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Against the Wall

Poor, Young, Black, and Male

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Chapter 4

The Economic Plight of Inner-City Black Males

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The economic predicament of black men in the inner city today resembles the situation documented by Elliot Liebow in his classic book *Tally's Corner: A Study of Negro Street Corner Men*. Liebow wrote *Tally's Corner* in the mid-1960s, yet his arguments concerning the work experiences and family lives of black men in a Washington D.C. ghetto are still applicable to contemporary urban communities. In analyzing the data collected by our research team on poverty and joblessness among black males in inner-city Chicago neighborhoods, I was repeatedly reminded of Liebow's analysis. Liebow was perhaps the first scholar to call attention to the fact that ongoing lack of success in the labor market lowers a man's self-confidence and gives rise to feelings of resignation that frequently result in a temporary, or even permanent, abandonment of the job search. "The most important fact is that a man who is able and willing to work cannot earn enough to support himself, his wife, and one or more children," declared Liebow. "A man's chances for working regularly are good only if he is willing to work for less than he can live on, sometimes not even then" (Liebow 1967, 50–51).

The jobs filled by the low-status black men in Liebow's study were poorly paying, dirty, physically demanding, and uninteresting. They offered neither respect nor opportunity for advancement. Like others in this society, the street corner man viewed such jobs with disdain. "He cannot do otherwise," stated Liebow; "he cannot draw from a job those values which other people do not put into it" (51). Understandably, the work histories of the street corner men were erratic. Menial employment was readily available, and workers drifted from one undesirable job to the next.

The New Urban Poverty

Although the job prospects for low-skilled black men were bleak when Liebow conducted his field research in the early 1960s, they are even

worse today. Indeed, the employment woes of low-skilled black men represent part of what I have called "the new urban poverty." By the new urban poverty, I mean poor, segregated neighborhoods in which substantial proportions of adults are unemployed, have dropped out of the labor force, or never participated in it at all. This jobless poverty today stands in sharp contrast to previous periods when the working poor predominated in urban ghettos. In 1950, for example, a substantial portion of the inner-city adult population was poor, but they held jobs (Wilson 1996). Now many adults are disconnected from the labor market.

When I speak of "joblessness" I am not referring solely to official unemployment. The unemployment rate includes only those workers in the official labor force, that is, those who are actively looking for work. I use the term "jobless" to refer not only to those who are looking for work but also to those who are outside of or have dropped out of the labor market, including millions of adult males who appear in the census statistics but are not recorded in the labor market statistics.

These uncounted males are disproportionately represented in inner-city neighborhoods. For example, take the three neighborhoods that form the historic core of Chicago's Black Belt: Douglas, Grand Boulevard, and Washington Park. In 1950, 69 percent of out-of-school males age fourteen and over who lived in these three neighborhoods worked for pay during a typical week, and in 1960 64 percent of this group were employed. However, by 1990 only 37 percent of out-of-school males age sixteen or over in these neighborhoods held jobs during a typical week. Over the last three decades, low-skilled African American males have encountered increasing difficulty gaining access to jobs—even menial jobs that pay no more than minimum wage. The ranks of idle inner-city men have swelled since 1970, and include a growing proportion of adult males who routinely work in and tolerate low-wage jobs when they are available (Wilson 1996).

The impact of this joblessness is reflected in real earnings, that is, earnings adjusted for inflation. For example, between 2000 and 2004 the average real annual earnings of twenty-four-year-old black males in the bottom quarter of the earnings distribution (the 25th percentile) were only $1,078, compared with $9,623 and $9,843 respectively for their Latino and white male counterparts.[1] For purposes of comparison, in the 75th percentile of the earnings distribution, average annual earnings for twenty-four-year-old black males were $22,000, compared with $22,800 and $30,000 for Latino and white males respectively. The really significant discrepancy is for those in the 25th percentile.

The extremely low annual average earnings for black males at the 25th percentile of the earnings distribution results from the fact that many of them were jobless during this period, including those who had completely given up looking for work and had virtually no reported income. These men are heavily concentrated in poor inner-city neighborhoods.

Many of these jobless men are high school dropouts. The situation for black male high school dropouts is especially bleak. A recent report by Andrew Sum and his colleagues at Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies reveals that "only 1 of every 3 young black male high school dropouts was able to obtain any type of employment during an average month in 2005" and only 23 percent of these males were able to find full-time employment during an average week. The report appropriately points out that "many of these young men will end up being involved in criminal activity during their late teens and early twenties and then bear the severe economic consequences for convictions and incarceration over the remainder of their working lives" (Sum et al. 2007, 2–3).

Given the severity of unemployment and underemployment, the relatively low proportion of young African American men with higher education has significant social ramifications. There has been a growing gender gap in college degree attainment in recent years, with women exceeding men in the rate of college completion. This discrepancy is particularly acute among African Americans. Black women have significantly higher college completion rates than black men, and the gap has widened steadily over the past 25 years. In 1979, for every 100 bachelor's degrees awarded to black men, 144 were received by black women. In 2003–2004, for every 100 bachelor's degrees granted to black men, 200 were conferred on black women. By contrast, for every 100 bachelor's degrees earned by white and Hispanic men respectively, 131 were earned by white women and 155 by Hispanic women (Sum et al. 2007).

The significant and growing discrepancy in the college attainment rate of black men and black women has important social and economic consequences for the black community as well as the larger society because the economic returns to college investment are very high for black males. Figure 4.1, which provides data on the employment/population ratio—the percentage of young men who were not in school and who were employed in 2005—reveals that there is very little difference in employment rates of black and white college graduates: 88.3 percent for whites and 86.2 percent for blacks. The employment gap widens with lower levels of education. The gap between white and black young males ages sixteen to twenty-four who were not in school in 2005 declined from 20 percentage points for high school dropouts to 16 percent among high school graduates, 8 percent for those completing 1 to 3 years of college, and only 2 percent for four-year college graduates. Education plays a key role in enabling black men to secure employment.

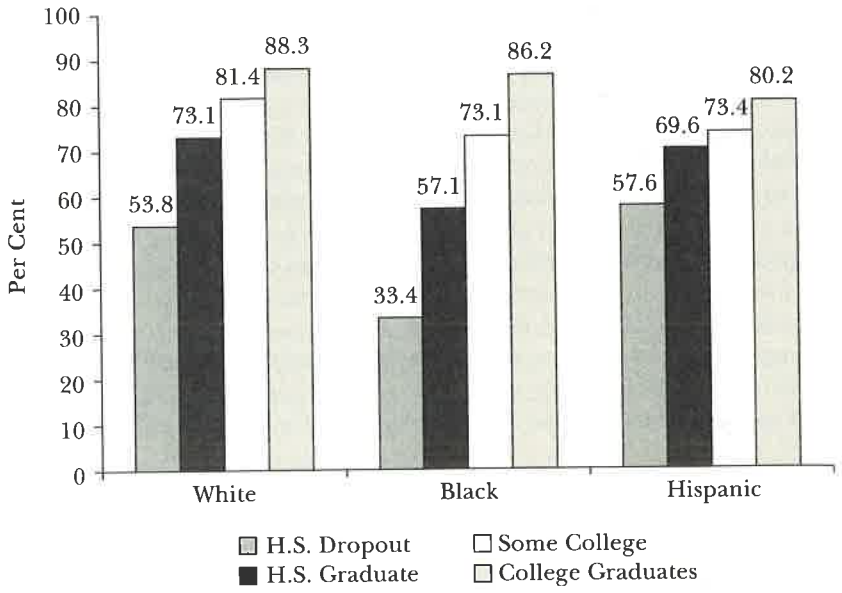

Figure 4.1. Employment/population ratios of non-enrolled sixteen- to-twenty-four-year-old males by educational attainment and race/ethnic group, 2005. Adapted from Andrew Sum, Ishwar Khatiwada, Joseph McLaughlin, and Paulo Tobar, "The Educational Attainment of the Nation's Young Black Men and Their Recent Labor Market Experiences: What Can Be Done to Improve Their Future Labor Market and Educational Prospects?" Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, Boston, February 2007.

