

# Theoretical Perspectives on Race and Crime

## CHAPTER 3

*A wide variety of sociological, psychological, and biological theories have been proposed to explain the underlying causes of crime and its social, spatial, and temporal distribution. All of these theories are based on the assumptions that crime is accurately measured. But when variation in crime patterns and characteristics is partially attributable to unreliability in the measurement of crime, it is impossible to empirically validate the accuracy of competing criminological theories.*

—Mosher, Miethe, and Hart (2011, p. 205)

Considering the historical and contemporary crime and victimization data and statistics presented in Chapter 2, the logical next question is, What explains the crime patterns of each race? Based on this question, we have formulated two goals for this chapter. First, we want to provide readers with a rudimentary overview of **theory**. Second, we want to provide readers with a summary of the numerous theories that have relevance for explaining race and crime. In addition to this, where available, we also discuss the results of tests of the theories reviewed. Last, we also document some of the shortcomings of each theory.

Decades ago, criminology textbooks devoted a chapter to race and crime (Gabbidon & Taylor Greene, 2001). Today most texts cover the topic, but only in a cursory way. In general, because of the additional focus on race and crime, scholars have written more specialized books, such as this one, to more comprehensively cover the subject. But even in these cases, many authors devote little time to reviewing specific theories related to race and crime (Walker, Spohn, & DeLone, 2012). In her 1993 tome on race and crime, *Unequal Justice: A Question of Color*, Mann provided one of the most comprehensive reviews of theories that have been applied to race and crime. In recent years, Gabbidon's (2010) *Criminological Perspectives on Race and Crime* considerably updated and expanded Mann's

coverage and represents the first text solely devoted to examining how well criminological theories contextualize race and crime. We attempt to provide an overview of the vast number of major and lesser-known theories that have been applied to understanding racial patterns in crime and victimization. Before we begin, however, we review the fundamentals of theory, noting what theory is, distinguishing the various types of theories, and discussing the usefulness of having theory.

## ❖ What Is Theory?

According to Bohm and Vogel (2010), “A theory is an explanation” (p. 1). Some theory can be found in practically everything we do. When it comes to explaining crime, just about everyone has an opinion. All of these insights, however, might not qualify as *scientific* theory. Curran and Renzetti (2001) noted that a scientific theory is “a set of interconnected statements or propositions that explain how two or more events or factors are related to one another” (p. 2). Furthermore, scientific theories are usually logically sound and empirically testable (Curran & Renzetti, 2001).

Theories can be further categorized as macrotheories, microtheories, or bridging theories (Williams & McShane, 2010). Macrotheories focus on the social structure and are generally not concerned with individual behavior; conversely, microtheories look to explain crime by looking at groups, but in small numbers, or at the individual level (Williams & McShane, 2010). Bridging theories “tell us both *how social structure comes about and how people become criminals*” (Williams & McShane, 2010, p. 8). Many of the theories reviewed in this chapter fit some of these criteria, whereas others do not, but in our view, they nonetheless provide useful insights into race and crime. Thus, we discuss some nontraditional approaches that have not been folded into the mainstream of scientific criminological theory. It is important to note here that this chapter does not review every criminological theory. Our aim was to simply examine some of those that have been applied to the issue of race and crime. Others, such as rational choice theory, might also have some relevance, but they were left out because there is limited scholarship that makes the connection between the perspective and racial disparities in crime and justice.

Theories are valuable for a number of reasons. Curran and Renzetti (2001) provided an important summary of the usefulness of theory:

Theories help bring order to our lives because they expand our knowledge of the world around us and suggest systematic solutions to problems we repeatedly confront. Without the generalizable knowledge provided by theories, we would have to solve the same problems over and over again, largely through trial and error. Theory, therefore, rather than being just a set of abstract ideas, is quite practical. It is *usable knowledge*. (p. 2)

There are several paradigms within criminological theory that are reviewed here. We review biological approaches that look to physical features and/or genetic inheritance to explain crime; other theories that have their foundations in the American social structure, social processes, or one’s culture; and theories that have psychological foundations. Theorists have also sought to integrate some of these approaches (Agnew, 2004; Messner, Krohn, & Liska, 1989). As one might expect, many of these theories have been applied to explain race and crime. We begin with a review of biological explanations of crime.

## ❖ Biology, Race, and Crime

### Early Developments in Biological Explanations

The linking of biology and crime has its roots in Europe. Reid (1957) wrote that “[in] the year 1843 a Spanish physician Soler was [the] first to [mention] the concept of the born criminal” (p. 772). It was also in Europe that phrenology, the study of the external shape of the head, was first popularized (Vold, Bernard, & Snipes, 1998). Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *Descent of Man* (1871) were also influential in this era. Once the ideas became accepted, **Cesare Lombroso**, a doctor in the Italian Army in the 19th century and the so-called father of criminology, began studying army personnel from the southern portions of Italy where, in addition to being considered inferior beings, the citizens were thought to be “lazy, incapable, criminal, and barbaric” (Vold et al., 1998, pp. 42–43).

In Lombroso’s first major work, *Criminal Man* (1876/1911), he made clear the importance of race in explaining crime. He mentioned that some tribes in parts of India and Italy had high **crime rates** due to “ethnic causes” (p. 140). He added that “the frequency of homicide in Calabria, Sicily, and Sardinia is fundamentally due to African and Oriental elements” (p. 140). When Lombroso took on the task of explaining criminality among women, he again saw race as being an important contributor to crime. In his view, “Negro” women and “Red Indian” women were manly looking, which contributed to their criminality. His works were widely hailed and were translated into English, by which time the notion of biological determinism had already taken hold on American shores.

As in Lombroso’s work, in the United States, racial and ethnic groups were the focus of ideas that inferior “stocks” were polluting society. The most virulent attacks were reserved for African Americans. Books such as Charles Carroll’s (1900) *The Negro a Beast* spoke to the notion that African Americans were not human; they were more akin to apes. Relying heavily on biblical interpretations, Carroll sought to show why the White race was superior to the African American race. Around the same time, there was the thought that because of their genetic inferiority, African Americans would eventually die off (Hoffman, 1896). Although these notions were vigorously challenged here and abroad, such ideas dominated the late 19th- and early 20th-century literature and gave rise to the racist eugenics movement. However, as noted in Chapter 1, with increased immigration to the United States, these ideas were also applied to the unwelcome new arrivals (see Hooton, 1939a, 1939b). There were, however, continuing critics of this early work (Bonger, 1943; Merton & Ashley-Montagu, 1940).

### Recent Developments in Biological Explanations

#### *Crime and Human Nature*

Because of the persistent criticism of the biological perspective, support for the ideology lay dormant until 1985, when Wilson and Herrnstein resurrected it with their publication of *Crime and Human Nature*. In their chapter on race and crime, Wilson and Herrnstein pointed to constitutional factors that may contribute to the overrepresentation of Blacks in crime; such constitutional factors “merely make a person somewhat more likely to display certain behavior; it does not make it inevitable” (p. 468). Wilson and Herrnstein next suggested that Black males tend to be more mesomorphic (muscular) than White males;

in addition, because they have higher scores on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) than Whites, they are “less normal.” Another constitutional factor mentioned by the authors is low IQ. This connection is discussed further in the next section of the chapter.

As with their predecessors, Wilson and Herrnstein (1985) have had their critics. Most notably, there were concerns about the clarity of concepts and other measurement issues. Another concern related to their exclusive use of the theory to explain crime in the streets, not “crimes in the suites” (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2001, pp. 212–213). This obviously speaks to race and crime because it is clear that these conservative thinkers have more interest in explaining crimes associated with racial minorities than those overwhelmingly committed by middle- and upper-class Whites.

### ***Intelligence, Race, and Crime***

With the development and acceptance of intelligence tests, another linkage was developed: intelligence and crime (S. Gould, 1996). Much of the early literature suggested that criminals were of low intelligence or “feeble-minded.” This line of thinking was based on Richard Dugdale’s 19th-century Jukes study, which chronicled the genealogy of a family that had experienced generations of immorality and criminality.

Building on the Jukes study, in the early 1900s, Henry H. Goddard studied the lineage of a family in New Jersey. Goddard found that one side of the family produced primarily descendants of superior intelligence, whereas the other side of the family produced offspring that were considered immoral, criminal, and alcoholics. Goddard’s study was later found to be faulty because he had his assistant, Elizabeth S. Kite, conduct the research, and she failed to use an IQ test to determine feeble-mindedness. Instead, she made her assessments based on physical appearance (Knepper, 2001). In addition, it was found that Goddard had altered some of the pictures in his books to make study participants look diabolical. The notion of a link between intelligence and crime had existed prior to the aforementioned studies, but the development of the IQ test gave proponents of the idea a tool with which to test their beliefs.

Because of a critical review of numerous studies on IQ and crime by Edwin Sutherland, as well as Simon Tulchin’s (1939) classic *Intelligence and Crime*, intelligence-based theories disappeared from the criminological literature until the 1970s. At this time, two prominent criminologists, Hirschi and Hindelang (1977), conducted a review of the literature on intelligence and crime. On the issue of race, they wrote, “There can be no doubt that IQ is related to delinquency within race categories” (p. 575). From their research, they concluded that students with low intelligence had difficulty in school and, as a result, were more likely to engage in delinquency—ergo, given that Blacks have traditionally scored lower on IQ tests, they are likely to commit more crimes.

The debate lingered until Herrnstein and Murray (1994) published their controversial work, *The Bell Curve*. The book picked up where the debate left off. They suggested that low IQ contributed to a host of factors, including crime, poverty, illegitimacy, unemployment, welfare dependency, and others. How? Well, the authors present a few ways in which this connection materializes. First, they state that low IQ results in school failure, which tends to lead to crime. Second, they argue that low IQ leads to people being drawn to danger and having “an insensitivity to pain or social ostracism, and a host of derangements of various sorts” (p. 240). Combined, these factors, in their minds, were

precursors for a criminal career. Finally, the authors suggest that those with low IQs would have a hard time following ethical principles. According to their theory,

[people with low IQ might] find it harder to understand why robbing someone is wrong, find it harder to appreciate values of civil and cooperative social life, and are accordingly less inhibited from acting in ways that are hurtful to other people and to the community at large. (pp. 240–241)

Implicit in their thinking is that, because Blacks tend to have lower IQs, they are likely at greater risk for engaging in criminality.

Following the publication of *The Bell Curve*, the American Psychological Association convened a committee of scholars to assess the state of knowledge on IQ. The committee found that IQ does predict school performance and that there are unexplained racial differences in IQ. There were concerns expressed by the committee that IQ doesn't cover all dimensions of intelligence, such as creativity, wisdom, practical sense, and so on (Neisser et al., 1996). Critics of IQ tests continue to assert that if a lack of intelligence is associated with crime, then what explains the fact that persons with high IQs commit white-collar and political crime (M. Lanier & Henry, 1998)?

