

Tracing the Historical Origins of Youth Delinquency & Violence: Myths & Realities About Black Culture

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The negative effects of slavery have been theoretically linked to contemporary problems faced by African Americans, such as family instability, low achievement motivation, and high rates of juvenile delinquency and youth violence. Combining historical, sociological, and psychological materials, the current analysis argues that Blacks exited slavery with the necessary social capital, inclusive of proactive family attitudes and patterns as well as high achievement motivation, for rapid acculturation into mainstream America. Shifting to the present, it is shown that the co-existence of high Black crime rates and Black cultural integrity are not contradictory, especially when systemic forces neutralize or undermine the ameliorative potential of Black culture.

In analyses of the dynamics, structure, as well as historical origins of Black social problems, such as youth violence and delinquency, part of the variance is attributed to systemic issues such as protracted poverty (Wilson, 1978, 1997), and another component to racism—sometimes referenced as modern racism—to distinguish it from the more virulent forms of the past (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; Swim & Stangor, 1998). To keep things honest, balanced, and objective, an unknown but critical part of the remaining variance is attributed to problems and pathologies emanating from within the Black community (Frazier, 1939; Ogbu, 1991; Patterson, 1998). Explanations that place too much weight on forces external to the Black community are critiqued as evasive of personal responsibility (Steele, 1990) or, in the case of arguments that seem to defend Black culture, as blatantly romantic (Patterson, 1998). This has led observers to essentialize problems when

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Blacks are involved, and to be more systemic when Whites and other social groups are highlighted (Coontz, 1992).

The essentialist versus systemic perspective is highlighted in events that took place about ten years ago. In the winter of 1992, a factory closed in Perry, Florida and *USA TODAY* ran a front-page story (Stone, 1992) on the economic ripple effects of the closure. Small photos of eleven laid-off workers, ten of whom were White, formed the border of a full-page pictorial schematic of the community. The photos, schematic, and accompanying article explicated how lost wages cut into the economic health of the surrounding community, with fewer dollars being spent in 31 local commercial establishments (jewelry store, cable television company, bank, ice-cream shop, hairdresser, volume of advertisements for local newspaper, etc.). The connection between employment, individual agency, taxpayer participation, safe and affordable housing, and community vitality could not escape the average reader. There were no suggestions that the laid-off workers would become lazy, unmotivated, and addicted to welfare. Around the same time period, the *New York Times* (July 5–10, 1992) ran a series of front-page articles (Roner, 1992) on the need for welfare reform. The focus tended to be on Black people and other people of color residing in urban centers. Only nominal reference was made to the links between employment and community vitality, and the tone of the series was that Blacks had somehow positioned themselves to be on welfare, independent of economic forces. Juxtaposing the two stories one notes that when the focus is on Whites, the social policy implication is how to create economic activity and new jobs, but in the case of Blacks, the need is to get people off welfare. In one case, systemic forces explain worker redundancy, while in the other, the emphasis shifts to an implied history that has resulted in a mindset or psychology that is peculiar to Black people.

The current *issue of JSI* focuses on delinquency and youth violence and when Black youth are highlighted, the issues of implied history and peculiar mindset become immediately evident. According to the literature reviews by Taylor (1995) and Payne (2001), empirical research depicts Black youth in general, and Black males in particular, as originating from broken or unstable families, and exhibiting certain negative psychological traits: low achievement motivation, an estrangement from schooling and formal learning activities, negative self-concept and negative self-esteem, and a propensity toward delinquency and crime. Key scholars of the Black experience such as Wilson (1987), Patterson (1998), and Ogbu (1991) have tried to show that *contemporary problems in the Black community can be traced in a linear fashion to the legacy of slavery and past discrimination*. They depict Blacks as having been crippled by slavery, and claim that the era of Jim Crow, which lasted from the turn of the century to the late 1960s, never afforded Blacks a chance to right themselves psychologically or culturally speaking. The overall recession in 1973, which hit the Black community more like a depression, laid bare such Black vulnerabilities, leading to an explosive growth in single parent Black

families and an epidemic of crime and Black-on-Black violence. Such notions of “the Black-underclass” and “Black oppositional identity” are premised on a certain understanding or theorizing about Black history. That is to say, Black kids do such-and-such negative and self-destructive things today because historically these negative propensities have existed all along, just below the surface of Black culture, waiting for an economic downturn to trigger latent tendencies into full-blown self-destructive patterns (Scott, 1997).

