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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Racial Discrimination and Violence: A Longitudinal Perspective

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A century ago, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote: "Crime is a phenomenon of organized social life, and is the open rebellion of an individual against his social environment" (1899/1996: 235). Explaining crime among blacks in Philadelphia between 1835 and 1895, Du Bois noted their overrepresentation in the courts as well as prisons and was acknowledging the damage to society done by racial discrimination both before and after the Civil War. Enumerations of prison populations in 1904, 1910, and 1923 showed serious overrepresentation of blacks both among resident prisoners and among those committed during the years of enumeration (Reuter, 1927). The fact that rates were higher for population counts than for intakes showed that blacks not only were convicted relatively more frequently but that, also, they were given longer sentences.

High crime rates among blacks are, of course, at least partly a function of the operation of the justice system and the way in which crimes and race are recorded. In many cases, white men have committed violence against blacks with impunity, thus not entering into any counts of violence. Although black recorded rates of violence exceeded the averages among whites, they did not rise to the levels of violence among Irish or Italian immigrants at particular times and places (Lane, 1997). Nevertheless, contemporary records indicate that violence among blacks, particularly among young black males, is an extremely serious phenomenon.

A plethora of social commentaries and theories have developed to identify conditions of the social environment that might account for crime among blacks. For example, some have suggested that there are pockets of people who approve the use of violence, referring to these groups as sharing a "subculture of Violence" (Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967/1982) or a "subculture of honor" (Butterfield, 1995; Nisbett and Cohen, 1996). These theories do not focus specifically on experiences of blacks but, rather, on

the case of transitions from civil exchange to aggressive actions among both blacks and whites. Although originating in the South, these subcultures are said to have been transported to inner cities along with the migration of freed blacks after the Civil War.

A variation on this theme suggests that social disorganization creates high tolerance for violence, although not necessarily approval of its use (Marable, 1996; Anderson, 1997; Sampson, 1997). William B. Harvey depicted the process by which social disorganization results in violence. Harvey described the Subculture of Exasperation as one in which "the dearth of opportunities that are available for black people to accrue reasonable incomes through socially sanctioned employment, to live in dignity and self-respect, and to realize the same benefits and pleasures as whites, inevitably results in displays of discontent and outward directed aggression" (1986: 155). Coupled with a constant bombardment of advertising that shows a form of life in which owning material goods constitute a "good life," the inability of many blacks to attain that life builds resentment. In a similar vein, Humphrey and Palmer suggest that "black interpersonal violence seems inextricably tied to the persistent difficulty black males have in obtaining a viable masculine identity" (1986: 65).

Despite the abundance of books and articles documenting high rates of violence among blacks, little empirical attention has been paid to identifying the source of violence among them. Exceptions can be found in studies showing effects of extreme poverty, unemployment, and family disruption (Blau and Blau, 1982; Fowles and Merva, 1996; Messner and Golden, 1992; Phillips, 1997; Sampson, 1985, 1987). Historical studies have indicated that rates of violence among blacks sometimes tend to increase during times of white prosperity – a tendency that has been taken by some to evidence effects of discrimination in employment (Henry and Short, 1954; Gurr, 1981; Lane, 1986).

In careful time-series analyses of crime rates between 1957 and 1988, LaFree, Drass, and O'Day found rates of crime declined – as expected – among whites during times of prosperity. To the contrary, however, they found that "for blacks, higher family income and educational attainment are generally associated with *higher* crime rates; conversely, increases in unemployment and percentage of female-headed families are associated with *declining* crime rates" (1992: 175). The authors suggested that education and prosperity might engender expectations that are conspicuously unfulfilled and that the consequent sense of injustice results in higher rates of crime.

American racism has created systematic biases that might influence rates of violence in a variety of ways. Katheryn K. Russell (1998) documented a litany of important issues in the criminal justice system that perpetuate racial stereotypes and feed into racial discrimination. Her historical summary covers slave codes and Black Codes of the nineteenth century as well

as Jim Crow Laws of the twentieth. She discusses racial disproportionality, addressing the difficult task of trying to distinguish between discrimination in the system and differentiation in rates of crime. The issues link the past to the present, for as Russell noted, "Black distrust of the justice system is not new. It is historically rooted in the role police played in enforcing the slave codes, Black codes, Jim Crow segregation, the ultimate form of vigilante justice, lynching.... Today, police brutality hardly resembles its past forms. . Many Blacks alive today, however, still remember the widespread, persistent, and inhumane abuse Blacks suffered at the hands of police" (1998: 35).