Long after the dust settled from the IQ debate inspired by *The Bell Curve*, biosocial criminology, with some of its lineage connected to the IQ and crime debate, emerged as a paradigm in the field. There are a few incarnations of the perspective. One incarnation is the r/K selection theory, which is based largely on evolutionary foundations. And recently, John Wright has integrated evolutionary and biosocial foundations to offer a perspective to explain offending among Blacks in particular. We review both theories below.

## Contemporary Biosocial Criminology and Race

### *r/K Selection Theory*

One of the more controversial criminological theories related to race in general and crime in particular is the r/K selection theory. Created by Harvard biologist E. O. Wilson to explain population growth and the decline in plants and animals, the theory has been adapted to humans by Rushton (1999), professor of psychology at Western Ontario University. This gene-based evolutionary theory links many of the differences among the races, including crime patterns, to migrations out of Africa.

Rushton (1999) agrees with the hypothesis that all humans came out of Africa. It is his contention, however, that there was a split of the population before humans left Africa and that this split is responsible for the current position of Blacks, Whites, and Asians. As he sees it, those who stayed in Africa (now referred to as Black people) were subjected to unpredictable droughts and deadly diseases, which caused them to die young. Those who migrated to Eurasia (now referred to as Whites and Asians) had to deal with other concerns, such as “gathering and storing food, providing shelter, making clothes, and raising children during the long winters” (p. 85). These tasks were more mentally demanding and, according to Rushton, required greater intelligence. Moreover, “They called for larger brains and slower growth rates. They permitted lower levels of sex hormones, resulting in less sexual potency and aggression and more family stability and longevity” (p. 85).

At the heart of the r/K selection theory are reproduction, climate, and intelligence. R-selected organisms are those that evolved to survive in less crowded, but unstable,

environments. K-selected organisms have the ability to compete successfully for limited resources in a stable environment. Because Africans were faced with early death, they often had to bear more children to maintain their population, which left them unable to provide significant care for their offspring. Conversely, those falling under the K-strategy, Whites and Asians (Rushton acknowledges only three races: Negroid, Caucasoid, and Mongoloid), reproduced less and generally spent more time caring for their offspring.

Rushton's theory relates to race and crime in that aggression, impulsive behavior, low self-control, low intelligence, and lack of rule following are all associated with criminals and, according to Rushton, those who fall under the r-strategy, namely, Black people. To support his approach, Rushton has conducted cross-national studies that looked at race and crime (see Rushton, 1995; Rushton & Whitney, 2002). Other scholars have also adopted some of Rushton's ideas in the areas of crime (Ellis, 1997; Ellis & Walsh, 1997, 2000; Walsh, 2004; Walsh & Ellis, 2003; J. Wright, 2008) and skin color and intelligence (Lynn, 2002).

As with all theories, there have been several notable criticisms of the r/K selection theory. First, Rushton generally ignores sociological factors. Most of his cross-national comparisons point strictly to numbers, without taking into account variables such as socioeconomic status, discrimination, and other important sociological variables. Second, in the 21st century, there are few "pure" races, especially in the United States, where, as noted in Chapter 1, White sexual aggression against Black females during the slave era produced countless mixed-race offspring. Therefore, the rigorous adherence to the Black-White-Asian split is problematic. Finally, if Rushton's theory were true, what would explain White aggression as early colonizers and their current involvement in wars and violence across the globe? In contrast to Rushton's theory, Bradley (1978) argued that, as a result of migration to colder regions, since the beginning of humanity, Whites have been the global aggressors.

### ***John Wright's Biosocial Thesis on Race and Offending***

In recent years, the connection between biology and behavior has emerged as a more accepted area of study in criminology (Cullen, 2009). Contemporary adherents to this theory point to the influence of biological and social factors in criminal behavior (Walsh & Beaver, 2009; Wright & Boisvert, 2009). In particular, the researchers have called for the consideration of neuroscience and genetics in criminological research. Among the assertions by biosocial theorists is that race does matter in biosocial criminology (Walsh, 2004). For example, John Wright (2009), drawing on evolutionary and biological considerations, argues that there is an "inconvenient truth" pertaining to the existence of race and the evolutionary basis of race-based patterns of behavior. While acknowledging the potential role of past societal injustices in America, he points to the persistent pattern of high crime in Black communities in America and abroad as further evidence that something biological is likely a contributing factor.

Moving away from structural and racism-based explanations, Wright (2009) offers two reasons for race and problem behavior that "are highly couched in an evolutionary understanding of race differences and, as such, overlap with one another" (p. 147). He turns first to executive functions, which are "a range of brain-based activities housed in the frontal, prefrontal, and orbital frontal cortex. These abilities are highly heritable and provide humans with their unique abilities to plan, organize their lives, and control their emotions" (p. 147). Self-control and IQ are two key components of executive functions. Wright's argument here

rests on the belief that those with low self-control will have difficulties throughout the life course, and this will be reflected in problems in education and employment. Although he believes these problems can befall all racial groups, he does add the caveat that “due to the distribution of low IQ and low self-control found in black populations, it is more often reflected in the lives of blacks” (p. 148). Wright next proffers that

collective social behavior is an evolved ability and set the stage for the beginning of complex societies we see today . . . it entails individuals making a choice to sacrifice or risk something they value personally for the overall good. (p. 149)

Wright (2009) believes that in neighborhoods where most residents exhibit collective social behavior and enforce basic social norms, crime will be minimized. In his view, this is simply not the case in Black neighborhoods. Specifically, Wright closes his perspective with the following:

In many black neighborhoods, but especially in inner cities and ghettos, there are too few individuals with the ability to act collectively and there are too many who violate basic social norms and laws. And the undeniable fact is that individual differences in IQ and other executive functions, which tend to cluster within neighborhoods by race, is intimately tied to the lack of collective social behavior, to the lack of social control . . . and to the violation of rudimentary norms of appropriate conduct. (p. 150)

Wright’s (2009) theory doesn’t explain within-race class differences. That is, if his theory is correct, then wouldn’t all Black neighborhoods—not just “many”—exhibit the same levels of social norm and law violation? In other words, if all Blacks of all classes suffer from “deficits in executive functions,” then it stands to reason that the same problems should be found among all groups in that population. If that is not the case, then the role of class is being underemphasized in favor of race. Furthermore, the lack of collective social behavior could be a product of cultural inclinations that are a product of past inaction on the part of criminal justice officials. As such, the observed unwillingness of Blacks to follow “rudimentary norms of appropriate conduct” might be simply an artifact of the longstanding “no snitch” cultural norm that is pervasive in many of the inner-city communities that appear to be the targets of Wright’s theory. Also, since Blacks reside in the most depressed areas of inner cities, it stands to reason that they might turn to violating norms of appropriate conduct to survive.

In large part, biosocial criminologists have relied on data from The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) to test ideas related to their suppositions. Though this stream of scholarship is fairly new, some findings have begun to emerge that partially support biosocial assertions regarding the intersection of race, gender, behavior, and alleles (Vaske, Beaver, Wright, Boisvert, & Schnupp, 2009; Vaske, Makarios, Boisvert, Beaver, & Wright, 2009). Notably, none of these findings support any of the evolutionary aspects of Rushton’s (1999) or Wright’s (2009) work. In addition, the authors have yet to show us how this work can be useful in reducing crime and averting future offending. In summary, many of the current biologically oriented theories either directly or indirectly point to some race and crime linkage. Nevertheless, for more than a century, opponents of such approaches have countered with alternative sociological perspectives, some of which are reviewed in the next section.

## ❖ Sociological Explanations

### Early Sociological Explanations

Sociological explanations for crime in general have existed for nearly two centuries. Beginning with the early work of the cartographic school, led by Adolphe Quetelet, who some have said produced the first scientific work on crime (see Quetelet, 1833/1984), this approach looked to sociological factors to explain criminality (age, social class, poverty, education level, etc.). Quetelet was likely among the first to aver some relationship between race and crime when he divided French citizens into distinct races and offered explanations why each group was engaged in crime (Mosher et al., 2011). Several decades after the publication of Quetelet's work, as noted earlier, biological notions related to crime were being espoused in America. Numerous American scholars, however, challenged the biological approach using sociological analyses of crime problems. With the development of the first sociology department at the University of Chicago in 1892, and other such programs at universities across the United States, scholars saw this new discipline and a sociological approach as a means to solve some of the pressing issues particularly plaguing overcrowded northern cities.

In the late 1890s, Philadelphia was one of those cities looking for answers to its concerns regarding the burgeoning African American population. At the time, city officials sought out **W. E. B. Du Bois** to conduct a study of Philadelphia's notorious Seventh Ward. Du Bois (1899/1996) conducted a comprehensive review of the ward, outlining the conditions in the area and also pointing to several possible explanations for crime among African Americans. One of his explanations was as follows:

Crime is a phenomenon of organized social life, and is the open rebellion of an individual against his social environment. Naturally then, if men are suddenly transported from one environment to another; the result is lack of harmony with the new conditions; lack of harmony with the new physical surroundings leading to disease and death or modification of physique; lack of harmony with social surroundings leading to crime. (p. 235)

He felt that the mass migration from the South to the North produced problems of adjustment for African Americans, who were previously familiar only with Southern life.

Du Bois's ideas were in line with the concept of **social disorganization**. Like Quetelet earlier, to explain criminality in the Seventh Ward, Du Bois pointed to issues related to age, unemployment, and poverty. Du Bois, however, added the sociological variable of discrimination, noting that Blacks were arrested for less cause than Whites, served longer sentences for similar crimes, and were subject to employment discrimination (Gabbidon, 2007; Taylor Greene & Gabbidon, 2000). Other early studies would echo similar sentiments on crime in the African American community (Grimke, 1915; K. Miller, 1908/1969; R. Wright, 1912/1969). Recently, Unnever and Gabbidon (2011) have offered an expansion of Du Bois's ideas and argued for the consideration of **racial discrimination** as a potential contributor to African American offending.

### Social Disorganization

Northern cities, such as Chicago, were also experiencing the same social problems that Du Bois found in Philadelphia as a result of population booms caused by the mass immigration

by racial and ethnic groups outlined in Chapter 1. With unparalleled philanthropic support from numerous foundations (Blumer, 1984), by the 1920s, the University of Chicago had put together a formidable cadre of scholars to investigate the social ills plaguing the city. Together, these scholars combined their ideas to formulate what is now known as the “Chicago School.”

The leaders of the school were Robert Park and Ernest Burgess. They viewed the city as an environment that functioned much like other ecological environments: It was formed based on the principles of invasion, dominance, and succession. In short, one group moves in, battles the previous group until they dominate the area, after which, to continue the cycle, it is likely that another group will invade the area and pursue dominance. This ecological approach was believed to explain the conflict that occurred in emerging cities across the United States. Moreover, it was Burgess (1925) who had earlier conducted a study that produced the notion that towns and cities “expand radially from its central business district—on the map” (p. 50). From this, he and Park produced their now famous map of Chicago. The map divided the city into several concentric circles or “zones,” as described by Park and Burgess. Of the numerous zones, Zone 2 is of most significance to the theory. This area was referred to as “the capital zone in transition” or “the slums,” which, according to the theory, is where most of the crime should take place. As predicted by the theory, the farther one moves away from this zone, the more crime decreases (Shaw & McKay, 1942/1969).