In this paper I construct a counterstory to show that whether the focus is on Black family structure, Black achievement motivation, or Black delinquency patterns, the historical linkage to slavery is problematic and dubious, and that contemporary systemic causal factors are repeatedly underestimated. In addition to not coming to terms with the real causes of contemporary Black youth violence, myths about Black history are another form of violence, only in this instance the violence is directed toward Black culture and Black people as a whole.

Black Family Instability as a Historical Antecedent to Black Youth Violence

After trivializing the works of Gutman (1976) and other revisionists who find themes of resilience, coping, and normal family functioning in Black history, Patterson (1998) argues that one of the greatest intellectual stumbling blocks to the development of realistic social policy about Black social problems, such as youth crime and violence, is the failure of Black as well as White scholars to fully appreciate the extent to which slavery dehumanized Black individuals and distorted Black cultural and family dynamics. He thinks the Black family and the basic relationship between Black men and women has never been adequate and positive, and that children raised in such chaotic family circumstances are at risk for turning to crime. As proof of his contention that the Black family has been unstable since the end of slavery, Patterson concentrates on the percent of single-parent Black households found in census reports, recorded between 1880 and 1910, which show 25% or more were headed by women.

Patterson points out that Frazier (1939) reported similar figures in 1939 and it was Frazier who first affirmed that the primitive and thus fragile rural Black family was headed toward disintegration in the aftermath of Black migration to urban centers. However, Frazier’s fragility-deterioration thesis was not confirmed by subsequent census reports from either 1940 or 1950 (Gutman, 1976). In both instances, 70% or more of Black families are recorded as intact (both parents present) as opposed to broken (one-parent family structure). About thirty years after Frazier’s work, Moynihan (1965) underscored an intact Black family rate of close to 70% but for the extremely poor the rate seemed to be getting smaller and it is on this basis that Moynihan predicted a decline in Black intact families. In effect, starting with early census reports from 1880, and continuing through the publication of Frazier’s figures in 1939, and the appearance of the Moynihan

report in 1965, intact Black families accounted for 70% and higher of all Black families. Given all the ecological, political, and sociological challenges Blacks faced between 1880 and the early 1960s, one could argue that a constant intact rate of 70% or higher is hardly a sign of instability (Hill, 2001).

Patterson is suspect of this 70% rate and argues that poor Black women often get pregnant and have a child out-of-wedlock with one man, and soon thereafter marry someone else, and record this second person as the actual father. This means, in the context of collecting census data, out-of-wedlock births could be underestimated, and the stability of the Black family could be overestimated. However, Patterson completely overlooks the fact that a similar pattern is readily isolated in the history of White women and out-of-wedlock birthing. Solinger's important book-length study, *Wake Up Little Suzie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Roe v. Wade* (Solinger, 1992), shows that from the late 1930s onward, White women who became pregnant outside of marriage often "disappeared" before they began to show and were secretly cared for in special facilities, such as the Cradle in Evanston, Illinois. For the duration of the pregnancy, the officials, social workers, religious figures, and psychiatrists linked to the facility coerced the woman into placing her baby up for adoption, at the point of birth. In exchange, the woman was allowed to return home, as if nothing had happened, and the adoption agency had a new, highly sought after White infant. As importantly, Solinger points out that the reverse was true for Black girls and Black women positioned in the same circumstances. The adoption agencies, which welcomed the White girls, turned their backs and were unavailable to Black girls and Black women, and the public social agencies to which Blacks were forced to turn for help pressured them to keep their infants. Solinger determined that Black women were viewed by social welfare agencies as primitive and irresponsible in their sexual habits and undeserving of a "second-chance." So effective was society in hiding the out-of-wedlock patterns of White females that by the time society got around (circa the 1980s and 1990s) to doing something about welfare as we know it, out-of-wedlock birthing was depicted as a problem unique to Blacks (see Solinger, 1992, especially pages 187–204; Coontz, 1992; Patterson, 1998; Scott, 1997).

