

== Chapter 1 ==

Introduction: One Hundred Years and Still Counting

RACE, PLACE, and crime are inextricably linked, both in actuality and in the minds of the public, in the contemporary United States. The image of the crime-ridden ghetto is prevalent in popular cultural portrayals on television, in movies, and in daily news reports (Bjornstrom et al. 2010; Russell 1998; Russell-Brown 2004). This imagery conveys the notion that African American neighborhoods are to be feared and avoided while white communities are havens of safety; Latino and other nonwhite areas are less well known but potentially risky. The fact that the vast majority of residents of African American and other minority neighborhoods are never involved in serious crime does little to dispel these images. Only a few researchers dig deeper to illuminate the complex elements at the root of continued patterns of criminal inequality by race and ethnicity. This book takes up this task and reflects our mutual interest in learning why and how race and ethnicity so fundamentally shape the experiences of urban residents, including their exposure to crime.

We came to this interest from divergent paths. One of us is white and the other African American. One of us spent her youth in the 1960s and early 1970s living on the North Side of Chicago. The other migrated from the rural South during the early 1960s and spent a portion of her teenage years on the East Side of Cleveland. Anyone familiar with Chicago and Cleveland knows that what separated us was not just that we resided in different cities, but that we lived in very different social environments because of our *racial* backgrounds. Chicago and Cleveland both have long histories of racial residential segregation, with Chicago's North Side being essentially white and much of Cleveland's near East Side essentially African American.

Our personal stories reflect the experiences of many individuals living in these different types of environment. Laurie lived in a neighborhood in which she saw almost no one but other whites on the streets, in local stores, and in the grammar school and high school to which she walked

just two short blocks from her home. The African Americans who crossed her path on a regular basis were the few who took the bus from the South Side to work in some of the homes in the area or to attend the local high school. Crime and fear for her safety were never obvious concerns for Laurie or her family. Indeed, when she was just twelve years old she was allowed to take the bus and the “El” to downtown with her friends. And there, in Chicago’s Loop, was the primary place, outside of the TV news, where she was exposed to African Americans from the South Side: the Loop was the main middle ground between the segregated white North Side and the segregated African American South Side of the city.

Ruth’s childhood was spent in the rural South toward the end of the Jim Crow era. She interacted with whites in some settings (stores, their homes), but under strict rules of racial etiquette that required deference from her. Otherwise, segregation was fairly complete: separate schools, separate churches, separate buses for transportation to school, and separate accommodations (such as restrooms and swimming pools), if African Americans were accommodated at all. Street crime was not a central concern. However, African Americans could easily get in trouble with legal authorities (and with whites in general) for minor infractions of the “race rules,” and this was the basis for her parents’ fear for her safety, since Ruth was an inquisitive and questioning child. Her move to Cleveland brought her to a place that seemed like a world apart from her southern rural roots. Here she rode buses with whites (and did not have to sit at the back), took classes with them, ate at the same lunch counters, and worked in proximity to whites in stores and other facilities. Still, it was impossible for her not to notice that whites and African Americans departed the bus at different stops and that eventually only African Americans remained on the bus, since they lived farther out on St. Clair Avenue. In her own neighborhood, she seldom saw white faces other than rent collectors and store clerks. It was in this area that Ruth came face to face with street crime for the first time, when a burglary occurred in one of the apartments in the building where she lived, and where one of her family members was the custodian. Although she did not become preoccupied with crime, from this incident she learned valuable lessons about urban environments as places where victimization occurs and care must be taken to keep safe.

We have had many occasions to comment on the divergent social worlds in which we grew up and how things seem to have changed since then. Many of the bricks in the walls that separated us—and others of our same colors—have been loosened or removed (see, for example, Smelser, Wilson, and Mitchell 2001). The legal barriers that kept the races apart early in our lives have been eliminated. Access to opportunities for non-whites has expanded. Some forms of overt discrimination have declined

to varying degrees. Residential segregation between African Americans and whites has, on average, decreased. The number of middle-class African American families has grown. And educational attainment has been on a steady upward trajectory for all groups, but has escalated to a particularly large degree for African Americans. One might think that by now, and with these types of change, equality of circumstances and outcomes across racial and ethnic groups would be close at hand.