In the tradition of Quetelet’s earlier work, two researchers, Clifford Shaw and Henry D. McKay, who worked at the University of Chicago’s Institute for Juvenile Research but were not faculty members, tested the theory by examining juvenile delinquency. To do so, they made use of 20 different types of maps. Each of the maps charted out different characteristics of Chicago’s residents and delinquent youth. For example, there were maps that outlined neighborhood characteristics such as population fluctuations, percentage of families on welfare, monthly rents, percentage of foreign-born and Negro residents, and distribution of male delinquents (Shaw & McKay, 1942/1969). Their results were striking. As postulated by the theory, over several decades and with several changes in ethnic groups, Zone 2 had the most delinquency. Describing this dramatic finding, Shaw and McKay (1942/1969) wrote,

the proportions of Germans, Irish, English-Scotch, and Scandinavians in the foreign-born population in 8 inner-city areas underwent, between 1884 and 1930, a decided decline (90.1 to 12.2 per cent); while the proportion of Italians, Poles, and Slavs increased . . . the 8 areas maintained, throughout these decades, approximately the same rates of delinquents relative to other areas. (pp. 150–151)

In the end, the scholars concluded that the crime in these areas was caused by social disorganization. Social disorganization refers to areas characterized by the following conditions: (a) fluctuating populations, (b) significant numbers of families on welfare, (c) families renting, (d) several ethnic groups in one area, (e) high truancy rates, (f) high infant mortality rates, (g) high levels of unemployment, (h) large numbers of condemned buildings, and (i) a higher percentage of foreign-born and Negro heads of families (Sampson & Groves, 1989; Shaw & McKay, 1942/1969).

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, a 1923 graduate of the “Chicago School,” Norman Hayner, utilized social disorganization theory while investigating crime in diverse communities populated by Whites, Asian Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans (Hayner, 1933, 1938, 1942). Under the “Oriental crime” heading, Hayner (1938) compared the situation of the Japanese, Chinese, and Filipinos in the Pacific Northwest. Overall, he

noted that each of the groups had little criminality in comparison with Whites. However, he decided to look at variations among the three Asian American populations. According to Hayner, the Japanese had low rates of crime and delinquency because of their closely integrated families, the efficiency and organization of the community, and the lack of acquaintance with American ways. The closely integrated families were characteristic of their home countries. The organization of the community reflected the concern of the community for their youth. At that time, they maintained language schools to keep youngsters busy after their regular school days. Community attitudes concerning crime were so strong that, according to Hayner's research, those caught engaging in crime would likely commit suicide before facing the community. Finally, some Japanese steered their youth away from American traditions because there was the belief that increasing Americanization would lead to increasing levels of crime and delinquency. In general, both of the other two groups had more crime than the Japanese, which was explained as a result of their either becoming too Americanized or having a gender imbalance (significantly more males than females), often due to earlier government immigration restrictions.

Turning to Native Americans, Hayner (1942) examined their conditions on three reservations in the Pacific Northwest. He sought to determine why these Native Americans had become engaged in more crime. The first of his explanations pointed to the increased mixing between Whites and Native Americans. In his words, "As the Indian becomes more like the White biologically and, as a result, associates more freely with him, his criminal behavior tends to approximate more closely the White patterns" (p. 605). Hayner also pointed to the social disorganization that occurred among Native Americans because of social isolation, concerns about sustenance, and, in other situations, "some Indians, pauperized by too much money [from successful suits against the government] or unwisely administered relief lack the incentive to work; others, including many boarding-school graduates, want to work but lack the opportunity" (p. 613).

### ***Contemporary Social Disorganization Theory***

Since these early articles, scholars have continued to explore the viability of social disorganization to explain crime, particularly in urban areas. Sampson (1987) found a connection between Black male joblessness and economic deprivation and violent crime. This connection was an indirect one mediated by family disruption (i.e., female-headed households). Another important article by Sampson and Groves (1989) expanded the theory and found considerable support for it. Building on this prior research and the important research of William Julius Wilson (1987), Sampson and Wilson (1995) posited a theory targeted at explaining race and crime with structural and cultural constructs:

[Our] basic thesis is that macro social patterns of residential 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 hence the control of crime. This thesis is grounded in what is actually an old idea in criminology that has been overlooked in the race and crime debate—the importance of communities. (p. 38)

The theory, which is referred to as the "racial invariance thesis," draws heavily on two of W. Wilson's (1987) concepts from *The Truly Disadvantaged*. The first, concentration effects, speaks to the fact that Whites and Blacks live in considerably different areas. In his research,

Wilson found that many African Americans live in areas where there are significant concentrations of poverty. Once neighborhoods reach this point, working-class and middle-class African Americans abandon them.

This removes important **social buffers** (role models) who show neighborhood kids that there are successful people who go to work, day in and day out. When all the “social buffers” have abandoned a community, Wilson (1987) suggested that the remaining individuals are in a state of *social isolation*, which he defined as “the lack of contact or of sustained interaction with individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society” (p. 60). The notion of social isolation adds the cultural component to the theory. By not being exposed to mainstream individuals and institutions, socially isolated people tend to develop their own norms within these isolated areas. In a series of articles, Lauren Krivo and Ruth Peterson of Ohio State University have tested some of the ideas of Wilson (1987) and Sampson and Wilson (1995) and have found considerable support for them (see Krivo & Peterson, 1996, 2000; Peterson & Krivo, 1993, 2005, 2010). Returning to the perspective, Sampson and Bean (2006) have called for a revision of the theory to account for concentrated immigration and culture, both of which have profound implications for communities (see Box 3.1).

### BOX 3.1

#### “Culture of Poverty” Makes a Comeback

By Patricia Cohen

For more than 40 years, social scientists investigating the causes of poverty have tended to treat cultural explanations like Lord Voldemort: That Which Must Not Be Named.

The reticence was a legacy of the ugly battles that erupted after Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then an assistant labor secretary in the Johnson administration, introduced the idea of a “culture of poverty” to the public in a startling 1965 report. Although Moynihan didn’t coin the phrase (that distinction belongs to the anthropologist Oscar Lewis), his description of the urban black family as caught in an inescapable “tangle of pathology” of unmarried mothers and welfare dependency was seen as attributing self-perpetuating moral deficiencies to black people, as if blaming them for their own misfortune.

Moynihan’s analysis never lost its appeal to conservative thinkers, whose arguments ultimately succeeded when President Bill Clinton signed a bill in 1996 “ending welfare as we know it.” But in the overwhelmingly liberal ranks of academic sociology and anthropology the word “culture” became a live grenade, and the idea that attitudes and behavior patterns kept people poor was shunned.

Now, after decades of silence, these scholars are speaking openly about you-know-what, conceding that culture and persistent poverty are enmeshed.

“We’ve finally reached the stage where people aren’t afraid of being politically incorrect,” said Douglas S. Massey, a sociologist at Princeton who has argued that Moynihan was unfairly maligned.

The old debate has shaped the new. Last month Princeton and the Brookings Institution released a collection of papers on unmarried parents, a subject, it noted, that became off-limits after the Moynihan report. At the recent annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, attendees discussed the resurgence of scholarship on culture. And in Washington last spring, social scientists participated in a Congressional briefing on culture and poverty linked to a special issue of *The Annals*, the journal of the American Academy of Political and Social Science.

“Culture is back on the poverty research agenda,” the introduction declares, acknowledging that it should never have been removed.

The topic has generated interest on Capitol Hill because so much of the research intersects with policy debates. Views of the cultural roots of poverty “play important roles in shaping how lawmakers choose to address poverty issues,” Representative Lynn Woolsey, Democrat of California, noted at the briefing.

This surge of academic research also comes as the percentage of Americans living in poverty hit a 15-year high: one in seven, or 44 million.

With these studies come many new and varied definitions of culture, but they all differ from the ‘60s-era model in these crucial respects: Today, social scientists are rejecting the notion of a monolithic and unchanging culture of poverty. And they attribute destructive attitudes and behavior not to inherent moral character but to sustained racism and isolation.

To Robert J. Sampson, a sociologist at Harvard, culture is best understood as “shared understandings.”

“I study inequality, and the dominant focus is on structures of poverty,” he said. But he added that the reason a neighborhood turns into a “poverty trap” is also related to a common perception of the way people in a community act and think. When people see graffiti and garbage, do they find it acceptable or see serious disorder? Do they respect the legal system or have a high level of “moral cynicism,” believing that “laws were made to be broken”?

As part of a large research project in Chicago, Professor Sampson walked through different neighborhoods this summer, dropping stamped, addressed envelopes to see how many people would pick up an apparently lost letter and mail it, a sign that looking out for others is part of the community’s culture.

In some neighborhoods, like Grand Boulevard, where the notorious Robert Taylor public housing projects once stood, almost no envelopes were mailed; in others researchers received more than half of the letters back. Income levels did not necessarily explain the difference, Professor Sampson said, but rather the community’s cultural norms, the levels of moral cynicism and disorder.

The shared perception of a neighborhood—is it on the rise or stagnant?—does a better job of predicting a community’s future than the actual level of poverty, he said.

William Julius Wilson, whose pioneering work boldly confronted ghetto life while focusing on economic explanations for persistent poverty, defines culture as the way “individuals in a community develop an understanding of how the world works and make decisions based on that understanding.”

For some young black men, Professor Wilson, a Harvard sociologist, said, the world works like this: “If you don’t develop a tough demeanor, you won’t survive. If you have access to weapons, you get them, and if you get into a fight, you have to use them.”

### Top of Form

Seeking to recapture the topic from economists, sociologists have ventured into poor neighborhoods to delve deeper into the attitudes of residents. Their results have challenged some common assumptions, like the belief that poor mothers remain single because they don’t value marriage.

In Philadelphia, for example, low-income mothers told the sociologists Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas that they thought marriage was profoundly important, even sacred, but doubted that their partners were “marriage material.” Their results have prompted some lawmakers and poverty experts to conclude that programs that promote marriage without changing economic and social conditions are unlikely to work.

Mario Luis Small, a sociologist at the University of Chicago and an editor of *The Annals’* special issue, tried to figure out why some New York City mothers with children in day care developed networks of support while others did not. As he explained in his 2009 book, *Unanticipated Gains*, the answer did not depend on income or ethnicity, but rather the rules of the day-care institution. Centers that held frequent field trips, organized parents’ associations and had pick-up and drop-off procedures created more opportunities for parents to connect.

Younger academics like Professor Small, 35, attributed the upswing in cultural explanations to a “new generation of scholars without the baggage of that debate.”

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Scholars like Professor Wilson, 74, who have tilled the field much longer, mentioned the development of more sophisticated data and analytical tools. He said he felt compelled to look more closely at culture after the publication of Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein's controversial 1994 book, *The Bell Curve*, which attributed African-Americans' lower I.Q. scores to genetics.