Racial biases among the police have frequently resulted in the arrest of black men who are innocent. Not only do such arrests inflate the crime figures reported to the FBI but, also, they undermine the legitimacy of law enforcement officers in their role as protectors. Therefore, police misconduct, too, contributes to the use of violence. If the police cannot be trusted, then citizens must control their own environments (McCord, 1997). Many, Anderson reports, "carry small handguns for protection" (1976: 185).

Burton Levy (1968) documented police abuses to show that deeply entrenched antiblack values, attitudes, and behavior permeate the police force. These values, attitudes, and actions contribute to distrust of and hostility toward police among the groups most in need of real protection. Darnell Hawkins (1986) suggests that the denigration of blacks by the police results in a lack of attention to those crimes that regularly can be used to foretell violence. In the absence of police control, some incidents that might have ended without violence escalate.

Hawkins (1986), like many others, considers the possibility that violence can be an attempt to gain some control in an environment over which young blacks appear to have no control. The use of violence to gain some control is a thesis developed more fully by Frantz Fanon. Fanon argued that the "colonized man" becomes so accustomed to violence that aggression seems "deposited in his bones" (1968: 52). At first, violence is used against those close to him, but later, violence becomes a threat to the colonizer. As the atmosphere fills with violence, the colonizer tries to defuse it. In taking responsibility for violence, the colonized man becomes integrated. Fanon suggests: "Violence is thus seen as comparable to a royal pardon" (1968: 86). Frederick Douglass (1845/1960), too, had deified violence. While still a slave, he finally fought his cruel and sadistic boss, Covey. Of this experience, he wrote: "It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom. My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact (1845/1960: 105).

Nathan Irvin Huggins (1977/1990) places the experience of slavery at center stage for understanding the experience of being black in America.

Huggins believes that crime and other social ills can be attributed to failure to "bring slavery and the persistent oppression of race from the margins to the center" (1977/1990: lvi) in analyzing the American Dream. Because there was so much violence on plantations, those slaves willing to stand up to their bosses were typically seen as heroes for their toughness (Genovese, 1972). Links between violence and heroism have been perpetuated through some of the great black literatures, as well as through stories passed along by word of mouth (Takaki, 1993).

W. H. Grier and P. M. Cobbs introduce their book about what it means to be black in America by noting: "Black children from birth are exposed to heavily systematized hostility from the nation and for their own survival must reject the community's code of behavior, containing as it does the injunction that they themselves are to be the object of hatred" (1971: 1). The authors continue by remarking the series of degradations that can be expected in school. They note the anti-intellectualism foisted upon black males, and the constant pressures used by whites to keep blacks "in their place." The degradation, the lack of preparation for success, the clear signs of injustice surround young black males with reasons for violence.

Most discussions of black crime purport to explain why rates of violence are so high among blacks. It is clear, however, that only a minority of blacks commit violent crimes. Du Bois, for example, showed that a small proportion of Negroes committed the bulk of crimes. He suggested "that deep social causes underlie this prevalence of crime (and) . . . that to this criminal class and not to the great mass of Negroes the bulk of the serious crime perpetrated by this race should be charged" (1899/1996: 257).

The present study addresses the issue of why some blacks become violent and others do not. To do this, we will specifically consider perceived racial discrimination as a form of victimization contributing to violence. Recognizing that all blacks are at least potentially subjected to discrimination, we consider differences between those who have and those who have not been specifically deprived of their desired goals because – at least in their own opinions – they are black.

The present study tracks individuals from childhood to the age of thirty-two. These people were first studied in 1966, at the age of six. They were retraced twenty-six years later. To evaluate the effects of a variety of life experiences, criminal records were collected through the courts and the FBI.