However, a variety of countervailing processes belie this conclusion and demonstrate that the separate experiences of our own early lives are, in many ways, still the reality in the urban United States. For example, although average levels of segregation have declined, they remain high, especially in older industrial cities like Chicago and Cleveland (Charles 2003; Logan, Stults, and Farley 2004; Wilkes and Iceland 2004). Further, deindustrialization, which began in the 1960s, stalled the expansion of opportunities; nonwhites were particularly harmed by this long-term trend because they were disproportionately employed in the traditional manufacturing industries. As William Julius Wilson (1987, 1996, 2009) makes patently clear, deindustrialization has had especially adverse effects on African American communities, where poverty concentration and joblessness have increased. In short, the patterns and social environments that characterized the Chicago and Cleveland neighborhoods of our early years are still dramatically evident in contemporary African American and white communities. In fact, from our vantage points, many racial neighborhood inequalities may have hardened rather than softened.

Further, the inequalities seen in contemporary cities have become more complex as the colors of the U.S. urban population have diversified, largely owing to an explosion of immigration from Latin America and Asia (Bean and Stevens 2003; Iceland 2009). In addition to the African American and white populations, many places now have a mix of Latinos and other groups from around the world. Laurie's old neighborhood in Chicago is a case in point. Over half of the residents of this area are now foreign-born, and Asians alone make up one-quarter of the population (Geolytics 2003). Latinos, at somewhat more than one-tenth of the community, are also present in visible numbers. Thus, immigration is reshaping the urban environment and the local conditions that should affect crime by altering the cultural and institutional fabric of many city areas. Of course, not all urban neighborhoods are equally affected by the introduction of new groups. For example, Ruth's Cleveland neighborhood has not experienced this diversification; it has been over 95 percent African American since at least 1970 (Geolytics 2003). Moreover, the economic circumstances of newly diverse communities vary considerably: many of these neighborhoods, especially those with large numbers of

Latinos, are as disadvantaged as those of their African American counterparts (Charles 2006).

Racial Structure and Neighborhood Crime

How do these separate life circumstances of whites, African Americans, Latinos, and others yield differences in neighborhood crime? We initially thought that we could answer this question by studying Columbus, Ohio, our current hometown. Coincidentally, we live in the same neighborhood just a couple of miles from Ohio State University. Our area is almost completely white, clearly middle-class, and nearly free from serious street crime. With this in mind, we set out to determine whether the absence of crime in our community was duplicated in *nonwhite middle-class* areas of the city. At the same time, we asked whether high crime was observed in both white and nonwhite *high-poverty* communities. Our basic goals were to determine whether racial composition affects the crime rates of white and nonwhite neighborhoods when differences in economic composition are not at issue, and whether there are class differences in crime *within* white and nonwhite neighborhoods.

To address these concerns we had to locate comparable middle-class and poor white and nonwhite areas within the city, but after many hours of poring over census data, we found just one African American middle-class neighborhood in Columbus. And to our surprise, there were slim choices of poor white areas, even though our city has many poor white former Appalachian residents. Thus, the composition of communities in Columbus would have made it difficult to answer our key question and could have led to erroneous comparisons that would have confounded the effects of socioeconomic conditions on crime with the apparent effects of racial and ethnic composition. When white neighborhoods, which are mainly or totally middle-class, are compared to African American neighborhoods, which are mainly working-class or poor, race-ethnic comparisons almost completely overlap with socioeconomic comparisons. This makes it impossible to determine whether differences in socioeconomic conditions are (or are not) the sources of observed differentials in neighborhood crime. Finding racially distinct but economically comparable areas was not the only problem that would have surfaced if we had tried to use our city as a research site. Studying Columbus would have limited us to comparisons of only African American and white neighborhoods. Even with a growing Latino population, this particular midwestern city has insufficient numbers of Latinos or other groups to include such communities.

As we came to grips with the fact that our own hometown would not be a suitable site for answering fundamental questions about the

connections between race, place, and crime, we also recognized that this was likely to be true for most U.S. cities. Few of them have a sufficient number of middle-class minority communities to enable a comparison with middle-class white areas (Sampson 2009; Sampson, Sharkey, and Raudenbush 2008; Sampson and Wilson 1995). Conversely, few have a sufficient number of very poor white neighborhoods to compare with the relatively large number of very poor African American and other nonwhite areas. These observations provide the foundation for the arguments that frame this book. If similarly poor and well-off white and nonwhite areas are virtually nonexistent, this social fact is not a neutral by-product of the differential efforts and tastes of individuals. Rather, this widespread pattern is a direct result of a society that is structured, through residential segregation and other mechanisms, so that neighborhoods, schools, work, and other institutions provide racial and ethnic groups with differential opportunities and access to resources. Typically, this involves privileging whites over others and leaving African Americans the furthest behind. Other racial and ethnic groups are commonly placed in hierarchical positions between these two extremes.