The authors claimed to have taken family background into account, Professor Wilson said, but "they had not captured the cumulative effects of living in poor, racially segregated neighborhoods."

He added, "I realized we needed a comprehensive measure of the environment, that we must consider structural *and* cultural forces."

He mentioned a study by Professor Sampson, 54, that found that growing up in areas where violence limits socializing outside the family and where parents haven't attended college stunts verbal ability, lowering I.Q. scores by as much as six points, the equivalent of missing more than a year in school.

Changes outside campuses have made conversation about the cultural roots of poverty easier than it was in the '60s. Divorce, living together without marrying, and single motherhood are now commonplace. At the same time prominent African-Americans have begun to speak out on the subject. In 2004 the comedian Bill Cosby made headlines when he criticized poor blacks for "not parenting" and dropping out of school. President Obama, who was abandoned by his father, has repeatedly talked about "responsible fatherhood."

Conservatives also deserve credit, said Kay S. Hymowitz, a fellow at the conservative Manhattan Institute, for their sustained focus on family values and marriage even when cultural explanations were disparaged.

Still, worries about blaming the victim persist. Policy makers and the public still tend to view poverty through one of two competing lenses, Michèle Lamont, another editor of the special issue of *The Annals*, said: "Are the poor poor because they are lazy, or are the poor poor because they are a victim of the markets?"

So even now some sociologists avoid words like "values" and "morals" or reject the idea that, as *The Annals* put it, "a group's culture is more or less coherent." Watered-down definitions of culture, Ms. Hymowitz complained, reduce some of the new work to "sociological pablum."

"If anthropologists had come away from doing field work in New Guinea concluding 'everyone's different,' but sometimes people help each other out," she wrote in an e-mail, "there would be no field of anthropology—and no word *culture* for cultural sociologists to bend to their will."

Fuzzy definitions or not, culture is back. This prompted mock surprise from Rep. Woolsey at last spring's Congressional briefing: "What a concept. Values, norms, beliefs play very important roles in the way people meet the challenges of poverty."

How much do you think culture matters in society today?

Scholars have also applied social disorganization theory to diverse groups such as Native Americans and found partial or full support for the theory (Bachman, 1991; Lanier & Huff-Corzine, 2006). Besides Native Americans, Martinez (2003) and Lee and Martinez (2002) have found support for aspects of the perspective in Latino communities. Velez (2006) argues that there is a lower level of social disorganization in Latino communities. This speaks to the so-called "Latino Paradox" that finds that even though Latinos are exposed to the same social disadvantages as other groups, they tend not to exhibit the extreme adverse effects (e.g., extreme levels of crime). Velez outlines four characteristics for this difference. First, she notes that there are lower levels of concentrated disadvantage in such communities. This includes things such as male joblessness and female-headed households. Moreover, in contrast to conventional wisdom, she argues that the presence of more immigrants "provide protective mechanisms against crime" (p. 92). This supposition contradicts the longstanding

immigration and crime perception held by the public (Higgins, Gabbidon, & Martin, 2010). And recent research has supported the notion that immigration does not increase crime but has actually contributed to a reduction of some crimes in Latino communities (Feldmeyer, 2009; Stowell, Messner, McGeever, & Raffalovich, 2009; Velez, 2009). Third, she indicates that Latino communities have better relations with economic officials, the police, and local politicians, all of whom are key “players” in all communities. Finally, she argues that Latinos tend to benefit from living in communities that are close to advantaged Whites. She provides data from Chicago that support her assertions (Velez, 2006).

### ***Mass Incarceration and Social Disorganization***

In the late 1990s, Dina Rose and Todd Clear (1998) articulated an expansion of social disorganization theory. Contrary to the punitive approach being heralded at the time, Rose and Clear posited that mass incarceration actually exacerbated social disorganization in the most depressed communities. According to their thesis, this happens for three reasons. First, it impacts the socioeconomic nature of the community. Second, because mass incarceration results in people leaving for prison and then being released from prison, it increases the mobility in certain communities. Finally, mass incarceration increases the heterogeneity of communities. This occurs because offenders who spend time in correctional institutions learn new antisocial behaviors that they bring back to their communities (for a recent articulation of the perspective, see Clear, 2007; see also Western, 2006; Western & Wildeman, 2009). Using data from Florida, they found support for their theory (Clear, Rose, & Ryder, 2001; Clear, Rose, Waring, & Scully, 2003).

## **❖ Collective Efficacy**

In the 1990s, Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997) sought to determine why urban communities differ in their levels of crime. From their research, they concluded that crime was related to the amount of **collective efficacy** found in a particular community. They defined collective efficacy as “social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good” (p. 918). In short, in the communities where residents do not retreat behind their locked doors and actively look out for one another, there is a diminished likelihood that they will have many of the ills found in other urban areas. Since their work, other scholars have found some support for collective efficacy among African Americans (Simons, Gordon Simons, Burt, Brody, & Cutrona, 2005). Other research has suggested that the impact of collective efficacy is not as significant in communities as more official strategies such as community policing (Xu, Fiedler, & Flaming, 2005).

Both social disorganization and collective efficacy theories generally speak to high-crime urban areas. Because not all African Americans live in high-crime urban areas, some have wondered whether those in middle-class areas also encounter higher crime rates than those in similarly situated White areas. To investigate this question, Pattillo (1998) conducted participant observation and 28 in-depth interviews in one such area of Chicago. She found that “middle class Black areas tend to be nestled between areas that are less economically stable and have higher crime rates” (p. 751). In addition, many of the Black residents who make it to middle-class areas are “unstable” middle-class residents and struggle to maintain their status. In some instances, they cross over the line into crime to do so. Therefore, Pattillo

also found that such residents were “given a degree of latitude to operate in the neighborhood” (p. 770). Based on the premise of social organization, which, along with being goal oriented, “stresses the importance of kin and neighborly ties for the social control of crime and disorder,” Pattillo showed how these communities maintain order while allowing “the integration of licit and illicit networks both working toward common goals, with variant strategies” (p. 770). Recent research by Hassett-Walker (2009, 2010) has also investigated crime among the Black middle class and found that structural factors were not as significant a contributor to middle-class delinquency as peer influence.

There is both support for and persistent criticisms of social disorganization theory in the research literature. The most often-cited weakness of the social disorganization perspective is the so-called ecological fallacy. This refers to the fact that the perspective is usually tested at the aggregate level, but researchers still use the data to make assertions about individuals. The theory also does not explain how certain groups, such as Asians and Jewish communities, maintained low levels of crime and delinquency, although they lived in areas that might be categorized as socially disorganized (Lanier & Henry, 1998). Moreover, although there were high levels of delinquency in the study areas, the theory does not explain why, in general, most juveniles in these areas do not become delinquent.

## ❖ Culture Conflict Theory

Originally formulated by criminologist Thorsten Sellin in the late 1930s, culture conflict theory, according to Williams and McShane (2010), is heavily based on the work of Chicago School graduates Louis Wirth and Edwin Sutherland (who collaborated with Sellin). A central idea of the theory relates to the rules or norms within a culture. Sellin (1938) suggested that, over a period of time, certain behavior becomes accepted within a culture, so that “the violation of [it] arouses a group reaction. These rules or norms may be called *conduct norms*” (p. 28).

Sellin’s (1938) theory states that all societies have conduct norms, which vary from one culture to the next and could result in violations in one society not being a violation of conduct norms in another. Within each society, those in power can control the definitions of conduct norms and hence determine what behaviors become crimes. This leads to the potential for culture conflict. In general, Sellin pointed to three ways that conflicts between various cultural codes arise: (a) when the codes clash on the border of contiguous cultural areas; (b) when, as may be the case with legal norms, the law of one cultural group is extended to cover the territory of another; or (c) when members of one cultural group migrate to another.

Summarizing these ideas, Sellin (1938) formulated two types of culture conflicts. Regarding the first type, called *primary conflicts*, he noted,

[If] the immigrant’s conduct norms are different from those of the American community and if these differences are not due to his economic status, but to his *cultural origin*, then we speak of a conflict of norms drawn from different cultural systems or areas. Such conflicts may be regarded as *primary* culture conflicts. (p. 104)

Sellin (1938) described *secondary conflicts* as “conflicts of norms which grow out of the process of social differentiation which characterize the evolution of our own culture”

(p. 105). As an example of the applicability of his perspective, Sellin used Native Americans as an illustrative population:

We need only to recall the effect on the American Indian of the culture conflict induced by our policy of acculturation by guile and force. In this instance, it was not merely contact with the White man's culture, his religion, his business methods, and his liquor, which weakened tribal mores. In addition, the Indian became subject to the White man's law and this brought conflicts as well, as has always been the case when legal norms have been imposed upon a group previously ignorant of them. (p. 64)

Although the theory clearly has relevance for Native Americans and the various ethnic immigrants who were arriving in America during the early part of the 20th century, in recent years, it has not received much attention. One exception to this trend was a study by N. Lee (1995) that studied culture conflict and crime in Alaskan villages. Based on comparative data on eight Yupiit Nation villages and eight non-Yupiit villages, Lee explored the following proposition: “that colonization (invasion, dominance, and succession) results in conflict (disorder/crime) related to the imposition of laws (social control) associated with the dominant group” (p. 181). Essentially, Lee wanted to find out whether crime was less prevalent in villages that maintained their traditional values. Moreover, Lee was interested in finding out whether villages that enforce alcohol laws have a higher or lower number of alcohol-related incidents. On the first point, Lee found that “the rates for felonies and misdemeanors are lower in Nation villages with the exception of liquor violation, drunk in public, minor in possession, and protective custody” (p. 184). On the second point, the results were mixed; however, one thing was clear: The formal laws were “not keep[ing] the villagers from drinking or acting out while drunk” (p. 186). Overall, the study found support for culture conflict theory. Even with these positive results, criminologists have generally neglected the theory; they have, however, borrowed some ideas from the theory and formulated related theories, such as strain theory, subcultural theory, and conflict theory. We look at these theories in the following sections.

## ❖ Strain/Anomie Theory

In the same year as the publication of Sellin's work on culture conflict, another important theory was presented. The 1938 publication of Robert K. Merton's “Social Structure and Anomie” produced what is likely one of the most cited theories in criminology: strain or anomie theory. The theory was influenced by the classic work of Emile Durkheim, who first made use of the word *anomie* in a criminological sense. According to Akers (2000), “Durkheim (1951[1897]) used the term anomie to refer to a state of normlessness or lack of social regulation in modern society as one condition that promotes higher rates of suicide” (p. 143). Merton's (1938) work showed that in every society, there are “culturally defined goals, purposes, and interest” (p. 672). He also suggested that there are generally “acceptable modes of achieving these goals” (p. 673). Turning to American society, Merton recognized that “the extreme emphasis upon the accumulation of wealth as a symbol of success in our own society mitigates against the completely effective control of the institutionally regulated modes of acquiring a fortune” (p. 675). In short, in pursuit of the “American Dream,” some

people turn to alternative means to secure this cultural goal. When applying the theory to race and crime, Merton recognized the special case of African Americans:

Certain elements of the Negro population have assimilated the dominant caste's values of pecuniary success and advancement, but they also recognize that social ascent is at present restricted to their own caste almost exclusively. The pressures upon the Negro which would otherwise derive from the structural inconsistencies we have noticed are hence not identical to those upon lower class Whites. (p. 680)

Merton (1938) understood that the strain experienced by African Americans was unlike any other in American society. Basically, no matter how much they sought to achieve the “American dream,” they could never “legitimately” reach the status of Whites, so they maintained lower aspirations and were resigned to achieving a lower level of success and advancement. Such a situation likely contributed to a strain that resulted in some African Americans turning to crime.