Similarly, the relative size of the gap in annual earnings between black men and all men ages twenty to twenty-nine decreases as the educational attainment of black men rises. The median annual earnings of black male dropouts in 2004–2005 were only equivalent to 15 percent of those of male dropouts in all racial-ethnic groups. However, that figure increased to 64 percent for high school graduates and 96 percent for those with bachelor's degrees. The disparity in the earnings of black and nonblack men is much less among high school graduates than among dropouts and almost vanishes among college graduates (Figure 4.2).

Explanations of the Economic Plight of Low-Skilled Black Men

What has caused the deterioration in the employment prospects of low-skilled black males and hence their remarkably lower earnings? I highlight several major factors, both structural and cultural, in explaining

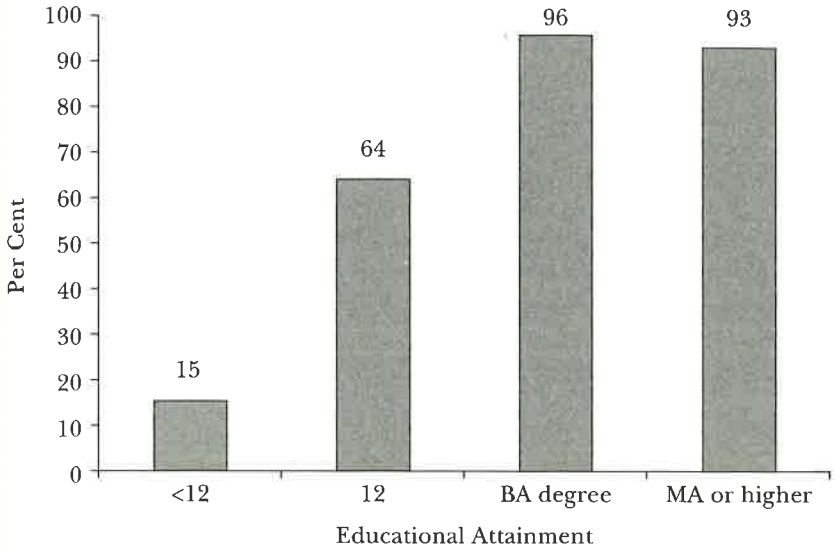

Figure 4.2. Ratio of median annual earnings of twenty- to-twenty-nine-year-old black men to all men by educational attainment, 2004–2005. Adapted from Andrew Sum, Ishwar Khatiwada, Joseph McLaughlin, and Paulo Tobar, "The Educational Attainment of the Nation's Young Black Men and Their Recent Labor Market Experiences: What Can Be Done to Improve Their Future Labor Market and Educational Prospects?" Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, Boston, February 2007.

this situation. The structural factors include those that are nonracial and are shared more or less by all low-income males, and those that are racial and pertain specifically to black males.

Structural Factors

Although African American men continue to confront racial barriers in the labor market, many inner-city black males have also been victimized by the declining relative demand for low-skilled labor. The propagation of new technologies is displacing untrained workers and rewarding those with specialized, technical training, while the globalization of the economy is increasingly pitting low-skilled workers in the United States against their counterparts around the world, including laborers in Third World countries such as China, India, and Bangladesh. Because of the decreasing relative demand for low-skilled labor, workers face the growing threat of wage declines and job displacement (Katz 1996; Schwartzman 1997).

Over the past several decades, black males have experienced sharp job losses in the manufacturing sector. While Hispanics have suffered the largest loss in manufacturing jobs over the long term, more recent losses have been worse among African Americans. According to John Schmitt and Ben Zipperer of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, the proportion of black workers who are employed in manufacturing decreased from 23.9 percent in 1979 to 10.1 percent in 2006. Whites experienced slightly smaller drops (from 23.5 to 11.9 percent), while Hispanics experienced a larger decline (from 30.2 percent to 11.9 percent). However, since 1996 black declines in manufacturing (from 16.0 to 10.1 percent) slightly exceeded those of whites (from 16.5 to 11.5 percent) and Hispanics (from 18.1 to 12.6 percent). The dwindling proportion of African American workers in manufacturing is important because manufacturing jobs, especially those in the auto industry, have been a significant source of better-paid employment for black Americans since World War II (Schmitt and Zipperer 2007).

The declining proportion of black workers in manufacturing parallels their decreasing involvement in unions. From 1983 to 2006 the proportion of all African American workers who were either in unions or represented by a union at their employment site dropped considerably from 31.7 percent to 16.0 percent (Schmitt and Zipperer 2007). This reduction (down 15.7 percentage points) was greater than that for whites (down 8.9 percentage points) and Hispanics (down 13.5 percentage points). The lack of union representation renders workers more vulnerable in the workplace, especially to cuts in wages and benefits.

Labor markets today are mainly regional, and long commutes in automobiles are common. Most ghetto residents cannot afford an automobile and have to rely on public transit systems that make the connection between inner-city neighborhoods and suburban job locations difficult and time-consuming, or even impossible. For example, research conducted in the Chicago ghetto areas revealed that only 19 percent of residents have access to an automobile. To make matters worse, many inner-city residents lack information or knowledge about suburban job opportunities. In isolated inner-city neighborhoods, the breakdown of the informal job information network aggravates the problem of the spatial mismatch between workplace and residence (Wilson 1996).

The heavy child support payments now required of noncustodial parents under federal law present a daunting problem, as Harry Holzer and his colleagues remind us. Such payments represent an employment tax of 36 percent of a worker's wages, and if the noncustodial father is in arrears, the federal law allows states to deduct as much as 65 percent of his wages. Many of those who face this higher tax are ex-offenders whose delinquent child support payments accumulated while they were

in prison. High child support payments function as a disincentive to remain in the formal labor market and an incentive to move into the casual or informal labor market (Holzer, Offner, and Sorensen 2003).

For inner-city black male workers, the problems created by these nonracial factors have been aggravated by employers' negative attitudes. This racial factor affects black males especially seriously. Interviews of a representative sample of Chicago-area employers conducted by my research team in the late 1980s revealed that a substantial majority of employers considered inner-city black males to be uneducated, uncooperative, unstable, or dishonest (Wilson 1996).[2] For example, a suburban drug store manager commented:

> It's unfortunate but, in my business I think overall [black men] tend to be known to be dishonest. I think that's too bad but that's the image they have.
>
> *Interviewer*: So you think it's an image problem?
>
> *Respondent*: An image problem of being dishonest men and lazy. They're known to be lazy. They are [laughs]. I hate to tell you, but. . . . It's all an image though. Whether they are or not, I don't know, but, it's an image that is perceived.
>
> *Interviewer*: I see. How do you think that image was developed?
>
> *Respondent*: Go look in the jails [laughs].