The so-called crash of the Black family—that is, the point at which out-of-wedlock birthing becomes extreme—is not evident until the mid-1960s. However, before one can turn to the bad culture or legacy of slavery arguments, it must be recalled that from the late 1950s onward, American cities lost hundreds of thousands of good paying, heavy industry jobs and Blacks, more so than Whites, were disproportionately affected by such turn of events (Goozner, 1990). Patterson (1998) and others seem to want Black families to "stay-together" even when there is no material basis for sustaining marriage. If, as Newman (1988) shows in her book, *Falling from Grace*, once stable middle and high income White families, in the face of protracted unemployment due to job layoffs and restructuring, can become the focus of father abandonment, divorce, and lower academic aspirations

in children—all within one generation—then what stops us from comprehending that Black families, far removed from slavery, may encounter in the here and now socio-economic circumstances that negate whatever cultural strengths they may bring to the table? Coontz (1992) points out that *the employment rate for Black men was as high as 80% in 1930 but dropped to as low as 56% in 1983; and, as significantly, the average real income of Black men fell by almost 50% between 1973 and 1986*. Coontz underscores that the biggest losers were unskilled or undereducated Black men, who, between 1930 and the late 1960s, could, by the mere dint of hard work and strenuous effort, make an adequate income to support marriage and a family (Coontz, 1992, p. 245).

It is ironic that not too long after the appearance of Moynihan's report in 1965, the out-of-wedlock birthing for *poor White* girls and young women skyrocketed, and as they were never slaves, the weight of the legacy of slavery or inherent instability of Black family arguments were made all the more problematic. When, in the late 1970s and 1980s, Whites, in increasing numbers, joined the ranks of Blacks in the loss of good-paying, high-benefit jobs (Newman, 1988), a strange thing happened and White families started to look and behave like Black families (Ehrenreich, 2001). Moynihan eventually tried to explain how he "missed" the out-of-wedlock trend among White families, and to his credit, his revised analysis places more explicit weight on economic forces, although his perspective on the Black family has not changed (Moynihan, 1996).

In short, a discussion of the Black family in and of itself provides few clues as to why Black family instability and a parallel rise in Black delinquency took on monstrous proportions from the late 1970s onward. If anything, the recording of a 70% stability rate for Black families shortly after the end of slavery, before and after waves of migration to urban centers around the turn of the 20th century, during and after the Great Depression of the 1930s, and across the periods of racial oppression of the 1940s and 1950s, would seem to eliminate the viability of the *legacy of slavery thesis* for serious consideration as a primary cause of contemporary Black problems such as Black youth violence.

The Legacy of Slavery on Black Achievement Motivation & Crime Rates

Focusing less on family dynamics than does Patterson, and more on issues of schooling, identity, and a drift into the underground economy and crime, Ogbu (1978; see also Gibson & Ogbu, 1991) claims that slavery blocked the development of positive Black achievement motivation, turned the Black self-concept into a site of racial self-loathing as well as hatred of anything White ("oppositional identity"), and that such factors cause Black youth to drift away from mainstream models of success and toward involvement in delinquency and crime. While his theory of oppositional identity is not simplistic, Ogbu nevertheless implies that one can draw a fairly straight line between contemporary Black problems and the effects of

slavery, especially with regard to (low) Black achievement motivation and a Black attraction to crime and the underground economy. There is a great deal of research on each of these factors, and what follows is an exploration of the evidence that contests Ogbu's legacy of slavery thesis.