Epps (1967) tested some of Merton's ideas regarding race and crime. Using a racially diverse sample (159 Whites, 111 African Americans, and 76 Asian Americans) of high school juniors from Seattle, Washington, Epps tested several hypotheses that looked at whether there were differences in delinquency and aspirations by race and class. He did find some differences between the occupational expectations and aspirations and the educational aspirations of the students. In all cases, Whites and Asian Americans had higher aspirations and expectations than did African Americans. No support, however, was found for any of the other hypotheses.

More than 30 years after Epps's research, Cernkovich, Giordano, and Rudolph (2000) tested whether African Americans still subscribe to the American Dream and whether this is related to their involvement in criminal behavior. Making use of longitudinal data involving African Americans and Whites from private households and an institutional sample (both from Toledo, Ohio), the authors found

that African Americans maintain a very strong commitment to the American dream. Blacks report higher levels of commitment to economic success goals than do their White counterparts and indicate that they are prepared to work harder and sacrifice more to realize them. Even though the young Black adults in our study report low incomes and are more likely to be unemployed than are Whites, they continue to maintain a very strong commitment to the American dream. (pp. 158–159)

Their study, which also partially tested social control theory, found support for **strain theory**, but only in the case of Whites. That is, many of the variables used to test strain theory “were significant correlates of crime among . . . Whites in our sample but not among African Americans” (Cernkovich et al., 2000, p. 161), a finding that the authors could not explain, but curiously implied that the African American participants might not have been forthright with their answers—something that likely applied to all participants. McCluskey (2002) applied strain theory to Latinos and found that the theory was a weak predictor of delinquency. As a result, she argued for a culturally specific model that supports the notion that criminological research pertaining to Latinos needs to consider the unique nuances of their experience.

## Limitations of Strain/Anomie Theory

Most of the criticisms of strain theory have been leveled at Merton's original formulation of the theory. Bohm (2001), for example, noted that anomie theories have a middle-class bias; they presume that lower class individuals commit crimes in an effort to reach middle-class status. As was seen by some of the research reviewed, this is not always the case. Another persistent criticism is that the theories do not explain white-collar and government crimes. Given that people at this level have already achieved middle-class status, why, then, do they engage in crime? Even in its various incarnations, the theory is generally silent on this issue.

Bohm (2001) also suggested that the theory suffers from overprediction. As he put it, "If strain is caused by the inability to achieve the American dream and is as widespread as Merton implies, then there ought to be much more crime than occurs" (p. 80). Because of the shortcomings of strain/anomie theory, Agnew (1992, 2006) developed a revised version of the theory.

## ❖ General Strain Theory

Robert Agnew, first in a pioneering *Criminology* article in 1992 and later in a book-length exposition (Agnew, 2006), renewed interest in strain theory by adding that the removal (or loss) of positive or introduction of negative stimuli into an environment can cause a strain that, as with blocked opportunities, can result in criminal behavior. As for the removal of positively valued stimuli, Agnew (1992) specifically pointed to the following: "loss of a boyfriend/girlfriend, the death of or serious illness of a friend, moving to a new school district, the divorce/separation of one's parents, suspension from school, and the presence of a variety of adverse conditions at work" (p. 57). Turning to the presentation of negative stimuli, Agnew pointed to the following: child abuse and neglect, criminal victimization, physical punishment, negative relations with parents, negative relations with peers, adverse or negative school experience, stressful life events, verbal threats and insults, physical pain, unpleasant odors, disgusting scenes, noise, heat, air pollution, personal space violations, and high density.

Building on these ideas, Jang and Johnson (2003) used the National Survey of Black Americans (composed of a sample of 2,107 African American adults) to test whether Agnew's theory holds true for African Americans. In addition to testing core tenets of Agnew's work, they sought to determine whether African American religiosity, an area in which research has consistently shown more commitment by African Americans than by other ethnic groups, has any impact on helping them cope when strain occurs. In contrast to the earlier research of Cernkovich et al. (2000), these authors found support for Agnew's modified version of strain theory, noting the following regarding the role of religiosity:

We find that individuals who are religiously committed are less likely than those who are not to engage in deviant coping in reaction to personal problems because their religiosity buffers the effects of negative emotions on deviance as well as directly and indirectly (via outdirected emotions) affects their coping strategies. (Jang & Johnson, 2003, p. 98)

Studies have continued to find support for the theory (Eitle & Turner, 2003; Rocque, 2008; Simons, Chen, Stewart, & Brody, 2003). In the Simons et al. (2003) research study, the

authors found that experiencing discrimination was a significant predictor of delinquency. Eitle and Turner's (2003) work revealed that disparities in crime commission were largely attributable to African Americans' increased exposure to stressors. Most recently, Jang and Johnson (2005) found additional support for their earlier research on the benefit of religiosity when coping with strain (see also Jang & Lyons, 2006). In addition, some research has also shown that there are ethnic-specific strains that influence delinquency among Hispanics (Perez, Jennings, & Giver, 2008).

Kaufman, Rebellon, Thaxton, and Agnew (2008) have recently clarified how **general strain theory** can explain racial differences in criminal offending. In particular, they posit that "A GST explanation of racial differences in offending . . . implies that African-Americans experience disproportionate strain in the social environment and/or have fewer resources for coping with strain in conventional ways" (p. 424). Kaufman and his colleagues point to economic strains, family strains, community strains, and a host of other strains that Blacks are more likely to encounter (e.g., discrimination in all aspects of life). Their work has provided additional clarity for how general strain theory applies to African Americans. Despite these clarifications, at least one recent study has found only mixed support for the theory as applied to race and offending (Piquero & Sealock, 2010). We now turn our attention to subcultural theory.

## ❖ Subcultural Theory

In the 1950s, several theories were formulated that considered criminality to be tied to the development of subcultures among White middle-class youth. In *Delinquent Boys*, Albert Cohen (1955) argued that gang delinquency was associated with juveniles being unable to achieve status among their peers. When they were unable to meet established White middle-class standards, they established their own values, which generally involved activities and behaviors that were in conflict with middle-class values.

While examining a diverse, lower class area in Boston, Walter Miller (1958) also formulated a subcultural theory. Referred to as the "focal concerns" theory, Miller's thesis was based on three years of field research. His focal concerns were considered values to which lower class residents adhered. These included trouble, toughness, smartness, excitement, fate, and autonomy. *Trouble* referred to youth engaging in risk-taking activities. *Toughness* represented the notion that one was fearless and could "handle oneself" in a physical encounter. *Smartness* referred to street smarts, which are valued in lower class communities. *Excitement* is the pursuit of thrill seeking. *Fate* is the belief among lower class youth that their lives are controlled by things over which they have no control. *Autonomy* was the final focal concern and represents the resentment that lower class youth have regarding the control others have over their lives (Miller, 1958).

Two years after Miller's work, Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) *Delinquency and Opportunity* pointed to opportunity structure as the key to understanding gang activities. They suggested that when there are limited opportunities, youth join gangs with one of three orientations. Those who cannot find legitimate opportunities join criminal gangs whose aim is to make money through a variety of illegitimate avenues. If, however, there remain few illegitimate opportunities, the youth might join a "conflict" gang. Such gangs primarily engage in violent activities, doing whatever is necessary to maintain their status in the streets. Youth who end up in "retreatist" gangs are what Cloward

and Ohlin refer to as “double failures.” Because such youth did not make it in either legitimate or illegitimate opportunities, they retreat to drug usage.

The same year Miller published his theory, noted criminologist M. Wolfgang (1958) published *Patterns in Criminal Homicide*. This was significant because, as an outgrowth of this pioneering work, less than a decade later he, along with Franco Ferracuti, formulated the subculture of violence theory, which has been used to explain homicide, particularly in the African American community. We review this theory next.

## The Subculture of Violence Theory

As reflected in Chapter 2, African Americans and Latinos are overrepresented in the violent crime categories. In the case of African Americans, this is nothing new. In the late 1950s, while studying homicides in Philadelphia, Wolfgang (1958) found high homicide rates among African Americans in Philadelphia. In addition, Wolfgang found interesting results related to sex differences, victim-offender relationships, weapons involved, and motives for the homicides. From this research and that of his colleague Franco Ferracuti, who had also conducted homicide research in Italy, Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967) formulated the subculture of violence theory. Their theory, which draws from several other criminological theories, consists of seven propositions.

These propositions speak to a range of factors that encapsulate the subculture of violence. Some of these factors include the fact that those invested in the subculture of violence are not violent all the time. Although the subculture is found in all age segments of society, it is found most in those in the late-adolescence to middle-age categories. Because those vested in the subculture do not see violence as “illicit conduct,” they have no feelings of guilt about their actions (Wolfgang & Ferracuti, 1967).

Several authors have either critiqued or tested the theory as it relates to race and the commission of violent crimes. Hawkins (1983) provided one of the earliest and most comprehensive critiques of the theory. In doing so, he also provided an alternative perspective. We begin with a summary of his critique; then we turn to a brief overview of his alternative theory. Hawkins pointed to the following five major weaknesses of the theory:

1. There is an extreme emphasis on mentalistic value orientations of individuals—orientations that in the aggregate are said to produce a subculture.
2. The theory lacks empirical grounding and, indeed, is put in question by some empirical findings.
3. Much of the theory has tended to underemphasize a variety of structural, situational, and institutional variables that affect interpersonal violence. For Blacks, these variables range from historical patterns developed during slavery to the immediate social context of an individual homicidal offense to the operation of the criminal justice system, past and present.
4. Subcultural theory underemphasizes the effects of the law on patterns of criminal homicide.
5. There are other plausible ways apart from the inculcation of values by which the economic, political, and social disadvantages of American Blacks may produce high rates of homicide. (pp. 414–415)

Hawkins' (1983) alternative theory provided three propositions that were meant to address the holes in the subculture of violence theory. Proposition 1 states, "American Criminal Law: Black life is cheap but White life is valuable" (p. 415). Here, Hawkins believes that, based on history, Black lives have taken on less value than White lives; as a result, African Americans can kill other African Americans without fear of being punished. In line with this argument, Hawkins expanded the work of G. Johnson (1941) and presented a hierarchy of homicide seriousness, interpolated between the least and most serious types of homicides (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2). Hawkins' (1983) second proposition states the following: "Past and present racial and social class differences in the administration of justice affect Black criminal violence" (p. 422). This proposition speaks to the lack of attention paid to pre-homicide behaviors in the Black communities. Hawkins believes that, because various pre-homicidal assaults in the African American community do not receive the attention they deserve, homicides that could be prevented are not. Such inattention is also a product of the poor relationship between African Americans and police agencies (Brunson, 2007; Jones-Brown, 2007; Rios, 2011; Stewart, 2007).