Subjects, all of whom are African Americans, lived in a single urban community in the city of Chicago when they were in first grade. In 1966, Woodlawn was a black neighborhood on the south side of Chicago. From 1955 to 1966, the black proportion of the population in Woodlawn had risen from 40 percent to close to 100 percent. Overcrowded, run-down, and containing massive unemployment, in 1966, Woodlawn ranked among the four most impoverished neighborhoods (Kellam, Simon, and Ensminger, 1983).

At the height of the civil rights movement, Woodlawn community leaders agreed to cooperate with researchers to improve the lives of their children (Kellam, Branch, Agrawal, and Ensminger, 1975). Children in first grades throughout the community participated. The inclusiveness of the study permits analyses to compare blacks who became violent with those who did not.

The Setting

Not unlike other cities, Chicago has a long history of racial discrimination and white violence against blacks. Before the Civil War, free blacks were not permitted to vote and found widespread segregation in the schools, public transport, and the theaters of Chicago (Drake and Cayton, 1945/1962). Although blacks were hired as strikebreakers in the Chicago stockyards during 1904 and 1905, they were fired when the strikes ended (Spear, 1967; Trotter, 1993).

African Americans, who lived in a majority of the 431 census tracts of the city during the first decade of the twentieth century, were forced to leave their homes by white Chicagoans who did not want to have blacks in their neighborhoods. "In the spring of 1919," wrote Spear, "the bombing of Negro homes and assaults on Negroes in the streets and parks became almost everyday occurrences" (1967: 212). President Wilson, acknowledging the disappointment faced by Negro soldiers unable to find employment after defending their country, clearly held whites responsible as aggressors (Quarles, 1964: 193).

Between 1919 and 1948, restrictive covenants, described in a local newspaper as "a marvelous delicately woven chain of armor" against the infusion of blacks into neighborhoods designated for whites by whites (quoted in Drake and Cayton, 1945/1962: 79), kept blacks in segregated communities. Such restrictive covenants gained strong support from federal policies guaranteeing loans on the basis of nationally recognized standards of appraisal that used racial and ethnic characteristics of neighborhoods as criteria for assessments (Bartelt, 1993; Jackson, 1985; Quarles, 1964).

With their return from fighting in World War II, black soldiers expected to participate in the prosperity of their country as they had in its defense. Such was not the case. Again, promises for an open society were thwarted. Throughout Chicago, as black families attempted to move into newly purchased homes, white mobs destroyed their property and threatened their persons (Hirsch, 1983). Blacks experienced continued job and housing discrimination at every turn.

The civil rights movement of the 1960s brought renewed hope. The result, however, was almost a cruel joke. As government policies changed to force hiring of blacks, job opportunities for which they were qualified

disappeared. Attractive loans for new construction and federal tax policies encouraged migration of industries from the cities. The federal Interstate Highway Act of 1956 assured funds for interstate highways, contributing to the exodus of industries from cities to suburbs (Sugrue, 1993). Tax breaks allowing accelerated depreciation for new constructions encouraged industries to build inexpensive single-story structures surrounded by parking lots, on inexpensive land, outside cities (Adams et al., 1991; Robinson, 1993). Shopping malls and other services followed industries to the suburbs, carrying with them many of the jobs suitable for unskilled workers.

Federal tax money from the sale of gasoline was dedicated to highway construction, rather than to public transportation. Therefore, not only had it become increasingly difficult for blacks to find work in the cities but also the lack of public transportation made it difficult for them to reach the suburbs where they might have found employment.

After studying interracial contacts in sixty large cities in 1970 and 1980, Massey and Denton concluded: "Blacks may have won political freedom, and may have made substantial progress in attaining their economic goals, but they have yet not achieved the freedom to live wherever they want" (1987: 823). Furthermore, the concentration of poverty was higher in Chicago than in the other major cities and the trend toward increasing isolation was most extreme there as well (Massey and Eggers, 1990).

