTURAL STUDY OF RACE AND CRIME

We believe that criminology in general, and the racial invariance theory of communities and crime in particular, can benefit from the insights gained in recent advances in the sociology of culture. It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a full blown cultural theory, but we can consider in abbreviated form how some of the general principles just reviewed call forth new directions in the study of race and crime.

For starters, the idea of "culture as adaptation to structure" is directly problematized. Consider the claim that people adapt rationally to a violent, desperate context by becoming violent themselves (Massey 1995; Anderson 1999). But how can culture be conceptualized as an adaptation to the context when participants are actively creating the violent context in the first place? Individual actions are part of creating violent neighborhoods—put differently, without the cultural agency of neighborhood residents expressed in ongoing engagements in violent altercations, the neighborhood context would not be violent. The relational approach understands culture not as a simple adaptation to structure in a one way causal flow, but as an inter-subjective *organizing mechanism* that shapes unfolding social processes and that is constitutive of social structure. From this perspective culture is simultaneously an emergent product and producer of social organization, interaction, and hence structure.

Second, and relatedly, people do not exclusively use culture to accept their fate, or justify their failure (Kornhauser 1978). They invent exciting and dangerous fates for themselves. Katz (1988) has vividly described how people actively creative the macabre environment that is supposed to be their externally imposed "environment." Youth gangs carve up their neighborhoods into imaginary territories and enact terrible performances of honor, conquest, and vengeance. "Taggers" literally inscribe these performances on their urban landscape with

elaborate graffiti. Ethnographic accounts of high-crime neighborhoods force us to recognize that people are enacting elaborate dramas of violence, not just as narrating their stories *in retrospect*.

Third, we believe that the idea of the social field offers particular promise for understanding high-crime, marginal communities. It is commonly argued that these neighborhoods are socially disorganized, but this raises interesting questions about how people acquire a stable *habitus* in such disorderly neighborhoods. What social games do neighborhood residents believe themselves to be playing, if any? Are there stable social fields in which residents compete for status and resources? Wacquant suggests that there are, in his ethnographic inquiries into the "social art" of the hustler (1998). More relevant for present purposes, Anderson (1999) describes a pattern of violence in a Philadelphia ghetto that we reinterpret as the characteristics of a social field: organized "staging grounds," common understandings about who the relevant players are, a sense of the rules, and a language that describes who has more or less capital in this field. For example, in the code of the street, inner-city teenagers acquire "juice" by performing their fearlessness in combat (Anderson 1999). These youth believe that skillful displays of "heart" win them status in their local peer groups. However, this nondominant cultural capital can only be "cashed in" for resources and status within a certain social field. In other social fields, like middle-class education, the performance of heart is stigmatizing. But in neighborhoods with large numbers of individuals who cannot claim mainstream signals of social status, a social field of violence emerges where residents vigorously compete to construct an honorable sense of self (Horowitz 1983).

Fourth, it follows then that we should no longer speak of cultural deficits of individuals or groups, but rather about the *match* between the social fields around them and their endowments of various kinds of capital. Bourdieu's concept of the social field can help us understand why young people perpetuate dangerous games of violence, when everyone involved

may stand to lose materially. The relevant cultural mechanism is not the worldviews of the people involved, but the logic of the social field in which they are embedded. Social fields are thus intersubjective processes, in which participants necessarily have varying levels of power and capital, regardless of their values and aspirations. The lack of cultural capital is not an individual attribute like the old "culture of poverty" or "cultural deficit" arguments in poverty research. And it's not enough to share the same values, preferences, or "repertoires of evaluation". As Kornhauser dryly commented in the 1970s, no one needs to be told that it's better to be middle-class than to be idle, that it's better to be safe than to be endangered. But one must have to have the right capital to play the middle class (and of course, upper class) game.

Finally, the newer conceptualization of culture helps us to better understand the role of law, or more accurately the lack thereof, in high violence settings. More generally, we cannot fully understand the organization of violence apart from the State, which claims a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Research has found that high-violence neighborhoods are characterized by both state disinvestment in access to law and widespread "legal cynicism": the feeling among residents that legitimate channels of protection and redress are not viable options (Sampson and Bartusch 1997). Residents in disadvantaged areas, who experience the highest rates of victimization, are less likely to report simple assaults to the police than residents of wealthier neighborhoods (Baumer 2002). This occurs when neighborhoods experience a policing vacuum or police resources are dramatically insufficient to provide a basic level of safety. Even if one reports a neighbor to the police, the police cannot protect them from retaliation, especially if their investigation is unlikely to result in a conviction.