The president of an inner-city manufacturing firm expressed a different reservation about employing black males from certain ghetto neighborhoods:

> If somebody gave me their address, uh, Cabrini Green I might unavoidably have some concerns.
>
> *Interviewer*: What would your concerns be?
>
> *Respondent*: That the poor guy probably would be frequently unable to get to work and . . . I probably would watch him more carefully even if it wasn't fair, than I would with somebody else. I know what I should do though is recognize that here's a guy that is trying to get out of his situation and probably will work harder than somebody else who's already out of there and he might be the best one around here. But I think I would have to struggle accepting that premise at the beginning.

Because of the prevalence of such attitudes, the lack of access to informal job networks is a notable problem for black males. The importance of knowing someone who knows the boss is suggested by another employer's comments to our interviewer:

> All of a sudden, they take a look at a guy, and unless he's got an in, the reason why I hired this black kid the last time is cause my neighbor said to me, yeah I used him for a few [days], he's good, and I said, you know what, I'm going to take a chance. But it was a recommendation. But other than that, I've got a walk-in, and, who knows? And I think that for the most part, a guy sees a black man, he's a bit hesitant.

These attitudes are classic examples of what social scientists call statistical discrimination: employers make generalizations about inner-city black male workers and reach decisions based on those assumptions without reviewing the qualifications of an individual applicant. The net effect is that many inner-city black male applicants are never given the opportunity to prove their qualifications. Although some of these men eschew entry-level jobs because of the poor working conditions and low wages, many others would readily accept such employment. Statistical discrimination, although involving elements of class bias against poor urban workers, is clearly a racially biased practice. Far more inner-city black males are effectively screened out of employment than Hispanic or white males applying for the same jobs.

Unfortunately, the restructuring of the economy has compounded the negative effects of employers' attitudes toward inner-city black males. Today, most of the new jobs for workers with limited education and experience are in the service sector, which includes jobs that tend to be held by women, such as waitstaff, sales clerks, and nurse's aides. Indeed, "employment rates of young black women now exceed those of young black men, even though many of these women must also care for children" (Holzer, Offner, and Sorensen 2003). The shift to service jobs has resulted in a greater demand for workers who can effectively serve and relate to the consumer. Many employers in our study felt that, unlike women and immigrants (who have recently expanded the labor pool for service-sector jobs), inner-city black males lack these qualities. Instead, low-skilled black males are perceived as dangerous or threatening. In the past, all that men had to demonstrate was a strong back and muscles for heavy lifting and physical labor in a factory, at a construction site, or on an assembly line. They did not have to interact with customers. Today, they have to search for work in the service sector, and employers are less likely to hire them because they have to come into contact with the public. Consequently, black male job-seekers face rising rates of rejection.

The difficulties experienced by low-skilled black males in the labor market are even greater for those who have prison records. The ranks of ex-offenders have increased significantly over the past several decades. Indeed, rates of incarceration have soared even during periods when the crime rate has declined. Finding employment has become exceedingly difficult for poor black males for many reasons, but the problem is even worse for those with prison records. According to one estimate, as many as 30 percent of all civilian young adult black males ages sixteen to thirty-four are ex-offenders; a significant proportion of them are high-school dropouts with prison records. Becky Pettit and Bruce Western estimate that "among [black] male high school dropouts the risk of imprisonment had increased to 60 percent, establishing incarceration

as a normal stopping point on the route to midlife" (2004). Their high incarceration rates are closely connected to their high jobless rates. It is a vicious cycle. Initial joblessness prompts illegal money-making activities that result in incarceration, which then leads to even more intractable joblessness.

The Role of Culture

Forced to turn to the low-wage service sector for employment, inner-city black males, a significant proportion of whom are ex-offenders, have to compete with the growing number of female and immigrant workers. Often they are unsuccessful. The more these men complain or manifest their job dissatisfaction, the less attractive they seem to employers. They therefore encounter greater discrimination when they search for employment. Since the feelings many inner-city black males express about their jobs and job prospects reflect their plummeting position in a changing economy, it is important to link attitudinal and other cultural traits with the opportunity structure (Wilson 1996).

According to my colleague Orlando Patterson, not enough attention is given to the cultural dimension of urban black men's employment problems. Patterson argues that "a deep seated dogma . . . has prevailed in the social science and policy circles since the mid-1960s: the rejection of any explanation that invokes a group's cultural attributes—its distinctive attitudes, values and predispositions, and the resulting behavior of its members—and the relentless preference for relying on structural factors like low incomes, joblessness, poor schools and bad housing." He asks, "Why do so many young unemployed black men have children—several of them—which they have no resources or intention to support? And why . . . do they murder each other at nine times the rate of white youths?" Why do young black males turn their backs on low-wage jobs that immigrants are happy to fill? (Patterson 2006). Referring to research conducted by Roger Waldinger (1996), Patterson states that these jobs enabled the chronically unemployed to enter the labor market and to acquire basic work skills that they later used to secure better jobs, but that the takers were mostly immigrants.

Patterson also refers to anecdotal evidence collected several years ago by one of his students, who visited her former high school to discover why "almost all the black girls graduated and went to college whereas nearly all the black boys either failed to graduate or did not go on to college." Her distressing finding was that all the black boys were fully aware of the consequences of failing to graduate from high school and go on to college; they told her indignantly, "we're not stupid!" So, Patterson asks, "why were they flunking out?" The candid answer that these young

men gave to his former student was their preference for what Patterson called the "cool-pose culture" of young black men, which they found too fulfilling to give up.[3] "For these young men, it was almost like a drug, hanging out on the street after school, shopping and dressing sharply, sexual conquests, party drugs, hip-hop music and culture" (Patterson 2006).

Patterson maintains that this culture blatantly promotes the most anomalous and counterproductive models of behavior in urban lower-class neighborhoods, featuring "gangsta-rap," predatory sexuality, and irresponsible paternity. "It is reasonable to conclude," he states, "that among a large number of urban, Afro-American lower-class young men, these models are now fully normative and that men act in accordance with them whenever they can" (2000, 217). For example, Patterson argues that male pride has increasingly become defined in terms of the impregnation of women. This orientation is not unique to the current generation of young black males, he notes. Several decades ago the sociologist Lee Rainwater (1969) uncovered a similar pattern. A majority of the inner-city young black male respondents he interviewed stated that they were indifferent to the fact that their girlfriends were pregnant; some even expressed pride because getting a girl pregnant proves that you are a man! The fact that Elijah Anderson and others discovered identical patterns (Anderson 1990; Majors and Billson 1992; Nightingale 1993) decades later suggests a process of cultural transmission within black communities (Patterson 2000).