The history of racial discrimination, we hypothesized, has contributed to high rates of black violence. We reasoned that those who were most exposed to discrimination would be most likely to become violent. Of course, we do not believe that only the exposure to discrimination accounts for violence. Our hypothesis was that early disruptiveness provided a risk factor for violence among blacks as it does among whites (Faretra, 1981; Farrington, 1992; Loeber, 1982; Magnusson, Klinteberg, and Stattin, 1992; McCord, 1983, 1994; Pulkkinen, 1983). We also believed that education might tend to mitigate effects of living in an environment that often required vigilance and introduced frustrations – or that, at a minimum, high school graduation represented a willingness to adapt to social conventions (see Hawkins and Lishner, 1987, and Maguin and Loeber, 1996, for reviews; and Crutchfield, 1995, for a discussion). We hypothesized that, among disruptive children, those with little education who experienced racial discrimination would be most likely to become violent criminals.

Method and Measurement

Subjects. In 1966, Woodlawn had a population of 78,182, with a median family income of $5,508 (Kellam et al., 1975). Subjects for the study were all of the 605 boys and 637 girls who attending first grade in the nine public or three Catholic schools in the area.

Between 1993 and 1994, attempts to locate these 1,242 children included going to their neighborhoods, telephone calls, record searches, and a variety of special techniques that depended on close cooperation between the Woodlawn community and the research staff. These efforts resulted in the successful tracing of 1,037 people, 83 percent of the total. Among them, forty-three had died, three were incapacitated, and thirty-nine refused to be interviewed. Those interviewed represented males and females almost equally. The 456 interviewed males constituted 75 percent of the boys in first grade and the 497 females constituted 78 percent of the girls who were in first grade at the time the study began in 1966.[1]

Those who were interviewed differed little from those who were not interviewed on the measures from first grade indicating early disruptiveness or intelligence of the participants. The group who were interviewed differed from those not interviewed, however, in terms of school attendance, juvenile records, and adult criminality as recorded officially. Those interviewed were more likely to attend school regularly in first grade ($X^2_{(1)} = 4.17$, $p = .041$) and less likely to have an official juvenile record ($X^2_{(1)} = 5.17$, $p = .023$). By contrast, the people interviewed were more likely to have been arrested for an index crime ($X^2_{(1)} = 4.98$, $p = .026$). For the following analyses, we focused on the 951 cases with complete data regarding early behavior and self-reported information at age thirty-two.

Measures. a. *Disruptiveness.*[2] During the first year of the study, teachers indicated which children in their class had problems in social adaptation related to failure to accept authority, fighting too much, lying, breaking rules, being destructive to others, or disobedience (Kellam, Brown, Rubin, and Ensminger, 1983). The scale had high test-retest reliability over a six-week period, $N = 282$ and Gamma = .92 (Kellam et al., 1983: 32). Furthermore, the scale has shown predictive validity measured against self-reported delinquency ten years later (Ensminger, Kellam, and Rubin, 1983). We considered subjects identified as having problems in social adjustment listed above as "disruptive" in terms of their social adaptation early in childhood. Among the 454 males with complete interview information, 172 (38 percent) had been rated as disruptive when they were six years old. Among the 497 females with complete interview information, 122 (25 percent) had been rated as disruptive when they were six years old.

b. *High School Graduation.* During the interview, respondents were asked to identify the highest grade in elementary or high school they had finished. They also were asked if they had ever received a high school diploma or a

[1] Seventy-nine percent of the men and 80 percent of the women who were still alive had been interviewed.

[2] In other publications, this scale has been referred to as aggression.

GED certificate. Those who received a high school diploma or GED certificate or completed at least one year of post–high school education were considered to have been high school graduates. Among the 454 males with complete interview information, 362 (80 percent) were high school graduates. Among the 497 females with complete interview information, 425 (86 percent) were high school graduates.

c. *Victim of Racial Prejudices.* Respondents were asked in the interview whether, because of being black, they have ever been denied a job, had a problem getting housing, had a problem walking in a neighborhood, gotten into trouble with teachers, had a problem going somewhere for entertainment, or been hassled by the police. Those who responded affirmatively to any of these were considered to have been victims of racial discrimination. Among the 454 males with complete interview information, 363 (80 percent) reported having been victims of racial discrimination. Among the 497 females with complete interview information, 290 (58 percent) reported having been victims of racial discrimination.

d. *Violence.* In 1993, names of each of the subjects was checked through the Chicago courts and the Federal Bureau of Investigation for records of their having been arrested for robbery, assault, battery, threat, weapons charges, kidnapping, manslaughter, domestic violence, rape, murder, and attempted murder. Those who had official records for having committed any of these offenses were considered violent criminals.