Those seeking to understand criminal inequality (and other outcomes) among neighborhoods of different colors must begin by recognizing the interconnections between racial structure and neighborhood crime-generating conditions. In this racialized reality, whites, African Americans, Latinos, and others are highly segregated from one another in settings where social and economic circumstances are rarely comparable. Moreover, because racial and ethnic groups have substantially different abilities to distance themselves from unfavorable urban social conditions, neighborhoods of distinct colors are further differentiated by where they are located and what is near them. Crime takes place within this racialized urban landscape. As such, what appear to be race-based differentials are more likely to be products of segregated “centers” of color that embody a preponderance of disadvantages or resources that discourage or encourage criminal activity (Du Bois 1899/1973). In other words, we contend that a critical and nearly unbridgeable racial-spatial divide in social contexts pervades the United States and sets the stage for ethno-racial inequality in crime. Moreover, in a society organized along racial lines, there is no easy corrective for criminal inequality because making conditions equal is systemically elusive.

Approaches to neighborhood crime that do not take into account the larger societal context of racial structuring might also tend toward overly simple individual-level interpretations of why crime rates are much higher in nonwhite than white neighborhoods. For example, the very high levels of crime in African American communities compared to white communities may be seen as resulting mainly from a greater proclivity

for crime among African Americans and hence a greater prevalence of “criminals” in African American areas. However, the dramatic and systematic patterns in the crime data examined in this book and their relationships with structured social inequality contradict such an interpretation. Instead, these patterns suggest that inequality in crime does not result from the concentration of “bad” or “good” people in certain areas but rather is a product of people being in either a disadvantaged or privileged place. That is, crime rates are higher on average in African American than in other neighborhoods, not because members of this group are more criminally oriented, but because African American communities have the highest average levels of disadvantaged social conditions owing to the role of race in structuring opportunity and community access.

The Relevance of Crime Theories

To embed our understanding of criminal inequality in a broad societal context, we join a racialized perspective with criminological theories (see chapter 2). This is a departure from prior neighborhood crime research, which draws mainly on criminological theories alone, most commonly social disorganization. The social disorganization perspective derives from the basic observation of Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1969) that high rates of crime and delinquency in inner-city areas persist even when the particular immigrant and ethnic groups that make up the residential population change. This is because these areas exhibit social conditions such as poverty, residential instability, and population heterogeneity that remain despite shifts in their demographic composition. Such conditions make it difficult for residents of these areas to work together to realize their common goals (the communities are socially disorganized; see, for example, Bursik and Grasmick 1993; Sampson and Groves 1989). Drawing on this logic, researchers concerned with accounting for variation in rates of crime across areas with different racial and ethnic compositions have argued that these differentials result from distinctions in levels of poverty and other forms of disadvantage (for example, Sampson and Wilson 1995).

Research has demonstrated consistent links between structural conditions and crime within local areas (Crutchfield, Glusker, and Bridges 1999; Krivo and Peterson 1996; Pratt and Cullen 2005; Sampson 1987; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997). Scholars have also shown that a large portion of the higher crime in African American versus white neighborhoods is due to the greater prevalence of poverty and other disadvantages in African American areas (Krivo and Peterson 1996; McNulty 2001). However, research to date has not conceptualized or

analyzed societal racial and ethnic stratification as integral to the generation of neighborhood criminal inequality. Instead, societal processes that lead to differences in structural conditions have been treated as outside of criminological concerns. As noted earlier, doing so ignores the fundamental “reality” that ethno-racially distinct neighborhoods are most often *not nearly* the same and not rapidly moving toward similarity. As such, prior research fails to make clear that neighborhood inequality in crime is an inevitable outgrowth of the glaring societal gulf in community circumstances.

Here we embed social disorganization theory within a racialized perspective that explicates the central importance to U.S. society of inequality in the social and economic conditions of racial and ethnic groups and their communities. Significant consequences flow from this inequality, which would be difficult to change without altering the wider racial order that privileges whites at the expense of other groups and typically leaves African Americans on the bottom social rungs. Differences in crime rates across neighborhoods of different colors are one such important consequence, which has not yet been understood in this light.