Patterson maintains that social scientists have shied away from cultural explanations because of the widespread belief that such explanations inherently blame the victim, that a focus on internal behavioral factors leads to the conclusion that the poor are responsible for their own poverty and social problems, rather than assigning causality to the nefarious and deleterious aspects of the environment. He contends that this view, which has often been put forth by conservatives, is "utterly bogus." To hold an individual responsible for his behavior is not to rule out any consideration of the environmental factors that may have evoked the questionable behavior to begin with. "Many victims of child abuse end up behaving in self-destructive ways," he argues, so "to point out the link between their behavior and the destructive acts is in no way to deny the causal role of their earlier victimization and the need to address it" (2006). Likewise, he contends, a cultural explanation of black male self-destructiveness not only speaks to the immediate relationship between their attitudes and behavior and the undesirable outcomes, but it also examines their brutalized past, perhaps over generations, to investigate the origins and changing nature of these attitudes. Patterson maintains that we cannot understand "the high rates of homicide, predatory sexuality and irresponsible fathering" of young black males without a deep examination of African Americans' collective historical experience.

Although I believe that Patterson tends to downplay the importance of immediate socioeconomic factors that are currently affecting black males' life chances, I fully concur with his view that cultural explanations should be part of any attempt to account for such behavior and outcomes. When we speak of cultural attributes we are referring to distinctive values, norms, attitudes, and predispositions held by a group, and the behavior of a group's members that stem from such attributes.

Not only is it exceedingly difficult to determine the relative importance of cultural and structural factors in explaining the situation and actions of young black males, but I firmly believe that to attempt to analyze them separately, rather than examining how they interact, is a serious mistake. If we are going to consider social and economic factors that over time contributed to the development of certain cultural traits and behavior patterns, we also have to give serious attention to the immediate effects of structural conditions. Social structures and cultures combine and interact to shape attitudes and behavior in a myriad of complex ways. A few examples illustrate this process.

Patterson contends that low-skilled black males do not pursue menial jobs that immigrants readily accept. However, he fails to discuss developments that were uncovered in our ethnographic research in Chicago: that many young black males, who now have to compete with women and immigrants in the low-wage service sector, have experienced repeated failures in their job search, have given up hope, and no longer even bother to look for work.[4] This defeatism was due in no small measure to employers' negative attitudes and actions toward low-skilled black males. Repeated failure results in resignation and the development of cultural attitudes that discourage the pursuit of steady employment in the formal labor market.

Furthermore, it is difficult to account for the higher dropout rate and lower academic achievement of black males in comparison with black females without taking into account the negative experiences of young black males in the labor market, even those who have graduated from high school. Black males are far less likely than black females to see a strong relationship between their schooling and post-school employment. I believe that the evolution of "cool-pose culture" is partly a response to that feeling of discouragement and sense of futility.

The relative lack of commitment to fatherhood among many inner-city men is a cultural problem that may have its origins in past experiences over the generations, but it is also related to more immediate restrictions on opportunities. Many inner-city fathers today, even those

who are not typically street corner men, have low self-efficacy when it comes to fatherhood, whether they are willing to admit it or not. Included among the norms of fatherhood is the obligation to provide adequate and consistent material support. Continuing lack of success in the labor market reduces the ability of many inner-city men to support their children adequately, which in turn lowers their self-confidence as providers and creates antagonistic relations with the mothers of their children. Convenient rationalizations emerge, shared and reinforced by the men in these constricted economic situations, which reject the institution of marriage in ways that enhance, rather than diminish, their self-esteem. The outcome is a failure to meet the societal norms of fatherhood that is even more widespread than reported by Liebow in 1967.

I strongly concur with Orlando Patterson that an adequate cultural explanation of young black male self-destructiveness must explore the origins and changing nature of attitudes that go back for generations, even centuries. Such analyses are complex and difficult. For example, Kathryn Neckerman provides a historical perspective to explain why so many black youngsters and their parents lose faith in the public schools. She shows in her book, *Schools Betrayed* (2007), that a century ago, when African American children in most northern cities attended schools alongside white children, the problems commonly associated with inner-city schools were not nearly as pervasive as they are today. She carefully documents how and why these schools came to serve black children so much more poorly than their white counterparts. Focusing on Chicago public schools between 1900 and 1960, Neckerman compares the circumstances of blacks and white immigrants—groups that had similarly little wealth and status yet received vastly different benefits from their educations. Their divergent educational outcomes, she contends, were the result of decisions made systematically by Chicago officials to deal with the increasing African American migration to the city by segregating schools and denying equal resources to African American students. Those decisions reinforced inequality in the schools over time. Ultimately, these policies and practices eroded the schools' legitimacy in the lower-class black community and dampened aspirations for education. "The roots of classroom alienation, antagonism, and disorder can be found in school policy decisions made long before the problems of inner-city schools attracted public attention," Neckerman concludes. "These policies struck at the foundations of authority and engagement, making it much more difficult for inner-city teachers to gain student cooperation in learning. The district's history of segregation and inequality undermined school legitimacy in the eyes of its black students; as a result, inner-city teachers struggled to gain cooperation from children and parents, who had little reason to trust the school" (2007, 74). We need more studies like this to fully understand the current cultural dynamics in inner-city neighborhoods.

Finally, Patterson argues that while culture "partly determines behavior, it also enables people to change behavior" (2006). He states that culture provides a frame for individuals to understand their world. By ignoring culture or only investigating it at a superficial level, as a set of styles or performances, social scientists miss an opportunity to reframe attitudes in a way that promotes desirable behavior and outcomes. I concur. However, reframing attitudes is often difficult without accompanying programs to address structural inequities. For example, I argue that programs focusing on the cultural problems pertaining to fatherhood, including attitudes concerning paternity, without confronting the broader and more fundamental issues of restricted economic opportunities have limited prospects of success. In my view, the most effective fatherhood programs in the inner city will be those that address attitudes, norms, and behaviors in combination with local and national attempts to improve job opportunities. Only then will fathers have a realistic chance to care for their children adequately and envision a better life for themselves.

Social Policies and Programs

What social policies and programs are most likely to improve the employment prospects of young low-skilled black males, including those with prison records, and could be instituted alongside activities intended to change self-destructive attitudes?

First, programs such as the Job Corps and Youth Build should be expanded to help young people who are unemployed and in need of training and assistance in locating and securing jobs. Skilled training programs, similar to STRIVE and Project Quest, which include instruction in both soft (or "people") skills and hard (or technical) skills and job placement, should also be expanded. Restoring funding for job training under the Workforce Investment Act would be helpful in this regard, as would providing more funds to increase job placement and transportation programs, such as America Works, in inner-city neighborhoods (Giloth 2003).

We should review ways to relieve the work disincentives associated with mandatory child support payments. I agree with Harry Holzer and his colleagues that various forms of "arrearage forgiveness" ought to be considered, especially for men who fell far behind in child support payments while spending time in prison (Holzer, Offner, and Sorensen 2003).

Transition programs should be created to facilitate the successful reentry of incarcerated men into society. These programs might include

a period of soft and hard skills training and job counseling prior to the prisoner's release and job placement assistance upon release.

Since joblessness is closely associated with incarceration, ideally we want programs to improve the employment prospects of young men before they commit crimes. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 42 percent of black youths who had not enrolled in college had jobs in October after graduating from high school in June, compared with 69 percent of their white counterparts. The figures for black youngsters in inner-city neighborhoods, especially black males, are even lower.

Accordingly, I think that it is vitally important to promote school-to-work transitions in inner-city neighborhoods through internships and apprenticeships, especially for high school seniors. Successful school-to-work programs will depend on the cooperation of employers, who should be encouraged by political leaders to create internship and apprenticeship opportunities for secondary-level students. The Career Academies programs, which increased the post-school earnings of the young men who participated, should be widely publicized in efforts to generate support for such initiatives.