Black Achievement Motivation

There is very little historical evidence that Blacks, en masse, resisted formal educational opportunities in the immediate aftermath of slavery. To the contrary, the scope of the educational demands that the masses of ex-slaves placed on themselves and on the larger society can be comprehended only as a *social movement for education*. In fact, as Spencer, Cross, Harpalani, & Goss (in press) noted, one is hard pressed to think of any White ethnic group entering the United States at the turn of the 20th century who exhibited the level of high and positive achievement motivation as did Blacks when they exited slavery. Had the larger society moved to cultivate, reinforce, and authenticate the ex-slaves' organic drive toward achievement and acculturation, Blacks today might well be disproportionately distributed among the highly educated. As it turned out, southern society, with the cooperation of the North, made extraordinary efforts to blunt, mangle, and where possible, destroy Black achievement motivation (Bullock, 1967; Du Bois, 1935; Harlan, 1958; Kluger, 1977; Steinberg, 1989, pp. 173–200). Even so, historians have documented that the positive value ex-slaves held toward education was passed on from one generation to the next, and did not appear to dissipate until the Great Depression of the 1930s (Anderson, 1988) and perhaps not even then (Spencer, Cross, Harpalani, & Goss, in press). Let us review the evidence.

It has long been recognized that there was much educational activity, involving the ex-slave population, immediately following the Civil War. Initially, historians linked such activity to forces and influences outside of the Black community such as enlightened members of the Union Army, White teachers and educational officials from the North, and the predominantly White Federal Freedman's Bureau, which was the federal agency responsible for the ex-slaves' transition to freedom (Bullock, 1967). However, revisionist historians such as Butchart (1980) and especially Anderson (1988) have shown that well before any of these external agents made their presence felt, the ex-slaves, themselves, organized and began to carry out educational ventures designed to spread literacy and enlightened citizenship among Black adults and their children. Given their mistrust of White southerners, the first impulse of the ex-slaves was to control their own education. Thus, except for collaborations with Black teachers from nearby free Black communities, the earliest forms of Black education were organic (Anderson, 1988). When White northern educators and federal officials first became involved in the education of the ex-slaves, they wrote in their diaries and field reports that they were often given the cold shoulder by Blacks who were already educating themselves

(Butchart, 1980; Anderson, 1988). White officials and White teachers were sometimes dumbfounded that a group just beyond the shadow of slavery was expressing not a resistance to or a lack of awareness about the value of education, but a level of positive achievement motivation that in some ways exceeded that which they associated with the achievement aspirations of free White families and children of the North (Butchart, 1980; Anderson, 1988).

The attitudes and behavior of the ex-slaves stretch our understanding of the concept of achievement motivation, which is generally defined at the level of the individual. Anderson (1988), Butchart (1980), and Du Bois (1935) depict the ex-slaves' educational demands and aspirations as reflecting a yearning for (a) schools for themselves and their children and (b) standards of personal excellence that would transform them from illiterate adults and children into valued and productive people capable of negotiating the political, economic, cultural, religious, and educational choices which, in their eyes, defined meaningful freedom. Progress within and across each of these domains necessitated literacy. As Butchart (1980) stressed, they wanted a future defined by social justice and achievement, both at the level of the individual and for the community as a whole. Their *individual-communal achievement motivation* redefined history:

The eagerness to learn among American Negroes was exceptional in the case of a poor and recently emancipated folk. Usually, with a protective psychology, such degraded masses regard ignorance as natural and necessary, or even exalt their own traditional wisdom and discipline over "book learning"; or they assume that knowledge is for higher beings, and not the likes of us. The American Negroes never acted thus. (Du Bois, 1935, pp. 637-638)