As a product of poor relations with the police, in some instances, response times are slower, and at some point, African Americans lose faith in the police and refuse to call on them for assistance in certain instances. Relatedly, once a homicide is committed and

**Figure 3.1**

Johnson's Hierarchy of Homicide Seriousness

Source: Johnson (1941).

Rating	Offense
Most Serious	Negro versus White, White versus White
Least Serious	Negro versus Negro, White versus Negro

**Figure 3.2**

Hawkins' Hierarchy of Homicide Seriousness

Source: Hawkins (1983, pp. 420–421).

Rating	Offense
Most Serious	Black kills White, in authority
	Black kills White, stranger
	White kills White, in authority
	Black kills White, friend, acquaintance
	Black kills White, intimate, family
	White kills White, friend, acquaintance
	White kills White, intimate, family
	Black kills Black, stranger
	Black kills Black, friend, acquaintance
	Black kills Black, intimate, family
	White kills Black, stranger
	White kills Black, friend, acquaintance
	Least Serious

the police are called in, their lack of serious attention provides no deterrent effect to the community. The final proposition—that “economic deprivation creates a climate of powerlessness in which individual acts of violence are likely to take place” (p. 429)—speaks to the association between socioeconomic disadvantage and violence, a connection generally lacking in the subculture of violence theory, but that was incorporated into Sampson’s (1985) test of Wolfgang and Ferracuti’s (1967) version of the theory. Sampson tested the theory, looking at disaggregated homicide rates for 55 of the largest American cities. According to Sampson (1985), if the theory were correct, he would find that “Black offending rates should be related positively to percent of Black violent crimes, independent of other structural characteristics, particularly poverty and inequality” (p. 52). Using a variety of sophisticated methods, no support was found for the theory.

During the 1990s, the theory also was tested to determine its applicability to Black women. Mann (1990a) examined homicide data from six major cities and found Black women comprised 77% of female murderers. However, after taking all factors into consideration, she concluded, “These women are not part of a ‘subculture of violence’ but of a ‘subculture of hopelessness.’ Their fierce independence, their tendency to batter or to kill when battered and their almost insurmountable economic obstacles represent a constant struggle” (Mann, 1990a, p. 198). When Ray and Smith (1991) took up the subject the following year, they noted that if there is a “subculture of violence” among African American females, there must also be one among White females who had identical offending patterns, primarily committing homicides against males of the same race with whom they have a close relationship.

During the mid-1990s, Harer and Steffensmeier (1996) did find support for the subculture of violence theory. Their research made use of prison misconduct data and examined the theory as applied to institutional violence. They found that Blacks were twice as likely to be found guilty of violent misconduct as were Whites, even after controlling for standard variables. Even so, they pointed out that the differences also could be attributable to racial discrimination in the disciplinary process, something their research did not take into consideration.

Cao, Adams, and Jensen (2000) tested the theory using General Social Survey (GSS) data from 1983 to 1991 (excluding 1985). Focusing on all core elements of the theory, the authors found that, in contrast to the theory, “Whites are found to be significantly more vocal than Blacks in expressing their support for the use of violence in defensive situations, with the effects of other factors held constant” (p. 54). Finally, the authors concluded with this:

Based on our data and analyses, there is enough evidence to conclude that Blacks in the general U.S. population are no more likely than Whites to embrace values favorable to violence. Our findings thus repudiate the idea that the causes of Black crime are rooted in unique aspects of Black culture. (p. 58)

They suggested that, given the limited support for the theory, for scholars to continue to promote it as an explanation for racial differences in violence implies that all African Americans are violent, something that is “unfair and potentially racist in nature” (Cao et al., 2000, p. 58). More recent results have been mixed, with some scholarship finding little support for the perspective (Chilton, 2004; Pridemore & Freilich, 2006), and other research finding qualified support for the theory (Staff & Kreager, 2008).

Other criticisms also have been leveled at the theory. Covington (2003) noted that supporters of the theory “fail to explain how [the] Black subculture of violence came to be more combative than the White subculture of violence” (p. 258). Psychologists also have argued that Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967) “ignore the psychological underpinnings of [the] subculture” (Poussaint; cited in Covington, 2003, p. 259).

## The Code of the Streets

A recent subcultural theory approach that has some connections to several of the approaches previously reviewed is the **code of the streets** (Anderson, 1994, 1999). Based on his research in Philadelphia, Elijah Anderson, an urban ethnographer, published a highly acclaimed article, “The Code of the Streets,” which focused on interpersonal violence in an impoverished Philadelphia neighborhood and how residents in the area adopted the “code of the streets” to survive. Anderson (1994) believes that “at the heart of the code is the issue of respect—loosely defined as being treated ‘right,’ or granted deference one deserves” (p. 82). In such an environment, something that has little meaning to one person might be interpreted as “dissing” by someone else and result in a confrontation that could lead to violence. Being able to defend oneself is also an important part of the code. Within such depressed neighborhoods, Anderson suggested, there are “decent” and “street” families. Decent families “tend to accept mainstream values more fully and attempt to instill them in their children” (pp. 82–83). Such families are also strict and teach their children to respect authority and act in a moral way. In addition, they are not seriously tied to the code.

In contrast, Anderson (1994) described “street families,” who loosely supervise their children and, in many cases, are unable to cope with them. Unlike the decent families, “they believe in the code and judge themselves and others according to its values” (Anderson, 1994, p. 83). Consequently, their lives “are marked by disorganization” (p. 83). In such families, children learn early on that they must fend for themselves. This produces a cycle in which they also become vested in the code and take to the streets to prove their “manhood,” which involves securing pretty women, being able to defend themselves, and being able to support themselves “by any means necessary.”

Research conducted within the last decade has provided some support for Anderson’s ideas focusing on Blacks (Baumer, Horney, Felson, & Lauritsen, 2003; Brezina, Agnew, Cullen, & Wright, 2004; Chilton, 2004; Stewart, Simons, & Conger, 2002; Stewart & Simons, 2006), Hispanics (Lopez, Roosa, Tein, & Dinh, 2004), and, more recently, young Black women (Brunson & Stewart, 2006; N. Jones, 2010). Other studies have also noted the role of rap music in the perpetuation of the code of the streets (Kubrin, 2005). In contrast to these positive findings, Stewart, Schreck, and Simons (2006) found limited support for the perspective. In line with the theory, they postulated that adhering to the code of the streets would reduce one’s likelihood of being victimized. However, their research revealed the opposite: Adherents to the code of the streets reported *higher* levels of victimization (see also McGee, 1999; McGee, Barber, Joseph, Dudley, & Howell, 2005; Stewart, Schreck, & Brunson, 2008).

Besides the need for nationwide replications of the theory, there have been other concerns expressed about the viability of Anderson’s ideas. Commenting on one of the life histories presented in Anderson’s work, J. Miller (2001) wrote that, based on the way Anderson

described the person's prison experience, it could be that the prison, not the streets, is the more powerful contributor to the development of the code of the streets. Elaborating on this point, he wrote,

I do not feel that Professor Anderson gives enough weight to the influences of prison on the code of the streets. It is no accident that most of the known violent gangs in California developed in the institutions of the California Youth Authority or the California prisons. Leadership is confirmed by a stint in prison. The walk, the "pose," the language, the argot, the dress, the focus of one's eyes, and the studied indifference all bespeak prison. (p. 157)

Wacquant (2002) provided a more expansive critique of Anderson's work, pointing to the "loose and over-expansive definition of the code of the streets" (p. 1491). Another point of concern is that "there is considerable confusion as to the origins and vectors of the code of the streets" (p. 1491). Wacquant further observed,

Because he starts from an overly monolithic vision of the ghetto and conflates folk with analytic concepts, Anderson cannot relate the *moral distinctions* he discovers in it to the internal *social stratification*. He thus boxes himself into a culturalist position with deeply disturbing political implications insofar as they render ghetto residents responsible for their own plight through their deviant values or role ineptness. (p. 1500)

Anderson took exception to Wacquant's (2002) critique and produced a rejoinder that suggested that Wacquant had misread his work and distorted its findings. Outside commentators on the debate have noted that both scholars had valid arguments (Wilson & Chaddha, 2009).

In general, a common shortcoming of subcultural theories is that they ignore criminality in the middle and upper classes (Hagan, 2002). In addition, as noted in the critiques of Hawkins (1983) and Cao and his colleagues (2000), tests of the theory (specifically the popular subculture of violence theory) have found minimal support. A final persistent criticism of subcultural theories is that, in most instances, they speak only to male criminality (Lilly et al., 2001).

One of the most popular theories used to explain racial differences in offending is conflict theory. Our discussion of the theory is presented next.

## ❖ Conflict Theory

**Conflict theory** likely represents the most popular theoretical framework used to explain race and crime. The theory, which has seeds in many of the ones previously discussed, has some of its origins in Germany. Specifically, the works of German scholars Karl Marx, George Simmel, and Max Weber have been credited with providing the impetus for the theory. According to Lilly, Cullen, and Ball (2011), "Theories that focus attention on struggles between individuals and/or groups in terms of power differentials fall into the general category of *conflict theory*" (p. 166). In short, when applying conflict theory to race and crime, one would look to whether the enforcement of laws and the distribution of punishment are

done in a discriminatory manner. Although social class and gender also would be important to investigate, the way in which the White power structure administers justice would be of central concern to conflict theorists.

## Conflict Theory, Race, and Crime

An early observer of race and crime, W. E. B. Du Bois studied under Weber and produced one of the earliest works to incorporate a conflict analysis (Gabbidon, 1999, 2007; Taylor Greene & Gabbidon, 2000). In 1901, he published an article on the convict-lease system (for more discussion on this system, see Chapter 8), which spoke to the conflict perspective. Du Bois (1901/2002) traced the history of the system whereby immediately after the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, states leased convicts out to private landowners who no longer had the free labor of African American slaves.