Nearly 2,500 high schools have career academies, which have three distinguishing features: an organizational structure featuring a school-within-a-school; curricula that combine academic and occupational courses organized around a career theme; and partnerships with employers. The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) recently evaluated this program using a random assignment design and found that school academies had substantial long-term effects on the earnings of young men, especially minority men. These programs included summer and after-school jobs provided by employers, which enabled these young men to gain work experience. Such programs should be widely publicized and expanded, especially in poor communities of color.

Finally, the City University of New York (CUNY) recently instituted a program called the Black Male Initiative to increase enrollment in college. This program could become a model for other universities and colleges around the country. In 2004, campuses in the CUNY system were funded to establish demonstration projects designed to improve both enrollment and college graduation rates of disadvantaged students, particularly black males; to increase opportunities for individuals without a high school diploma to enroll in GED courses oriented toward college preparation; and to provide support for formerly incarcerated individuals to enroll in college. The importance of increasing the educational attainment of black men cannot be overstated; that is why the CUNY Black Male Initiative is so timely and important.

All these programs are modest and realistic and ought to receive the support of policymakers who are concerned about the worsening plight of young black men growing up poor in the inner city. If these structural programs are combined with those dedicated to addressing self-destructive attitudes and norms, programs focused on patterns of behavior will be more effective.

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Chapter 5

Blacklisted: Hiring Discrimination in an Era of Mass Incarceration

Devah Pager

Jerome arrived at a branch of a national restaurant chain in a suburb twenty miles from Milwaukee. He immediately sensed that he was the only black person in the place. An employee hurried over to him, "Can I help you with something?" "I'm here about the job you advertised," he replied. The employee nodded reluctantly and went off to produce an application form. Jerome filled out the form, including information about his criminal background. He was given a math test and a personality test. He was then instructed to wait for the manager to speak with him. The manager came out after about ten minutes, looked over Jerome's application, and frowned when he noticed the criminal history information. Without asking any questions about the context of the conviction, the manager started to lecture: "You can't be screwing up like this at your age. A kid like you can ruin his whole life like this." Jerome began to explain that he had made a mistake and had learned his lesson, but the manager cut him off: "I'll look over your application and call if we have a position for you."

Jerome could have been any one of the hundreds of thousands of young black men released from prison each year who face bleak employment prospects as a result of their race and criminal record. In this case, Jerome happened to be working for me. He was one of four college students I had hired as "testers" for a study of employment discrimination. An articulate, attractive, hard-working young man, Jerome was assigned to apply for entry-level job openings throughout the Milwaukee metropolitan area, presenting a fictitious profile designed to represent a realistic ex-offender. Comparing the outcomes of Jerome's job search to those of three other black and white testers presenting identical qualifications with and without criminal records gives us a direct measure of the effects of race and a criminal record, and of possible interactions between the two, in shaping employment opportunities. In

this essay I consider the ways in which high rates of incarceration among African Americans may fuel contemporary stereotypes about the criminal tendencies of young black men. The evidence reviewed here suggests that the disproportionate growth of criminal justice intervention in the lives of young black men and the corresponding media coverage of this phenomenon, which presents an even more skewed representation, has likely played an important role in reinforcing deep-seated associations between race and crime, with implications for employment discrimination and broader forms of social disfranchisement.

Racial Stereotypes in an Era of Mass Incarceration

Over the past three decades, we have seen an unprecedented expansion of the criminal justice system, with rates of incarceration increasing more than fivefold from 1970 to 2000. Today the United States boasts the highest rate of incarceration in the world, with over two million individuals currently behind bars. The expansive reach of the criminal justice system has not affected all groups equally: African Americans have been more acutely affected by the boom in incarceration than any other group. Blacks comprise over 40 percent of the current prison population, although they are just 12 percent of the U.S. population. At any given time, roughly 12 percent of all young black men between the ages of twenty-five and twenty-nine are behind bars, compared to less than 2 percent of whites in the same age group. Roughly a third of young black men are under criminal justice supervision (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2006, 2000, Table 1.29).[1] Over the course of a lifetime, nearly one in three young black men—and well over half of young black high school dropouts—will spend some time in prison. According to these estimates, young black men are more likely to go to prison than to attend college, serve in the military, or, in the case of high school dropouts, to be in the labor market (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1997; Pettit and Western 2004). Imprisonment is no longer a rare or extreme event among our nation's most marginalized groups. Rather, it has now become a normal and anticipated marker in the transition to adulthood.

In addition to the unprecedented reach of incarceration in the lives of young black men today, these trends have troubling consequences that may extend well beyond the prison walls. There is good reason to believe that the mass incarceration of black men contributes to continuing discrimination against the group as a whole, not only those with criminal records, by reinforcing the association of criminality with African Americans that has long been a feature of racial prejudice in the U.S. African American men have long been regarded with suspicion and fear. In contrast to progressive trends in other racial attitudes that have occurred in

recent decades, associations between race and crime have changed little. Survey respondents consistently rate blacks as more prone to violence than any other American racial or ethnic group, endorsing stereotypes of aggressiveness and violence most frequently in their ratings of African Americans (Sneiderman and Piazza 1993; Smith 1991). The stereotype of blacks as criminals is deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of whites, irrespective of their level of prejudice or personal beliefs (Devine and Elliot 1995; Eberhardt et al. 2004, 7; Graham and Lowery 2004).

Although the current prevalence of racial stereotypes cannot be traced to any single source, the disproportionate growth of criminal justice intervention in the lives of young black men, compounded by skewed media coverage of this phenomenon, has likely played an important role. Experimental research shows that exposure to news coverage of a violent incident committed by a black perpetrator not only increases punitive attitudes about crime but further increases negative attitudes about blacks generally (Gilliam and Iyengar 2000; Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon, and Wright 1996; Entman 1990). The more exposure whites have to images of blacks in custody or behind bars, the stronger their expectations become regarding the race of assailants and the criminal tendencies of black strangers.

The consequences of mass incarceration may well extend far beyond the costs to the individuals behind bars, the families that are disrupted, and the communities whose residents cycle in and out.[2] The criminal justice system may itself legitimate and reinforce deeply embedded racial stereotypes, contributing to the persistent chasm in this society between black and white.

The Credentialing of Stigma

For each individual processed through the criminal justice system, police records, court documents, and corrections databases detail arrests, charges, convictions, and terms of incarceration. Most states make these records publicly available, often through online repositories, accessible to employers, landlords, creditors, and other interested parties.[3] As increasing numbers of occupations, public services, and other social goods become off limits to ex-offenders, these records can be used as the official basis for determining eligibility or exclusion. The state serves as a credentialing institution, providing official and public certification of those among us who have been convicted of wrongdoing. The "credential" of a criminal record, like educational or professional credentials, constitutes a formal and enduring classification of social status, which can be used to regulate access and opportunity across numerous social, economic, and political domains.

In the labor market, the criminal credential has become a salient marker for employers, with increasing numbers making use of background checks to screen out undesirable applicants. The majority of employers claim that they would not knowingly hire an applicant with a criminal background. These employers show little concern about the specific information conveyed by a criminal conviction and its bearing on a particular job, but rather view this credential as an indicator of "general employability" or trustworthiness (Holzer 1996, 60).[4] Well beyond the single incident at its origin, the credential comes to stand for a broader internal disposition.