As their resistance gave way to acceptance, the ex-slaves took advantage of the material and funding support provided by the Federal Freedman's Bureau and joined hands with educational agents from northern benevolent societies, hundreds of mostly female White teachers transplanted from the North, and Black teachers from free Black communities, to create what can be comprehended only as a social movement for education (Spencer, Cross, Harpalani, & Goss, in press; Du Bois, 1935). The historical record clearly shows that more times than not, those who stepped forward to help the ex-slaves in one educational venture or another were often startled and overwhelmed by the educational demands the ex-slaves made of themselves, their children, and their new-found White educational friends from the North. When a good mix of Blacks' demands, external leadership, and resources were provided, the result was an unheard of level of progress within a short span of time. For example, Du Bois (1935) pointed out that under the leadership of the Union Army General Nathaniel P. Banks, New Orleans and the State of Louisiana established Black schools throughout the state, including rural districts, all within a few years following the abolition of slavery. When this new system came under threat, ex-slaves organized and signed petitions in favor of its continuance, inclusive of one 30-foot long petition that showed the marks of 10,000 ex-slaves (Du Bois, 1935, p. 644).

The White teachers from the North, the White educational officials from the northern benevolent societies, and officials from the Federal Freedman's Bureau did not have to spend time instilling a sense of achievement motivation in the ex-slaves and their children. Rather, these external friends of the ex-slaves were often beside themselves in trying to keep up with the ex-slaves' educational demands. One sign of the scope of this pressure is how quickly officials moved to establish Black colleges, even before the dust from slavery and the Civil War had settled, in order to produce enough teachers to serve the emergent Black students and schools (Du Bois, 1935). Eventually, the spirit and influence of the drive for Black education overlapped with the general politics of the region, and as Du Bois (1935) first proclaimed and Bullock (1967), Butchart (1980), and Anderson (1988) have supported, the codification of the need for and right to public education was written into the southern state constitutions as a "gift" from the Black community.

That the ex-slaves would make education a priority the instant they achieved freedom means that the value of education and the groups' collective achievement motivation was in evidence *before* they were free. That is, they somehow developed a value for and appreciation of education not afterwards, but during, slavery even though it was officially against the law to educate slaves. There was no absence of Black educational activity during slavery, as Woodson (1919) discovered, when, in 1919, he set out to write a pamphlet on Black education during slavery. His modestly conceived project eventually grew into a 454-page book, because it took that much scholarship to summarize the scope of educational activities that were directed at the slaves and free Blacks throughout the history of slavery. Woodson's research helps to explain how, during slavery, literacy was characteristic of free-Black communities, and this community of free-Blacks produced many teachers, who were some of the first persons to engage the ex-slaves as they exited bondage (Butchart, 2002). However, it is from more recent scholarship that we have come to understand how the masses of illiterate slaves fashioned a world view and value system that reflected a level of achievement motivation generally associated only with certain White ethnic groups who entered the United States some 40 to 50 years after slavery (Spencer, Cross, Harpalani, & Goss, in press).

Certainly the slaves were influenced by the presence of free Black communities the majority of whose members were literate. Free Blacks found ways to communicate through the slave grapevine about the importance of knowing how to read and write (Webber, 1978; Woodson, 1919). Slaves sometimes witnessed the power of education in the hands of a fellow Black, as in 1755, when White southern Presbyterians from North Carolina decided—as an experiment—to see if Blacks could succeed at the college level, and sent the slave John Chavis to Princeton University (Bullock, 1967). Upon returning to the South, Chavis opened a school that was attended only by the White children of the slave owners. The irony of an educated slave teaching the master's children could not help but influence the slave

community's attitudes about the importance of education. Free Black communities wrote and performed plays, held festivals that required written communications, and built and established Black churches, the activities for which were driven by the membership's ability to read the Bible. And, on occasion, some free Blacks wrote and secretly distributed, among the slaves, pamphlets arguing for the destruction of slavery.