Granting that many violent people are never arrested – and that some people are arrested when they are not guilty – many studies have shown that criminal records identify roughly the same people as those who confess to frequent or very serious crimes (Elliott and Ageton, 1980; Farrington, 1989; Gold, 1966; Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis, 1979). As have others, we found a higher prevalence of criminal violence among men than among women: among the 454 males and 497 females with completed interviews, 41 percent of the men and 11 percent of the women had been arrested for at least one of the listed violent crimes.

Our primary hypothesis, that the experience of unjust prejudice contributes to violence, would be tested by using information from three sources. The measure of disruptiveness depended on teachers' perceptions of the subjects when they were young children. The measures of educational achievement and unjust prejudice depended on the subjects' descriptions of their experiences. The measure of violence depended on police records.

Results

Measures of disruptiveness and of violence yielded information about those who had not been interviewed as well as those who had. As expected, males

Table 16.1. *Percent Arrested for a Violent Crime*

	Not disruptive	Disruptive
Female	($N = 480$) 7.1	($N = 157$) 15.9
Male	($N = 371$) 34.8	($N = 234$) 46.6

Table 16.2. *Percent Who Were Disruptive*

	Not exposed to discrimination	Exposed to discrimination
Female	($N = 207$) 23	($N = 290$) 26
Male	($N = 91$) 40	($N = 363$) 37

were more likely than females to have been rated as disruptive (39 percent versus 25 percent). Also as expected, a higher proportion of the males had been arrested for violent crimes (39 percent versus 9 percent).

Among both males and females, having been rated as disruptive at the age of six presaged subsequent arrest for violent crimes. Almost half (46.6 percent) of the disruptive males – compared with about a third (34.8 percent) of their nondisruptive counterparts – were arrested for violent crimes, $X^2_{(1)} = 8.387$, $p = .004$. Less than a fifth (15.9 percent) of the disruptive females – compared with less than a tenth (7.1 percent) of their nondisruptive classmates – were arrested for violent crimes, $X^2_{(1)} = 11.001$, $p = .001$ (see Table 16.1).

If being a victim of racial discrimination were a response to a disruptive orientation, one would expect disruptive children to report more victimization. Neither among males nor among females, however, were there indications that disruptive behavior presaged reporting being victims of racial prejudice (see Table 16.2).

We used logistic regression (CATMOD, SAS, 1985) to evaluate the hypothesis that exposure to racial discrimination contributes to violence. The model considered sex, whether the people had been disruptive when they were young children, whether they graduated from high school or received an equivalent degree, and whether they had been exposed to racial discrimination (see Table 16.3).

The Maximum-likelihood analysis of variance indicates that sex, disruptiveness in childhood, education, and exposure to racial discrimination contributed meaningfully to whether the children from Woodlawn became violent.

Table 16.3. *Maximum-likelihood Analysis of Variance*

Source	DF	Chi-Square	Prob
Intercept	1	81.80	0.0000
Sex	1	78.28	0.0000
Disruptiveness	1	10.34	0.0013
High school graduation	1	19.98	0.0000
Exposure to discrimination	1	10.39	0.0013
Likelihood Ratio	11	11.26	0.4220

Table 16.4. *Percent Arrested for a Violent Crime*

	Not exposed to discrimination	Exposed to discrimination
Female		
Not Disruptive		
High School Graduate	(N = 142) 4	(N = 189) 10
Not High School Graduate	(N = 18) 17	(N = 26) 12
Disruptive		
High School Graduate	(N = 36) 14	(N = 58) 16
Not High School Graduate	(N = 11) 18	(N = 17) 35
Male		
Not Disruptive		
High School Graduate	(N = 46) 26	(N = 191) 32
Not High School Graduate	(N = 9) 56	(N = 36) 67
Disruptive		
High School Graduate	(N = 22) 27	(N = 103) 50
Not High School Graduate	(N = 14) 29	(N = 33) 67

Table 16.4 shows the percent of those in each category of disruptiveness, education, and exposure to discrimination – separately for females and males – who were arrested for violent crimes.