The power of the credential lies in its recognition as an official and legitimate means of evaluating and classifying individuals.[5] The negative credential of a criminal record offers formal certification of the offenders among us, and official notice of those demographic groups most commonly implicated. But credentials have effects that reach beyond their formalized domain. Particularly in cases where the certification of a particular status is largely overlapping with other status markers, such as race, gender, and age, public assumptions about who is and is not a "credential holder" may become generalized or exaggerated. Because blacks are so strongly associated with the population under correctional supervision, it becomes easy to assume that any given young black man is likely to have, or to be on his way to acquiring, a criminal record. According to legal scholar David Cole, "when the results of the criminal justice system are as racially disproportionate as they are today, the criminal stigma extends beyond the particular behaviors and individuals involved to reach all young black men, and to a lesser extent all black people. The criminal justice system contributes to a stereotyped and stigmatic view of African Americans as potential criminals" (1995, 2561). Invoking this formal category may legitimate forms of social exclusion that, based on ascriptive characteristics alone, would be more difficult to justify.[6] In this way, negative credentials make possible a new rationale for exclusion that reinforces and legitimates existing social cleavages.

To understand the workings and effects of this negative credential, we must rely on more than speculation as to when and how these official labels are invoked as the basis for enabling or denying opportunity. Because credentials are often highly correlated with other indicators of social status or stigma, especially race, gender, class, we must examine their direct and independent impact. In addition, credentials may affect certain groups differently from others, with the official marker of criminality carrying more or less stigma depending on the race of its bearer. As increasing numbers of young black men are marked by their contact with the criminal justice system, it becomes a critical priority to understand the costs and consequences of this now prevalent form of negative credential.

Applying for Jobs in White and Black, With and Without a Criminal Record

This study uses an experimental audit methodology to measure the extent to which race and criminal backgrounds represent barriers to employment. The basic design of an employment audit involves sending matched pairs of individuals, called testers, to apply for real job openings in order to see whether employers respond differently to applicants on the basis of specific characteristics. The current study included four male testers, two black and two white, matched into two teams; the two black testers formed one team, and the two white testers formed a second. The testers were college students from Milwaukee who were matched on the basis of age, race, physical appearance, and general style of self-presentation. They were assigned fictitious resumes that reflected equivalent levels of education (high school degree) and work experience (steady employment across a range of entry-level jobs). Within each team, one tester was randomly assigned a "criminal record" for the first week; the pair then rotated which member presented himself as the ex-offender for each successive week of employment searches, so that each tester served in the criminal record condition for an equal number of cases.[7] By varying which member of the pair presented himself as having a criminal record, unobserved differences within the pairs of applicants were effectively controlled.

The testers participated in a common training program to become familiar with the details of their assumed profile and to ensure uniform behavior in job interviews. The training period lasted for one week, during which testers participated in mock interviews with one another and practice interviews with cooperating employers. The testers were trained to respond to common interview questions in standardized ways, and were well rehearsed for a wide range of scenarios that emerge in employment situations. Frequent communication between myself and the testers throughout each day of fieldwork allowed for regular supervision and troubleshooting in the event of unexpected occurrences.

A random sample of entry-level positions requiring no previous experience and no education beyond high school was drawn each week from the Sunday classified advertisement section of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. In addition, I drew a supplemental sample from Jobnet, a state-sponsored website for employment listings that was developed in connection with Wisconsin's W-2 Welfare-to-Work initiatives.[8] I excluded from the sample those occupations with legal restrictions on ex-offenders, such as jobs in the health care industry, work with children and the elderly, jobs requiring handling firearms (e.g., security guards), and jobs in the public sector.

Each of the audit pairs was randomly assigned fifteen job openings each week. The white pair and the black pair were assigned separate sets of jobs, with the same-race testers applying to the same jobs.[9] One member of the pair applied first, with the second applying one day later; whether the ex-offender came first or second was determined randomly. A total of 350 employers were audited during the course of this study, 150 by the white pair and 200 by the black pair. The black team performed additional tests because black testers received fewer callbacks on average than whites did; in this situation, a larger sample size enables the calculation of more precise estimates of the effects under investigation.

Immediately after submitting a job application, testers filled out a six-page response form that coded relevant information. Important variables included type of occupation, metropolitan status (city/suburb), wage, size of establishment, and race and sex of employer. Additionally, testers wrote detailed narratives describing the overall interaction and recording any statements on application forms or comments made by employers specifically related to race or criminal records.

The study focused only on the first stage of the employment process. Testers visited employers, filled out applications, and proceeded as far as they could during the course of one visit. If testers were asked to interview on the spot, they did so, but they did not return to the employer for a second visit. I therefore compare the results on the basis of the proportion of applications that elicited callbacks from employers. Individual voice mail boxes were set up for each tester to record employer responses. I focus on this initial stage of the employment process because it is the stage likely to be most affected by the barriers of race and a criminal record. Early on, employers have the least individualizing information about the applicant and are more likely to generalize on the basis of group-level, stereotyped characteristics. In a parallel case, a recent audit study of age discrimination found that 76 percent of the measured differential treatment occurred at this first stage of the employment process (Bendick, Jackson, and Reinoso 1994). Given that both race and a criminal record, like age, are highly salient characteristics, it is likely that as much, if not more, of the overall effects of racial criminal stigma will be detected at this stage.

A second advantage of the callback rather than a job offer as the key outcome variable is that it does not require employers to narrow their selection down to a single applicant. At the job offer stage, if presented with an ex-offender and an equally qualified non-offender, even employers with little concern over hiring ex-offenders would likely select the applicant with no criminal record, an arguably safer choice. Equating the two applicants could magnify the impact of the criminal record,

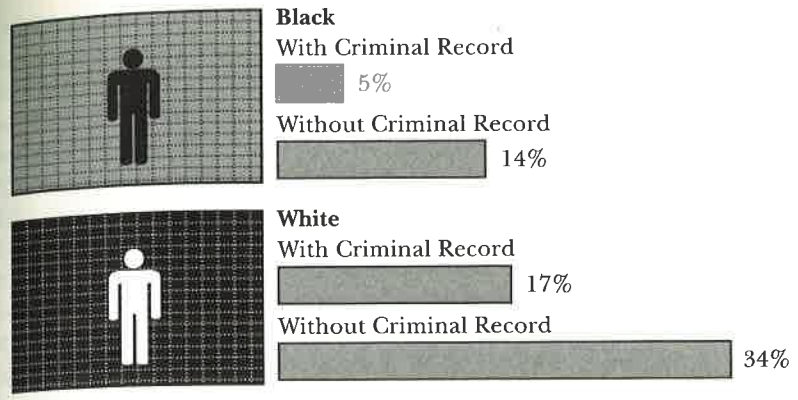

Figure 5.1. Effects of race and criminal background on employment. Bars represent percentage of callbacks received by each group. The effects of race and criminal record are large and statistically significant ($p < .01$). The interaction between the two is not significant in the full sample.