Neighborhood Crime Patterns Across the United States

How does crime differ across neighborhoods of different colors? Specifically, what are the levels and rank orderings of violent and property crime rates among white, African American, Latino, minority (African American and Latino), and integrated areas? The answers to these questions probably seem obvious based on television, newspaper, and online media reports of crime, as well as some academic articles. Yet what may seem obvious cannot be taken for granted because direct evidence of neighborhood crime patterns is sparse. Indeed, crime data for local areas within cities are not widely available. The two of us have studied these issues for Columbus, Ohio (Krivo and Peterson 1996), and Thomas McNulty (2001) has done so for Atlanta. However, exploration of these two cities—or any other city—leaves one wondering whether the conclusions apply to other places, such as Pittsburgh, Memphis, or Phoenix, with different social and racial characters and histories.

We conducted the National Neighborhood Crime Study (NNCS) to overcome the bias of single-city research (Peterson and Krivo 2010). For the NNCS, we compiled crime and other data for 9,593 neighborhoods in 91 large cities. Including many cities throughout the United States addresses the basic problem of insufficient numbers of uncommon types of communities that is typical in the racially stratified United States. Just one city, such as Columbus, may have only one or two middle-class

minority neighborhoods and just a couple of poor white areas, but collectively many cities include much larger numbers of more advantaged nonwhite and disadvantaged white communities. Together, the NNCS cities are a highly diverse set of places where just under half of all residents are non-Latino whites (47 percent) and African Americans and Latinos each make up slightly more than one-fifth (22 percent each) of the population. This diversity mirrors that found in large cities throughout the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2009a). Analyzing this database of crime within diverse urban neighborhoods allows for a more comprehensive documentation of the ethno-racial patterning of crime than has ever before been available. As shown in the following chapter, the results confirm that African American neighborhoods have startlingly high rates of violent crime compared to white areas and that rates for other types of communities fall between these two. Property crime, however, is much less *unevenly* distributed than violence across the five types of racially distinct neighborhoods.

A Tale in Four Parts

We tell the empirical story of how ethno-racial differences in crime result from a societal racial order of inequality by answering four fundamental questions. First, to what extent are racial and ethnic groups residentially isolated from one another in U.S. urban areas? In the vast majority of neighborhoods in metropolitan areas in the United States, whites, African Americans, or Latinos predominate (Karafin 2009). Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton (1993) have described this residential pattern as an “American apartheid” because of the degree to which African Americans are more extremely isolated from others than any other racial or ethnic group. Beginning in chapter 3, we paint a picture of the degree of residential separation among whites, African Americans, and Latinos in the large set of cities in the NNCS. A striking portrait in which disproportionate shares of all three groups—but especially whites and African Americans—live in same-race neighborhoods provides the backdrop for the evaluation of race, place, and crime that follows.

How dramatic are gaps in the social and economic character of five ethno-racially distinct types of urban neighborhoods—white, African American, Latino, minority, and integrated? The answer to this question is the second part of our empirical tale of the broad societal origins of ethno-racial criminal inequality (also presented in chapter 3). The neighborhood residential segregation described in the first part of our story is critical in reproducing the existing privileges and disadvantages that diminish or increase the potential for crime. Drawing on the characteristics pointed to in social disorganization theory, we illuminate in detail

how disadvantaged social conditions (such as poverty or an absence of professional workers) vary across the neighborhood types. We also bring attention to the ways in which residential instability, local investments, and immigration distinguish communities of different colors. The data confirm that the social context of local crime is one in which the social worlds of ethno-racial groups are highly divergent, with whites experiencing extraordinary privilege and nonwhites substantial disadvantage.

The third part of our tale addresses the extent to which differences in relative disadvantage and advantage are sources of inequality in violent and property crime across the neighborhood types. This question was raised by our own distinct residential histories in Chicago and Cleveland. Violent crime in Laurie's middle-class (but now less white) neighborhood is just one-third as high, and property crime just over 60 percent as high, as it is in Ruth's highly impoverished African American community. What reductions would there be in these crime differentials in the unlikely event that social and economic parity were achieved in these two neighborhoods? We address this question through analyses in chapter 4 of neighborhood criminal inequality for the full set of areas in our data. We begin by assessing the relationship of neighborhood factors (described in chapter 3) with violent and property crime; such an analysis has not been done previously outside of single-city studies. Only if such factors broadly affect local crime can they be responsible for criminal inequality. Next, we examine the degree to which relevant neighborhood conditions contribute to the differentials in crime across the five ethno-racial neighborhood types. An additional exploration focuses on the subset of neighborhoods that are relatively comparable in their levels of advantage to assess whether racially and ethnically distinct neighborhoods with similarly low levels of adverse conditions have rates of crime that are comparably low. The findings from these analyses highlight that neighborhood structural factors are helpful in accounting for differentials in crime across neighborhoods of different colors. Yet significant racial gaps in violent crime, though not property crime, remain even when we account for such conditions, pointing to the differentials in racial privileges found in contemporary society.