Du Bois (1901/2002) wrote about how states strategically enacted various laws (referred to as the “Black codes”) to snare Blacks into the criminal justice system so they could be returned to the labor force, which helped maintain the power and privileged status of Southern White landowners. In the article, Du Bois also rebutted the biological theorists of his day by declaring,

Above all, we must remember that crime is not normal; that the appearance of crime among Southern Negroes is a symptom of wrong social conditions—of a stress of life greater than a large part of the community can bear. The Negro is not naturally criminal; he is usually patient and law-abiding. If slavery, the convict-lease system, the traffic in criminal labor, the lack of juvenile reformatories, together with the unfortunate discrimination and prejudice in other walks of life, have led to that sort of social protest and revolt we call crime, then we must look for remedy in the sane reform of these wrong social conditions, and not in intimidation, savagery, or legalized slavery of men. (p. 88)

By this time, as reviewed earlier, Du Bois had already made significant statements on crime, pointing to discrimination, segregation, lynching, and the attitudes of the courts as explanations for African American criminality (Gabbidon, 2001; Taylor Greene & Gabbidon, 2000). Other prominent scholars would find considerable support for Du Bois's ideas (Myrdal, 1944; Sellin, 1928, 1935; Work, 1900, 1913). In each case, the authors wrote of the discrimination and economic conditions that were contributing to African American involvement in the criminal justice system—matters that directly speak to conflict theory.

It would be some time, however, before the formal articulation of conflict theory (also referred to as “critical criminology”) and a little longer before it incorporated race as a central component. The development of conflict theory over the last 40 years is often credited to the writings of Chambliss (1964, 1969), Turk (1969), and Quinney (1970). Much of these writings were class-based analyses that suggested that capitalism, class structure, and the manipulation of laws were significant contributors to crime, and, as such, changing the structure of society would go a long way toward eliminating crime.

In addition to these scholars, in his classic work *Crime and Privilege*, Krisberg (1975), while articulating a critical perspective (referred to then as “New Criminology”), clearly added the dimension of race to the theory by integrating the history of criminal justice

practices used to control oppressed groups and also highlighting the prison writings of George Jackson, Angela Davis, and other high-profile African American prisoners of the early 1970s. Notably, building on the work of Blauner (1972), Krisberg (1975) devoted a whole section of the work to race privilege, which in recent years has been translated into the notion of “White privilege” (see McIntosh, 2002). This notion of White privilege within criminal justice translates into more focus on “crimes in the streets,” as opposed to “crimes in the suites.” This focus criminalizes the actions of other races and poor Whites while minimizing or looking past the crimes of Whites in power. Over the years, in several editions of his classic text *The Rich Get Richer, and the Poor Get Prison* (2004), Reiman has spoken of this in terms of white-collar crimes, environmental crimes, and other corporate crimes that kill thousands of people, who are primarily poor and American minorities, but rarely result in anyone being severely punished.

Hawkins (1987) further expanded the conflict model by examining it in terms of race, crime, and punishment. He emphasized the need to consider race discrimination in conflict theory. According to Hawkins, other considerations usually lacking in conflict theory included victim characteristics, region, and accounting for race-appropriate behaviors. Whereas the first two characteristics are self-explanatory, for the latter, Hawkins noted that anomalies found in some studies do not take into account behaviors that are generally committed by one race and that, when committed by another race, result in a punishment that seems out of line. Finally, Hawkins also suggested that too often conflict theorists do not consider the power threat approach of Blalock (1967). The approach, which some have called a “power threat version of conflict theory” (Ellis & Walsh, 2000, pp. 384–385), argues that once a majority population sees a minority group encroaching on spheres traditionally reserved for majority group members, they respond in a number of ways, including imposing additional social control (Hawkins, 1987). This usually comes in the form of increased investments in police forces. According to past and recent scholarship, there is support for the “power threat” thesis (see D’Alessio, Eitle, & Stolzenberg, 2005; Jackson, 1989; R. King, 2007; Sharp, 2006). Recent scholarship has also found support that Hispanics represent a new minority threat (Eitle & Taylor, 2008).

Around the same time of Hawkins’s important research, Wilbanks (1987), a professor of criminal justice at Florida International University, published his controversial work, *The Myth of a Racist Criminal Justice System*. In contrast to conflict theorists, who argue that discrimination is a significant reason why minorities are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, Wilbanks argued that, although he believed there was some discrimination in the criminal justice system (using the analogy of having a few bad apples in a barrel), contrary to what was being espoused in much of the race and crime literature,

I do not believe that *the system* is characterized by racial prejudice or discrimination against Blacks; that is, prejudice and discrimination are not “systematic.” Individual cases appear to reflect racial prejudice and discrimination by the offender, the victim, the police, the prosecutor, the judge, or prison or parole officials. But conceding individual cases of bias is far different from conceding pervasive racial discrimination. (pp. 5–6)

Wilbanks’ perspective became known as the “no discrimination thesis” (NDT).

## BOX 3.2

**Walker, Spohn, and DeLone's (1996) Discrimination-Disparity Continuum**

Building on the “no discrimination thesis” (NDT) and “discrimination thesis” (DT) articulated by Wilbanks and Mann, Samuel Walker, Cassia Spohn, and Miriam DeLone created the “discrimination-disparity continuum,” which was presented in the first edition of their book, *The Color of Justice* (1996). The continuum provides a useful framework for the NDT/DT debate. As they see it, discrimination in the criminal justice and juvenile justice systems can fall somewhere along their continuum (see Figure 3.3). At the one end of the continuum is systematic discrimination, whereby discrimination takes place “at all stages of the criminal justice system, at all times, and at all places” (Walker, Spohn, & DeLone, 2007, p. 19). At the other end of the continuum, there is pure justice, which suggests that there is no discrimination in the criminal justice system and the overrepresentation of minorities in the criminal justice system is likely a product of offending patterns. In between these poles, you have institutionalized discrimination, contextual discrimination, and individual acts of discrimination. Walker et al. (2007) defined institutional discrimination as “racial and ethnic disparities in outcomes that are the result of the application of racially neutral factors, such as prior criminal record, employment, and demeanor” (p. 19).

**Figure 3.3** Discrimination-Disparity Continuum

Systematic Discrimination	Institutionalized Discrimination	Contextual Discrimination	Individual Acts of Discrimination	Pure Justice
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Source: Walker, Spohn, & DeLone (2007).

Contextual discrimination is discrimination that occurs only in certain contexts. The examples presented by the authors include discrimination found in “certain regions, particular crimes, or special victim-offender relationships” (Walker et al., 2007, p. 19). Individual acts of discrimination occur when there are simply individuals within the criminal justice and juvenile justice systems—not whole agencies—engaged in discrimination.

After presenting their continuum, the authors surveyed the current race and crime literature and concluded that although the criminal justice and juvenile justice systems were once characterized by systematic discrimination, that is no longer the case. Their most recent review of the literature suggests that the two justice systems are now characterized by contextual discrimination (see Walker et al., 2007, p. 420).

Pick a topic related to race and crime (e.g., the death penalty, racial profiling) and find three refereed journal articles on the subject. After reviewing the articles, see whether, as a whole, you also find that contextual discrimination pervades your selected area of race and crime.

Wilbanks's (1987) book and its perspective initiated a series of debates between Wilbanks and Coramae Richey Mann. In contrast to Wilbanks's position, Mann (1990b) felt,

The racism in the criminal justice system has become institutionalized in the same way that it has in other organizational segments of the nation such as education, politics, religion, and the economic structure; and the barrel *is* rotten. (p. 16)

Mann's perspective became known as the "discrimination thesis" (DT). Although the debates became heated, the two had brought to the fore an issue that lay below the surface among criminologists for many years. In 1993, Mann responded with her contemporary classic *Unequal Justice: A Question of Color*. Although the debate cooled after the publication of her book, the level of discrimination in the criminal justice system continued to be a central focus of race and crime researchers (Walker et al., 2007). Moreover, although Wilbanks never produced the second edition he planned to write (Wilbanks, 1987, p. x), other scholars have continued in his tradition (see, e.g., Delisi & Regoli, 1999; DiIulio, 1996a; MacDonald, 2003, 2008).

Along with Hawkins's (1987) concern about the oversimplification of the theory, a few other shortcomings of conflict theory have been noted. Bohm (2001) noted that the perspective does not take into account individual differences. That is, not all people who are oppressed or discriminated against will respond the same way. Finally, some have suggested that, in some of its forms, the theory is not testable. A perspective related to conflict theory that has been applied to race and crime is the colonial model.

## ❖ The Colonial Model

The **colonial model** has its foundations in the work of psychiatrist and activist Frantz Fanon (Tatum, 1994). Although Fanon used the model to examine the relations between Blacks and Whites in colonial settings, Blauner (1969) and Staples (1975), leaning heavily on intellectuals of the Black power movement, such as Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, were among the first to substantively apply the theory to crime. Applying the perspective to the conditions of African Americans, Blauner (1969) provided the following definition of colonialism:

Colonialism traditionally refers to the establishment of domination over a geographically external political unit, most of them inhabited by people of a different race and culture, where this domination is political and economic, and the colony exists subordinated and dependent on the mother country. Typically the colonizers exploit the land, the raw materials, the labor, and other resources of the colonized nation; in addition a formal recognition is given to the difference in power, autonomy, and political status, and various agencies are set up to maintain this subordination. (p. 395)

Blauner (1972) also generally applied the model to Native Americans. In the work *Gringo Justice*, Mirande (1987) reviewed the historical treatment of Mexican Americans by the criminal justice system and formulated a theory of "gringo justice," integrating the colonial model and conflict theory. Although African Americans were not colonized in the sense that Native Americans or Mexican Americans were, according to Tatum (1994), internal colonialism, which is "when foreign control of a state or territory is eliminated and the control and exploitation of subordinate groups passes to the dominant group within the newly created society" (p. 41), produces many of the same characteristics of the more traditional **colonization** process. Such characteristics include "a caste system based in racism, cultural imposition, cultural disintegration and recreation and members of the colonized being governed by representatives of the dominant power" (p. 41). Such characteristics within a society leave the colonized with feelings of alienation, which results in either crime and delinquency or the desire to assimilate or protest.

All articulations of the theory note the important role that agents of the criminal justice system (or “internal military agents,” as they are called by Staples, 1975) play in maintaining order in a colonial society. In the words of Blauner (1969),

The police are the most crucial institution maintaining the colonized status of Black Americans. . . . Police are key agents in the power equation as well as the drama of dehumanization. In the final analysis they do the dirty work for the larger system by restricting the striking back of Black rebels to skirmishes inside the ghetto, thus deflecting energies and attacks from the communities and institutions of the larger power structure. (pp. 404–405)

R. Austin (1983) was one of the first to empirically test the theory. Using violence rates before and after the decolonization of the Caribbean island of St. Vincent, he sought to determine whether crime rates declined following the removal of British colonial rule. Although he did find that crime rates declined after the end of colonial rule, this did not hold true when he examined data related to murder and manslaughter. Here, Austin noted that the increasing availability of guns might have played a role in this finding.

More than a decade ago, Tatum (2000) provided one of the more comprehensive tests of the theory. In her test of the theory, she formulated several propositions related to the model, including the connections among race, class, and oppression; how race and class are associated with the availability of social support; and issues related to alienation. Relying on survey data from African American, Mexican American, and White juniors and seniors at two high schools in a major southwestern urban area, she found limited support for the model.