as it becomes the only remaining basis for selection between the two (Heckman 1998). The callback does not present such complications. Typically employers interview multiple candidates for entry-level positions before selecting a hire. In a telephone survey following the audit, employers in this study reported interviewing an average of eight applicants for the last entry-level position filled. At the callback stage, employers need not yet choose between the ex-offender and non-offender. If the applicants appear well qualified and the employer does not view the criminal record as an automatic disqualifier, he or she can interview them both.[10]

Racial Disparities in Hiring Outcomes

Results are based on the proportion of applications submitted by each tester which elicited callbacks from employers. Three main findings appear in the audit results, presented in Figure 5.1. First, there is a large and significant effect of a criminal record for white job seekers, with 34 percent of whites without criminal records receiving callbacks relative to only 17 percent of otherwise equally qualified whites with criminal records. A criminal record thus reduces the likelihood of a callback for whites by 50 percent. Second, there is some indication that the magnitude of the criminal record effect may be even larger for blacks than whites. While the interaction between race and criminal record is not statistically significant, the substantive difference is worth noting. While

the ratio of callbacks for non-offenders relative to offenders for whites was two to one (34 versus 17 percent), this same ratio for blacks was close to three to one (14 versus 5 percent).[11] Finally, looking at the callback rates for black and white tester pairs side by side, the fundamental importance of race becomes vividly clear. Among those without criminal records, black applicants were less than half as likely to receive a callback compared to equally qualified whites (14 versus 34 percent). This disparity implies that young black men needed to work more than twice as hard, applying to twice as many jobs, to secure the same opportunities as whites with identical qualifications. Even more striking, the powerful effects of race rival the strong stigma conveyed by a criminal record. In this study, a white applicant *with a criminal record* was just as likely to receive a callback as a black applicant without any criminal history (17 versus 14 percent).[12] Despite the fact that the white applicant revealed evidence of a felony drug conviction and reported having recently returned from a year and a half in prison, employers seemed to view this applicant as no more risky than a young black man with no history of criminal involvement. Racial disparities have been documented in many contexts, but here, comparing the two effects side by side, we are confronted with a troubling reality: in terms of one's chances of finding a job, being black in America today confers just about the same disadvantage as having a felony conviction.

In presentations of this research, I have often heard an audible gasp from the audience when I display these results. Could the effect of race really be so large? The magnitude of these effects stands in striking opposition to the prevailing wisdom that such blatant forms of discrimination have become vanishingly rare. It is tempting to think that there is something peculiar about this study, or about the time and place in which it was conducted, which offers an exaggerated view. When this study was conducted, Milwaukee was the second most segregated city in the country, implying great social distance between blacks and whites.[13] If race relations were more strained in Milwaukee than in other parts of the country, then the effects of race found there might be larger than what would be found in other urban areas. In fact, however, the magnitude of the race effect found in this study falls squarely within the range found in previous audit studies (Pager 2007a). An audit study in Washington, D.C., found that blacks were 24 percentage points less likely to receive a job offer than their white counterparts, a finding strikingly similar to the 20 percent difference between white and black non-offenders found here.[14]

Likewise, a recent field experiment by Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan (2003) found large effects of race among employers in Boston and Chicago. In this study, the researchers mailed resumes with

racially identifiable names to employers in the two cities. Their sample was restricted to listings for sales, administrative support, clerical, and customer service positions. Despite the narrower range of occupations and the higher level of qualifications presented in this study, these authors find clear evidence of racial bias. White male names triggered a callback rate of 9.19 percent, compared to 6.16 percent among black male names. The ratio of callbacks for whites to blacks (1.5), while smaller than the ratio of callbacks to white and black non-offenders from this study (2.4), strengthens our confidence that Milwaukee is not the only city in which race continues to matter.[15] A replication of our study in New York City obtained very similar results, with whites receiving callbacks at twice the rate of similarly qualified blacks (31 percent versus 15 percent), and white felons receiving callbacks at rates similar to those of blacks with no criminal history (17 percent versus 13 percent) (Pager, Western, and Bonikowski 2007).

Each of these studies reinforces the conclusion that race represents an extremely powerful barrier to job entry. The matched designs allow us to separate speculation about applicants' qualifications (supply-side influences) from the racial attributions or biases of employers (demand-side influences). While these studies remain silent on the many supply-side factors that may also contribute to the employment difficulties of young black men, they speak loud and clear about the significance of employers' racial biases or attributions in shaping the opportunities available to young black and white job seekers. Before applicants have an opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities in person, a large proportion are weeded out on the basis of a single categorical distinction.

Driving While Black: Associations Between Race and Crime

I received a call from Andre at about two o'clock one afternoon. He was calling me from his cell phone while sitting in the back of a police car. The police had stopped him at a freeway entrance on the way to one of his assignments. Though Andre had not committed any traffic violation, the police explained they were looking for someone who matched his description: "a black man, between the ages of 21 and 25." Andre was instructed to step out of his car and asked to take a seat in the back of the police vehicle. Passersby craned their necks to catch a glimpse of the latest criminal suspect who had been apprehended. The police asked him a long series of questions and called in his information to the station to have his background thoroughly checked. In the end, the police were satisfied that Andre was not the guy they were looking for and let him go. Andre had spent over an hour in the back of that police car.

We often hear popular accounts of the problems of "driving while black," the phenomenon that blacks are pulled over arbitrarily for police checks, with the implication that in some places any black man is automatically suspect (Harris 1994).[16] Over the course of the fieldwork for this study, I witnessed some of these episodes first hand. The young men serving as testers in my field experiment were bright college kids, models of discipline and hard work; yet in the course of their daily lives, they were at times mistaken for the troublemaker types featured on the nightly news. Particularly in casual encounters, while driving or when entering a place of business, there seemed little they could do to signal their distance from the dominant stereotype of the black male.[17]

On several occasions, black testers were asked in person, before submitting their applications, whether they had a prior criminal history. For these employers, a young black man immediately aroused concern about criminal involvement, and this issue took center stage before getting to matters of education, work experience, or qualifications. None of the white testers, by contrast, was asked about his criminal history up front.[18] These experiences are consistent with Elijah Anderson's account of the suspicion with which young black men are often viewed. According to Anderson, "the anonymous black male is usually an ambiguous figure who arouses the utmost caution and is generally considered dangerous until he proves he is not" (1990, 190).[19] Overcoming this initial stereotype is one of the first challenges facing the young black male job applicant, particularly in low-wage labor markets where fewer objective indicators, such as a college degree or related work history, are available for, or relevant to, the evaluation.

The effect of race demonstrated here is especially striking by virtue of its contrast with the effect of a criminal record. Seeing the two categories side by side drives home just how much race matters in employment contexts; being black is viewed as tantamount to being a convicted felon. These effects, however, should not be seen as independent. In an era of mass incarceration, when one in three young black men will wind up in prison, black men are readily associated with criminal activity in the minds of whites. High levels of incarceration cast a shadow of criminality over the black population as whole, implicating the majority of black men who have remained crime-free.

Race and Crime on TV

Racial stereotypes of black criminality are fueled by media coverage of crime, which tends to depict criminal episodes in a heavily racialized context. A study of local television news in Chicago found that the largest share of news stories featuring blacks (on any topic) portrayed

blacks as perpetrators of violent crimes (Entman 1990),[20] more often than news about Oprah, Michael Jordan, or Barack Obama (all Chicago residents), and more often than news about the thousands of black corporate leaders and community organizers in the city.