How does the spatial location of neighborhoods of distinct colors perpetuate crime gaps? The answer to this question, the fourth and final part of our tale, is presented in chapter 5. In chapter 4, we examine the effects of only the internal character of communities, thereby treating them as islands disconnected from nearby areas. However, the ways in which neighborhoods are located relative to one another may protect them from, or set the stage for, crime (Heitgerd and Bursik 1987; Mears and Bhati 2006; Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush 2001; Pattillo-McCoy 1999). Further, white, African American, Latino, and other nonwhite areas

are surrounded by communities with very different levels of poverty, instability, investments, and the like. At the extremes, and reflecting the U.S. racial order, African American neighborhoods often are located near highly disadvantaged communities, while white areas are surrounded by neighborhoods with many resources. We consider these external contexts by analyzing the roles of the structural conditions of areas that surround individual neighborhoods for crime. The findings make clear that such external conditions are responsible for much of the inequality in crime that is not due to ethno-racial differentials in the internal character of neighborhoods.

In telling the four-part empirical story of crime in divergent social worlds, we also offer some insights on issues that are not a core part of the set of research questions with which we began. Two such issues stand out. First, by examining a large set of neighborhoods in a broad array of cities, we move beyond the predominant focus on comparisons of African American and white neighborhoods. By studying five neighborhood types, we illuminate the subtleties in the patterns and relationships that exist in a society where diversity is extensive and growing. Latino and immigrant neighborhoods have not been totally ignored in research. However, the few existing studies have focused on a handful of border cities (El Paso, Miami, and San Diego) and have tended to compare crime in Latino and African American (or black immigrant) neighborhoods, ignoring the significant contrast with whites as the most privileged group (Cancino, Martinez, and Stowell 2009; Lee, Martinez, and Rosenfeld 2001; Martinez and Nielsen 2006; Vélez 2006).

Second, because we include neighborhoods across a large set of places, we can explore, for the first time, whether the character of the cities in which communities are located affects their levels of crime. Do neighborhoods that are similar in race-ethnic composition, level of disadvantage, extent of residential instability, and the like have more crime when they are located in cities that are larger, have weaker economies, and are more segregated? Many studies have examined crime and violence across cities (see Pratt and Cullen 2005), but these lack data for smaller areas within the overall city. Our analyses show that some city characteristics contribute to neighborhood crime. For example, when the comparable neighborhoods are located in more segregated cities or in cities with a smaller manufacturing base, they have more violence.

Once we have presented the four parts of our tale, we discuss in chapter 6 the implications of the evidence. Some of the messages that come through pertain to the value of integrating ideas from different fields (criminology, urban sociology, and of course race scholarship) for advancing understanding of an issue of important theoretical and policy concern. After reading this book, it should be very clear that dif-

ferentials in neighborhood crime are not just about collections of criminally oriented individuals or community social disorganization. Rather, crime gaps are outgrowths of the racialized order in which groups of *all* colors reside. This type of broad understanding is critical for developing policies to bring the extraordinarily high crime levels that some communities face into closer alignment with those in more privileged communities. Thus, our results suggest that piecemeal efforts that focus only on crime and the criminal justice system cannot alone solve the problems of racial and ethnic community criminal inequality. Rather, effective and lasting solutions will come only from transforming racialized systems of opportunities and access to create far greater equality in social conditions across groups of all colors.

We offer one final note to the reader. As we put pen to paper (or, more aptly, fingers to keyboard), our main goal was to tell a more complete story than heretofore available about neighborhood crime and criminal inequality. In the end, we are satisfied that we have made an important contribution. Indeed, we believe that we might even get an approving nod from W. E. B. Du Bois (1899/1973), who over one hundred years ago wrote about the difficulty of explicating the complex social conditions that gave rise to the relatively high crime rate in Philadelphia's nineteenth-century black neighborhoods. Du Bois clearly understood how deep the racial-spatial divide runs in U.S. society, and he would probably be chagrined that the weakening of this divide is yet to be realized. Still, we believe that he would applaud the exposure of the systemic injustices we document in this book.