Minorities and residents of racially stigmatized neighborhoods feel especially alienated from police who may be inclined to treat them like potential suspects rather than citizens in need of assistance (Weitzer 1999, 2000). Perceptions of injustice are a natural outgrowth, creating a

“racial gradient” whereby Latino and Black youth are more similar to one another and distinct from Whites in their alienation from the legal system (Hagan, Shedd, and Payne 2005). Under these circumstances, a common reaction is for minority residents to feel that they must resolve their conflicts themselves, obtaining the support of family and friends for doing so.

Legal cynicism fuels a distinct practice that Kubrin and Weitzer call "cultural retaliatory homicide" (2003). Cultural retaliatory homicide differs from other forms of violence in its disproportionate emphasis on retaliation for "disrespect", or small slights to individual or female family members. Cultural retaliatory homicide also refers to vigilante-style executions to punish infractions or resolve disputes that could be brought to the police. Perhaps most importantly, this kind of costly world-making consistently arises in certain structural contexts: Spatial inequality and residential sorting processes produce neighborhoods with high rates of poverty, unemployment, transience, and lack of access to formal law, which combine to produce legal cynicism and an emphasis on cultural retaliation in interpersonal disputes (see also Gould 2000).

CONCLUSION

Like Sampson and Wilson (1995), our perspective views the race and crime linkage from a contextual lens that highlights the very different ecological contexts that blacks and whites reside in—regardless of individual characteristics. We emphasize that crime rates among blacks nonetheless vary by ecological characteristics just as they do for whites and Latinos. Taken together, these facts suggest a powerful role for community context in explaining race and crime.

Time marches on, however, and increasing immigration is one secular change that cannot be ignored. We therefore offered revisions to the racial invariance theory that we hope will guide and be tested in future research. In particular, we believe that there is a rich set of

hypotheses on the Latino paradox, diversity as a cause of the crime drop, the protective mechanisms of concentrated immigration, and other aspects of ethnicity as articulated above.

We also believe that extra-neighborhood spatial processes deserve further scrutiny in the explanation of patterns of ecological dissimilarity by race and ethnicity, as do the social organizational and cultural processes that are correlated with but not redundant with structural features like concentrated disadvantage. To this end we have offered a "spatial externalities" perspective on racial dis(advantage) that moves beyond the traditional emphasis on internal neighborhood characteristics. In fact, our argument is that extra-neighborhood and city-wide spatial dynamics create racial inequalities that are potentially more consequential that the ones already at play within neighborhoods. This revised view has direct implications for understanding the durability of violence in poor black neighborhoods and the ever present threat of violence in what otherwise would be characterized as middle-class areas.

Finally, we have offered a preliminary cultural framework that revises Sampson and Wilson (1995) by drawing on the latest thinking in the new sociology of culture. Our framework seeks to elide the unproductive culture vs. social structure divide that has long hampered sociology in general (Sewell 1992) and the study of race and crime in particular. Although working at a fairly abstract level, we believe our arguments have import for concrete causal thinking. Kubrin and Weitzers's (2003) recent work exemplifies the relational approach to culture, structure, and violence that we advance here. Put in present terms, their measures of culture operationalize the new paradigm: culture as *intersubjective*, *performative*, *cognitive*, *relational*, and *world-making*. For example, Kubrin and Weitzer code cases of cultural retaliatory homicide in terms of reports of family and community support for the action, an intersubjective measure of culture. They record embodied practices as played out on a public stage, not beliefs encased in the individual mind. They cite in-depth descriptions of murder

reports that capture the relational aspects of killing, the perceived need to lash out in order to "save face" and establish a reputation. In their formulation, and consistent with the perspective proposed here, cultural retaliatory homicide is thus not caused by beliefs or values. Rather, the practice of violence exemplifies world-making at its most dramatic. We believe this type of approach to culture can help elucidate the mechanisms that link the production of social—and in this case killing—fields with durable macro-level forces that find continued expression in concentrated disadvantage, the racial stigma of neighborhoods, and state disinvestment.

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