The frequency of coverage focusing on black criminals does have some basis in reality; higher arrest rates for blacks logically translate into greater news coverage of black accused criminals. But direct comparisons of local crime reports with corresponding arrest rates do not support a straightforward explanation. When Travis Dixon and Daniel Linz (2000) compared news reports about crime in the Los Angeles metro area with arrest rates from the California Department of Corrections, they found that blacks were 75 percent more likely to be represented as perpetrators in crime reports than their actual arrest rate would have predicted. White offenders, by contrast, were shown on television about 25 percent less often than their arrest rate would have predicted.[21] Existing racial disparities in criminal justice involvement tend to be exaggerated in the news, with blacks more often, and whites less often, shown in custody than actual crime statistics reveal to be true.

Other studies of race and crime in the news have found media coverage of black criminals to be skewed not only in frequency, but also in kind. A study by Richard Entman and Andrew Rojecki (2000) found that news coverage of blacks in custody was more likely to present mug shots (as opposed to a live image or an image taken prior to arrest), or images of blacks in handcuffs and under the physical restraints of a white police officer, than was coverage of whites in custody. Moreover, in coverage of individuals accused of violent crimes, local news broadcasts were nearly twice as likely to provide an on-screen name for whites (47 percent) as for blacks (26 percent). According to Entman and Rojecki, "The presence of the accused's name provides a sense of his or her individual identity. Its absence may suggest that individual identity does not matter, that the accused is part of a single undifferentiated group of violent offenders: just another Black criminal" (82). The more menacing and less individualized images of black suspects provide vivid "evidence" in support of racial stereotypes depicting blacks as dangerous, violent, and criminal.

With roughly 70 percent of Americans identifying television as the source of "most of your news about what's going on in the world today," media distortions of the frequency and severity of offending among blacks can have important consequences for how Americans think about race and how they think about crime (Mayer 1993; Sheley and Ashkins 1981). To begin with, the vast over-representation of black criminals in the news is linked to distorted images of the race-crime connection. A 1991 survey, for example, asked, "Of all the people arrested for

violent crimes in the United States last year, what percent do you think were black?" The modal response to this question was "60 percent," an exaggeration by roughly 35 percent of the actual proportion at that time.[22] Similarly, an experiment in which individuals were shown a short news clip describing a murder—in which the race of the alleged perpetrator was not identified—found that over 40 percent of subjects falsely recalled having seen a black perpetrator.[23] When the most common image of blacks on TV shows blacks as criminal offenders, the associations between race and crime become virtually automatic.[24]

Indeed, racial stereotypes of blacks as violent or crime-prone are among the most salient dimensions of contemporary stereotypes about African Americans. The associations remain deeply embedded in the unconscious, and can affect the cognitive processing and behavior of even those individuals who consciously repudiate racial stereotypes or discrimination (Eberhardt et al. 2004; Devine 1989; Payne 2001). Social psychological experiments have found that subjects are more likely to interpret ambiguous actions as threatening when the actor is portrayed as African American (Duncan 1976; Sagar and Schofield 1980).[25] Subjects instructed to "shoot" potentially armed targets (presented in a videogame) are more quick to do so when the target is African American (Correll, Wittenbrink, and Judd 2002). Through some combination of higher crime rates, media distortions, and cultural biases, race has become a powerful heuristic with which to assess danger.[26] Particularly in interactions that contain some ambiguity, or in decisions made under pressure, evaluations are easily colored by these pervasive (and largely unconscious) stereotypes about black aggressiveness or threat.

Findings such as these suggest that the characteristic of criminality is readily ascribed to blacks. Consequently, even blacks with no history of criminal involvement are likely to suffer some of the same penalties as do ex-offenders of any race. Despite the lack of official conviction record, their job candidacy is nevertheless suspect by virtue of membership in a group with high incarceration rates and pervasive images of criminality.[27] This is not to say that employers are indifferent to a criminal record among blacks; blacks suffer a larger penalty for a criminal record compared to whites. But this research suggests that even without an official marker of criminality, blacks are viewed as high-risk employees. Once again, then, we return to one possible far-reaching consequence of our crime policies: steeply rising incarceration rates among blacks cast a shadow of criminality across the black population. The effects of race shown in this study should not be thought of as unrelated to employers' concerns about crime. Rather, it seems to be the case that blacks with or without criminal records are likely to be viewed by employers with suspicion.[28]

By focusing on discrimination at the point of hire, this study uncovers an important and under-investigated source of racial disadvantage in the low wage labor market. Blacks are less than half as likely to receive consideration by employers as equally qualified whites, and black non-offenders fare no better than even whites with prior felony convictions. The sheer magnitude of these findings underlines the continuing significance of race in employment decisions.

This research cannot identify the precise source of employers' reluctance to hire blacks. Indeed, it is difficult if not impossible to "get inside employers' heads" to determine what combination of conscious or unconscious considerations may lead to the racial preferences we observe. High incarceration rates among blacks and their amplification in the media are one possible source of racial bias. Indeed, the available evidence points to the pervasiveness of images associating blacks with crime and the power of these images to strengthen negative feelings about blacks as a group. It may be the case, then, that increasing rates of incarceration among blacks, and their disproportionate coverage in the media, heighten negative reactions toward African Americans generally, irrespective of their personal involvement in crime.

While the true concerns underlying employers' decisions are difficult to discern, the prima facie evidence shows that race carries important meaning to employers, and can often represent the sole basis for dismissing a candidate. According to the results presented here, black men must work at least twice as hard as equally qualified whites simply to overcome the stigma of their skin color. Rather than being merely a problem of the past, direct racial bias continues to shape employment outcomes in ways that contribute to persisting racial inequality.

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Chapter 6

The Effects of Immigration on the Economic Position of Young Black Males

Gerald D. Jaynes

The charge that immigrants, especially the undocumented, put downward pressure on wages and take jobs from native-born Americans has become one of the most contentious issues in the debate over immigration and "control of the U.S. border." Support for these charges appears readily available, and disturbing evidence is disseminated widely. Recently, the Center for Immigration Studies, a Washington, D.C., think tank that advocates and lobbies for tighter restrictions on immigration to the U.S., issued an alarming report discussing the effects of undocumented immigration on the employment of native-born workers. One of the report's starkest findings concerned job growth between March 2000 and March 2005, a period that the White House boasts about as characterized by high rates of job growth during the economy's recovery from the 2001 recession. During this five-year period, native-born workers, who accounted for 6 of 10 people making up the net increase in the population aged eighteen to sixty-four, accounted for slightly less than 1 of 10 of the net increase in jobs received by adults (Camarota 2006). The numbers were confirmed by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), although an economist at DOL felt obligated to point out that as job growth strengthened during 2005 the proportion of native-born job seekers finding jobs rose to 4 of 10, an increase unlikely to calm their anxieties (Scherer 2006).

Facts as stupefying as these job gain numbers explain in dramatic fashion why the labor market effects of immigration on the native born have emerged as a tempestuous public policy issue. In addition to an abundance of anecdotal evidence showing immigrant "takeover" of specific jobs (Jaynes 2000, 23), both common sense and straightforward economic reasoning explain why in a continuing stream of public opinion surveys many Americans say they believe that immigrants tend to decrease wages and displace native-born workers from jobs. The common