But had there been no free Black communities, the slaves would still have seen the power of literacy as a result of the stratification of the White community. Blacks could readily see that the lowly overseers and poor Whites, who were on the margins of the plantation system, could not read and often were landless and without the right to vote. It must be recalled that poor Whites were seldom viewed by slaves to be role models of Whiteness, as they were frequently accorded a status beneath that of slaves—certainly beneath those slaves who were skilled craftpersons (Gutman, 1976; Webber, 1978). By comparison, the slave-plantation owners were often highly literate and were surrounded by evidence of the power derived from formal educational experiences. The slave grapevine knew about laws, the Constitution, newspapers, contracts, books, letters or written correspondence, etc. Almost every slave enclave had a few members whose missing fingers, ears, or whip-scarred backs revealed the price slaves were willing to pay to learn how to read or write (Webber, 1978). Bondage effectively prevented the spread of literacy among the captive Africans, and the masses of ex-slaves could be accurately described as illiterate. But, attitudinally, the slaves understood the value of education and they exited slavery with a hunger for education that, when assisted by others friendly to their cause, exploded into a social movement for education. That is the legacy of slavery, not some sort of “oppositional identity.”

The foremost expert on the history of Black education in the South, James Anderson (1988), has traced this legacy of positive Black achievement motivation well into the 20th century, and Spencer, Cross, Harpalani, & Goss (in press) suggest that the educational problems of the so-called Black underclass are much more contemporary than is typically understood. It is not being romantic to suggest that, at the end of slavery and thereafter, had the larger White society taken advantage of the positive attitudes the slaves held about education and acculturation, then the proportion of Black people who are poor today would be dramatically diminished, and Blacks would likely be more proportionately represented across the social classes. Given that the ex-slaves had educational attitudes that put them ahead of poor Whites, it is not inconceivable that today Blacks might be a major force within the educational establishment in most southern states.

But this was not the White response. No sooner had General Banks and Blacks from Louisiana established a statewide system for educating Black children in 1864 (recall this was mentioned a few pages back), then other Whites turned around to destroy it (Du Bois, 1935). In 1880, when Blacks seemed to be educating their children too aggressively and threatened to produce Black high school students

whose knowledge base and competencies might place them ahead of their White peers, the White community responded by shutting down the Black high school. It would be nearly 40 years before Black children in that area of Georgia would again have access to a high school (Anderson, 1988, pp. 188–193).

We typically think of the American Civil War in a singular sense, but there were two wars, the one between the North and South and the other “silent” civil war within the South itself, during which the White South defeated and subjugated its Black citizens. Black civil rights were eliminated, their place and future in the social order was truncated and fixed at a lowly status, and a segregated school system was created that was anything but separate and equal (Harlan, 1958). Tax dollars, which should have been distributed equally, were proportioned such that White children received far more and Black children far less than would have been the case under an equal distribution system (it was not uncommon that for every dollar spent on a Black child, 12 or more were spent on a White child; Harlan, 1958; Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1967). This resulted in the exaggerated funding and accelerated development of White children as compared to the severe *under-funding and consequent underdevelopment* of Black children. In the early 1900s southern Black migrants practically matched the educational profiles of White immigrants pouring into the country—essentially both groups were undereducated (Lieberson, 1980). However, by the 1940s and 1950s, when the 2nd major wave of Blacks migrated from the South to the North, states such as Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, and South Carolina could speak with confidence that they had, over a 40–50 year period, carried out government-sanctioned social policies that effectively underdeveloped the social capital of hundreds of thousands of Black people and their children (Jaynes & Williams, 1989). Once in the North, life would not necessarily get better, for as Homel (1984) and Clark (1965) have noted, the underfunding of urban Black school districts, in conjunction with housing segregation and employment discrimination, would be commonplace from the late 1930s to the present. Such containment policies had the power to neutralize any level of achievement motivation Blacks might continue to hold. In point of fact, historians and educators have not pinpointed when low Black achievement motivation would become such a problem as to cause Ogbu (1991) and Wilson (1987, 1997) to theorize about the underclass and oppositional identity. One thing is for certain: low achievement motivation and undervaluing the role of education are not cultural themes carried over from slavery.