The colonial model has applicability for racial groups who have been subjected to colonization (most notably, Native Americans, African Americans, and Mexican Americans). There have been mixed results when the theory has been tested, and there need to be more direct tests of it. Tatum (1994) also noted several additional concerns with the theory. First, as reflected in other structural models, she noted that two people can be exposed to the same oppression yet respond differently; in such instances, the model does not account for the different adaptations. Second, as with conflict theory, the model is difficult to test. Another weakness of the model is that it does not adequately address class issues (Tatum, 1994).

Criminologist Agozino (2003) also has considered colonialism in his groundbreaking work *Counter-Colonial Criminology: A Critique of Imperialist Reason*. In the work, he argued that “criminology is concentrated in former colonizing countries, and virtually absent in the former colonized countries, because criminology is a social science that served colonialism more directly than many other social sciences” (p. 1). More specifically, Agozino focused on

how imperialism used criminological knowledge and how it can be seen as a criminological project—imprisonment with or without walls, a widening of the net of incarceration, and how the close kinship between the two fields of knowledge and power, criminology and imperialism, served both. (p. 6)

He also highlighted that the discipline of criminology originated “at the height of European colonialism” (p. 6). As a product of these origins, he noted that “criminology is dominated by scholars in former colonial centres of authority,” which has led to what he considers “theoretical underdevelopment through the concealment of the bloody legacy of colonialist criminology” (p. 6). Although on the surface his ideas might seem controversial, it is clear that Agozino’s work provides a critical new direction for race and crime theorists.

In general, however, the impact of colonialism on countries around the globe has been neglected too long by criminologists. Notably, scholars have begun to revisit the role of colonialism in crime and justice (see Bosworth & Flavin, 2007; Gabbidon, 2009; Hawkins, 2011; Saleh-Hanna, 2008).

## ❖ Integrated and Nontraditional Theories on Race and Crime

Integrated theories of crime and nontraditional theories of race and crime receive less attention in crime and justice textbooks. Integrated theories incorporate more than one theory to explain criminal behavior. Nontraditional theories tend to have nontraditional ideas behind them. They also tend to be controversial. The integrated and nontraditional theories discussed here include structural-cultural theory; the abortion, race and crime thesis; and critical race theory.

### Structural-Cultural Theory

In the 1980s, Oliver (1984) proposed that, to explain Black male criminality, one needs to use an integrated theory combining structural conditions of African Americans and their cultural adaptations to such conditions. In one of his early articles, he explored Black males and their “tough guy image” or, as he called it, the “Black compulsive masculinity alternative.” Oliver believes that because of racial oppression, Black males exhibit masculine behavior that places an overemphasis on “toughness, sexual conquest, manipulation, and thrill-seeking” (p. 199).

Oliver (1984) has argued that Black males act this way for two reasons. First, “lower-class Black males who adopt the compulsive masculinity alternative do so in order to mitigate low self-esteem and negative feelings which emerge as a consequence of their inability to enact the traditional masculine role” (p. 199). The second reason relates to the notion that males who adapt the masculine approach pass it on to other males. In later publications, Oliver (1989a, 1989b) applied his theory to sexual conquest and the adaptation of an Afrocentric perspective to ameliorate social problems in the African American community, and he also has examined violence among African Americans in barroom settings (Oliver, 1994). More recently, he has continued to refine his perspective (see Oliver, 2003, 2006).

One limitation of Oliver’s perspective relates to the central role of low self-esteem. There has been some debate as to whether low self-esteem is really the central problem contributing to social problems among African Americans generally and African American males in particular (see Ross, 1992). Covington (2003) also has argued that Oliver’s approach labels activities “race specific” that Whites also engage in. For example, many of the functions that bars serve for African Americans serve the same functions for Whites. Finally, Covington noted that in one of his studies, Oliver’s “sample of African-American participants in violent transactions report that many of their fights seem to have been precipitated for non-race-specific reasons that apply equally well to violent Whites” (p. 266).

### Abortion, Race, and Crime

In a highly controversial paper, Donohue and Levitt (2001) proposed that more than 50% of the crime drop in the 1990s could be attributed to the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion. They pointed to three important factors that support this

thesis. First, they noted that the decline in crime coincided with the landmark decision and the period when those who would have been born would have reached their peak years of criminal activity (ages 18–24). Second, they suggested that the states that legalized abortion three years before the *Roe v. Wade* decision experienced earlier crime drops than the remaining states. Finally, they pointed to the fact that states that have the highest abortion rates also have had the largest declines in crime.

At the core of the theory are two premises. First, abortion reduces the pool of individuals who would later engage in crime. Second, the theory relates to race and crime in that, according to this view, abortion is not random. According to their thesis, those likely to have abortions include unwed women, teenagers, and Blacks. As such, because of a host of challenges often faced by such parents, they would be less than ideal parents and would place their children “at risk” for criminal activity. Donohue and Levitt’s thesis, which has been widely disseminated in the scholarly community as well as in Levitt and Dubner’s (2005) best-selling book *Freakonomics*, has garnered significant attention.

Among scholars, there has been vigorous debate about the veracity of their thesis, with some scholars supporting the thesis (Barro, 1999), and other researchers (some of whom conducted re-analyses of Donohue and Levitt’s data) having found little to no support for the thesis (Chamlin, Myer, Sanders, & Cochran, 2008; Foote & Goetz, 2006; Hay & Evans, 2006; Joyce, 2004a, 2004b; Lott & Whitley, 2007). More recently, scholars have tried to apply the abortion and crime thesis to England and Wales and found no support (Kahane, Paton, & Simmons, 2008). Some noted scholars, such as Al Blumstein, have suggested that, although creative, the thesis does not give enough “attention to other factors, such as the decline in crack cocaine street dealing, the booming economy, and the efforts of police to keep guns away from juveniles” (“Renowned Criminologist Eschews Alarmist Theories,” 1999, p. B5). Overall, although Donohue and Levitt (2004, 2006) have vigorously defended their perspective, there has not been a major shift toward using their thesis to explain the significant crime dip of the 1990s.

## Critical Race Theory

In addition to theories based on biological, sociological, or other traditional perspectives, critical race theory (CRT), which emanated from the critical legal studies movement during the 1970s (K. Russell, 1999) and closely aligns with radical criminology (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 113), represents another perspective that has proved useful for contextualizing race and crime. Founded by Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and other legal scholars, in recent years it also has become more widely known in social science circles. The perspective has two goals. The first is to understand how the law is used to maintain White supremacy and continue to oppress people of color. The second is countering or stopping the use of the law to maintain White supremacy (K. Russell, 1999). It is here that critical race theorists have expressed concern about laws (e.g., “three strikes and you’re out”) and practices (e.g., racial profiling, wrongful convictions) that directly impact racial and ethnic minorities.

In addition to the aforementioned goals, there are several tenets of the perspective. First, racism is ever present in American society and is, thus, a daily occurrence. The second tenet is referred to as “interest convergence,” or the notion that Whites benefit (materially and in other ways) from racism, so they “have little incentive to eradicate it” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). Third, critical race theorists believe race to be socially constructed, manufactured classifications. Here, critical race theorists are particularly concerned about the racialization of groups. Specifically, they express concern about “the ways the dominant society racializes different

minority groups at different times, in response to shifting needs such as the labor market” (p. 8). Critical race theorists also believe that, because of their distinct histories and experiences, racial and ethnic minorities have a “unique voice of color” perspective to offer society.

There have been a few persistent criticisms of the theory. First, because much of the work is based on storytelling and personal narratives, which move away from “objective” or “value-free” analyses, some critics have concluded that the perspective is unscientific. Also, according to K. Russell (1999), some have argued that “CRT amounts to academic whining about women and minorities” (p. 183). Even with these criticisms, the perspective has become a standard legal theory, especially among women and minority legal scholars. In addition, criminologists have also started to use the theory as the foundation for studies in the discipline (Glauer, 2009; Longazel, Parker, & Sun, 2011; Ross, 2010).

## ❖ Conclusion

Just as there is little consensus among criminologists about the causes of crime (Cooper, Walsh, & Ellis, 2010; Ellis & Walsh, 1999), there is even more debate about which theory best explains racial patterns in crime and victimization. However, one thing is apparent from the coverage in this chapter—numerous theories have been applied to the question of race and crime (see Table 3.1). In the beginning, scholars turned to the biology of African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans to answer this question; however, over the years, this has changed. The decline in popularity of the biological approach gave rise to the sociological approach. Beginning with scholars such as Du Bois, the sociological approach continues to be a mainstay of those interested in studying race and crime. Subcultural approaches seem to

**Table 3.1**

**Theoretical Contexts of Race and Crime**

Theory	Context
Biological	White superiority, genetic inferiority, low IQ, physical characteristics, evolutionary factors
Biosocial	Interaction of biological and environmental factors
Sociological	Social conditions, social structure, heterogeneity, mobility, mass migration, impact of mass incarceration on communities
Culture conflict	Cultural differences, violation of social norms within a community
Subcultural	Street culture, code of honor rooted in violence
Conflict	Racial discrimination in criminal justice
Colonial/counter-colonial	Role of imperialism, criminology's role in imperialism
Structural-cultural	Social structure, culture, and black masculinity
Legalized abortion	Unborn “at-risk” children
Critical race theory	Law maintains White supremacy

have also maintained their place in the race and crime literature. Conflict theory now represents one of the more popular theoretical frameworks when studying race and crime. In addition, scholars are beginning to reexamine the role of colonization in race, crime, and justice.

There are clearly limits to the utility of these various theories. Even with the increasing scholarship on race, crime, and gender (Gabbidon, 2010), there remains a dearth of knowledge as to minority female offending. It is also noteworthy that much of the existing theoretical research on race and crime is centered on African Americans (and males in particular). While it is obvious that the research on Latinos and crime is on the rise, scholars need to test the existing theories to determine their relevancy for other racial/ethnic groups.

Finally, with the return of the biological-sociological debate in the form of biosocial criminology, the discipline has come full circle. Moreover, with the discoveries tied to the Human Genome Project, scholars have become even more interested in the influence of genetics on human behavior and also in explaining racial disparities in offending. When one reviews the various theories, it seems safe to say that, although the research methodologies have become more sophisticated, many of the same ideas presented about race and crime 100 years ago remain popular today. Chapter 4 looks at the police and their historical and contemporary roles in handling race and crime.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why are theoretical perspectives so critical for race and crime researchers?
2. How do biologically based theories explain racial differences in crime trends?
3. How do sociologically based theories explain racial differences in crime trends?
4. What is colonialism? How does it explain the disproportionate involvement of racial and ethnic minorities in certain criminal offenses?
5. In your view, which of the theories in the chapter best explains racial differences in offending?

## Internet Exercises

1. Review the index offenses presented at <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm> and discuss which of the theories presented in this chapter can provide an explanation for robbery trends by race.
2. Spend 30 minutes at the Eugenics Archives (<http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/>) examining some of the history and materials related to the Eugenics Movement.

## Internet Sites

*Eugenics Archive:* <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/>

*W.E.B. Du Bois:* [http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories\\_people\\_dubois.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_people_dubois.html)