In every category, males were more likely than females to become violent. In all eight comparisons, those with less education were more likely to become violent. The odds ratios for exposure to discrimination within sex, disruptiveness, and education categories range from 0.7 to 2.5 with a median of 1.55. The perception of having been exposed to racial discrimination failed to increase the probability of arrest for a violent crime only among females who had not been disruptive in first grade and who dropped out of school without receiving a high school diploma. In each of the other comparisons, exposure to racial discrimination increased the probability for violence.

Table 16.5. *Maximum-likelihood Analysis of Variance*

Source	DF	Chi-Square	Prob
Intercept	1	71.11	0.0000
Sex	1	77.52	0.0000
Disruptiveness	1	10.41	0.0013
High school graduation	1	20.48	0.0000
Crime victimization	1	0.88	0.3482
Exposure to discrimination	1	8.60	0.0034
Likelihood Ratio	26	23.99	0.5765

Summary and Discussion

This analysis has employed three types of measures, from three sources, to explore the hypothesis that, in addition to the more traditionally acknowledged sources of violence, exposure to racial discrimination is a risk factor.

Like others, we found that early signs of disruptiveness predicted violence. Like others, too, we found that lacking a high school education predicted violence. But, in addition, we found that exposure to racial discrimination increased the probability of violent crimes, particularly among black males.

It seemed plausible, however, that respondents reporting victimization in terms of racial discrimination were actually affected by a more general problem of victimization, one not specifically related to the prejudices of a powerful white society. To evaluate this possibility, we used a measure of crime victimization.

Respondents had been asked whether they had ever been purposely injured, had something stolen by threat or force, been swindled or conned, had something stolen from home or car, had a car stolen, or been forced to have sex. Affirmative answers to any of these questions resulted in classification as a crime victim.

The analysis indicates that being a victim of crimes could not account for the relation between being a victim of racial discrimination and violence (see Table 16.5).

We measured exposure to racial discrimination by noting whether respondents gave an affirmative answer to at least one of the questions about whether, because of being black, they have ever been denied a job, had a problem getting housing, had a problem walking in a neighborhood, gotten into trouble with teachers, had a problem going somewhere for entertainment, or been hassled by the police. Responses for both men and women ranged from 0 to 6. The mean for men, however, was 2.18 ($sd = 1.63$) affirmative answers as compared with a mean of 1.24 ($sd = 1.41$) for the women, $t_{(901.7)} = 9.473$, $p = .0001$.

It is unclear, of course, whether the recall of discrimination reflects differences in experience or differences in reporting. It is clear, however, that the perception of injustice is sometimes backed by solid evidence such as that produced by the careful examination of police deployment of dogs in Los Angeles (Campbell, Berk, and Fyfe, 1998).

This study provides reason to suppose that a risk factor to be addressed in serious attempts to reduce violence ought to include unjust discrimination. Indeed, the dismal history of justice for blacks in the criminal justice system led Russell to conclude: "American racism and criminal justice, which involved the systematic denial of basic human rights to Blacks for more than three hundred years, simply cannot be dismissed as irrelevant" (1998: 150).

The American dilemma of yesterday remains a serious problem for American society today. At least a part of that problem, as Gunnar Myrdal noted more than half a century ago, is "the opportunistic desire of the whites for ignorance. It is so much more comfortable to know as little as possible about Negroes, except that there are a lot of them in Harlem, the Black Belt, or whatever name is given to the segregated slum quarters where they live..." (1944: 48).

Echoing this theme, Darnell Hawkins suggested: "It may well be that reductions in levels of deprivation/inequality across ethnic/racial groups will not completely eliminate group differences in rates of involvement in crime. But public policies and programs aimed at such reductions are a social experiment worth pursuing" 1993: 114–15).

If we are to reduce violence, we would be wise to address the underlying problems that come from social policies. We ought to recognize that policies benefiting those who have political power may generate undesired responses by those who lack such power. As criminologists studying violence, we should expand our vision beyond individuals, families, and neighborhoods to take into account the laws, the habits, and the attitudes that form the fabric of out society.

Fair social policies are unlikely, by themselves, to eliminate violence. But absence of fair policies may make peace in a democracy impossible.