

Criminological Perspectives on Race and Crime

Third Edition

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Preface

As I noted in the first edition of this work, the idea for this book has its origins in Coramae Richey Mann's classic text, *Unequal Justice: A Question of Color* (1993). As a graduate student, I can recall reading Chapter 3, in which Mann reviewed theories that sought to explain offending and victimization trends among racial and ethnic minorities. After reading the chapter, I realized the importance of exploring the utility of criminological perspectives for contextualizing race, ethnicity, and crime. Thus, the first edition of this work represented the first attempt to provide book-length coverage of criminological theories that have been proffered to better understand race, ethnicity, and crime (for chapter length discussions of theories used to explain race and crime, see Gabbidon and Taylor Greene 2013, Chapter 3; Leiber 2008). To say the least, the response to the first two editions was overwhelming! In addition to strong sales and scholarly reviews, I received emails and had personal conversations with countless colleagues from around the world who were appreciative of the work. Consequently, on the heels of this positive feedback, Routledge decided to publish this third edition.

This new edition has been updated with cuts in some places and additions in others. Even so, I cannot claim the work is fully comprehensive. The sheer number of works published each year precludes the inclusion of every study that tests the perspectives profiled in this book. Nonetheless, the work provides, as reviewers of the first edition have noted (see Dawson-Edwards 2008; Henderson 2008; Knowles 2008), a starting point for those interested in examining how well criminological theory contextualizes racial and ethnic disparities.

The aims for the third edition remain the same as the first. First, this work is an attempt to produce a book that answers the question so many students and scholars ask—especially once they see data showing racial and ethnic disparities in crime and victimization (particularly as they relate to violence): “What explains such differences?” To answer this question, I have reexamined some of the

“classic” theoretical works to determine whether they addressed the issue of racial and ethnic disparities. In addition, the second edition continues my efforts to explore criminological perspectives advanced by racial and ethnic minorities. Finally, I continue to be concerned with determining which, if any, criminological perspectives have been most successful in contextualizing racial and ethnic disparities.

To accomplish these aims, I have reviewed numerous articles and books that have directly or indirectly focused on this issue. The book is divided into ten chapters. Many focus on traditional criminological theories; first I explain their basic tenets and then follow with a sampling of the scholarly literature devoted to exploring how well the perspective contextualizes crime among racial and ethnic minorities. Due to the nature of this book, the discussion of three well-known perspectives was excluded. Specifically, there are no chapters on learning theories, psychological perspectives, and rational choice theory. These perspectives were excluded because only a limited number of research studies have used these perspectives to contextualize racial disparities, although occasionally some studies integrated aspects of them. In such instances, the assorted theories included in the integrated perspectives are noted. Even with the absence of these staples, the book reviews an abundance of relevant studies on the remaining theoretical perspectives. Finally, in line with traditional theory books, each chapter notes some general weaknesses of each perspective.

The book begins with an introductory chapter that provides an overview of important concepts such as race, crime, and theory. In addition, the chapter closes by arguing that the earliest connections between race and crime can be found in religious doctrines. Chapter 2 examines biological perspectives on race and crime. Beginning with the well-known works of Lombroso, this chapter reviews the scholarly literature that has pointed to biology to explain racial disparities related to race and crime. Here, there is expanded coverage of the emerging biosocial approach. Chapter 3 is devoted to social disorganization and strain theories. Social disorganization theory has continued to be a staple among criminologists as

well as among those who are seeking to better understand the plight of racial and ethnic minorities residing in disorganized communities. The multiple forms of strain theory are also reviewed in Chapter 3. Over time, its original formulation by Robert Merton has popularized the theory for race and crime theorists. In addition, Robert Agnew's general strain theory has significantly renewed interest in the perspective. This interest has spurred an increasing body of literature on the role of race discrimination as a stressor. This chapter reviews this emerging literature.

Chapter 4 covers subcultural perspectives on race and crime. Following an analysis of the early scholarly literature in this area, the chapter examines the well-known thesis on the subculture of violence and the increasingly popular "code of the street" perspective. For both perspectives, the chapter assesses the utility of such theories for understanding inner-city crime and violence. Labeling theory is the focus of Chapter 5. While over the last few decades the theory has lost its luster within the discipline of criminology, the chapter argues that the perspective remains important because of the renewed interest in the impact of stereotypes on racial and ethnic minorities.

Among the most widely used perspectives to contextualize race and crime, conflict theory, which is the focus of Chapter 6, has a long history of showing the relevance of one's class and position in society to understanding crime and justice. The chapter reveals that race also has historically been a central emphasis of scholarly literature examining the plight of racial and ethnic minorities in America. Chapter 7 focuses on social control perspectives on race and crime. Almost from the very beginning, theorists attached to this perspective have declared its "generality"; thus, they argue that the theory is race neutral and can contextualize crime among all racial and ethnic groups (here and abroad). By reviewing a sampling of past and current scholarship in the area, this claim is questioned. Chapter 8 examines the colonial model, which is arguably one of the most neglected and under-researched criminological perspectives. This chapter introduces the basic tenets of the perspective and also examines the limited scholarly literature devoted to the exposition of the theory.

Chapter 9 has been revamped. In the two prior editions, the chapter solely focused on feminist perspectives. In this edition, I have added race-centered perspectives as well. The section on gender-based perspectives examines the “two waves” of the feminist movement and the development of scholarly literature on gender, race, and crime. Centered primarily on the black female experience the section examines how the theory can be useful to race and crime scholars. Similar to the approach used in feminist perspectives, race-centered perspectives seek to explain the criminal behavior of one specific racial group paying close attention to their unique experience in America. This portion of the chapter is devoted to the race-centered perspective presented in Unnever and Gabbidon’s (2011) book, *A Theory of African American Offending*.

Chapter 10 concludes the book by providing an overview of the numerous theoretical perspectives reviewed. No integrated race and crime perspective is presented because such an undertaking, as is evidenced by the contents of this book, would be futile. Racial and ethnic minorities are too diverse to have one theory. Even so, some theories are obviously more “generalizable” than others. The conclusion makes note of such perspectives.