The Origins of Black Crime—Black Culture or Systemic Forces?

The current tendency to see Black juvenile delinquency as having a “life of its own” can be traced back to Frazier’s (1939) text on the Black family (Frazier, 1948). In chapter seventeen, titled “Rebellious Youth,” Frazier argues that the

Black delinquency rate steadily increased between 1930 and 1940, with greater crime involvement in the more run-down sections of the Black community, where broken Black families resided. He thought this trend became attenuated, as one moved outward to those sectors of the ghetto where more accomplished, intact Black families lived. According to Frazier:

[A] decline in delinquency coincided with the decline in dependency, family desertion, and illegitimacy in the . . . zones indicating the expansion of the Negro population. The rates were high in those areas characterized by physical decay and the lack of organized community life. In these areas the customary forms of social control, as represented by the family and simple folk culture of the migrants from southern communities, tended to break down or disappear altogether. (Frazier, 1948, p. 279)

Frazier presented cases that underscored the failure of broken or dysfunctional Black families to monitor their children, flooding the streets with a steady stream of Black youth. He weaves issues of poverty and oppression into the discussion, but the emphasis is clearly on problems internal to the Black family and the Black community. More recently, Ogbu (1978, 1991) emphasized the same kind of thinking as did Frazier in viewing high rates of Black crime as emanating from within Black culture. However, new research suggests that the crime rise Frazier observed and to which Ogbu makes reference may have been the result of key structural and institutional problems over which Blacks had little control.

In 1984, Homel published an important book on the education of Blacks in the public schools of Chicago for the period covering 1920 to 1941 (Homel, 1984). Like Frazier, Homel, in a section dealing with family life, community, and the schools, makes note of the high delinquency rate which often characterized portions of the Black community. However, unlike Frazier, who emphasized the role of community and family dynamics, Homel discovered a more systemic and oppressive origin to Black delinquency: *the schools*. For the same time period stressed by Frazier (1930 to 1940), Homel found that the White ethnic population stabilized and began to decline in terms of percentage of ethnic White children attending public schools. Consequently, by 1940, overcrowding was not much of a factor in the administration of schools attended by the children of White, ethnic parents. The reverse was true for Blacks, as their numbers and the percentage of children in Chicago schools increased rather steadily between 1930 and 1940. In a report dated 1941, which recorded the enrollment capacity of a large number of Black elementary as well as Black high schools, the schools were said to have an official capacity of 18,800 students but the actual enrollment for all the schools was 28,673 or 35% more students than the actual legal capacity. A few of the elementary schools were running 30–40% over capacity, but most alarming was the overcrowding at Black high schools. Du Sable High had an official capacity of 2,400 students but was serving as many as 4,000 students. Phillips High, with a capacity of only 1,500 students, was being asked to accommodate the incredible figure of 3,600 students or an overcapacity of nearly 240%! These figures reflect

also the density of racial segregation in Chicago; for the time period in question, Black areas of the South Side of Chicago had 90,000 people per square mile, while for nearby White neighborhoods the density was 20,000 residents per square mile. As Homel underscores, the impact of residential overcrowding was evident in ghetto classrooms.

Part of the problem was that officials were hesitant to invest in new schools for Blacks, and even with the White school population on the decline, new facilities were more likely to be built in White than Black districts. With limited investments in Black school construction, the school board resorted to other remedies to relieve overcrowding at Black schools, namely, the use of temporary structures and something called double shifts (Homel, 1984, pp. 79–80). To maintain school segregation, officials provided dismal, damp, and unhealthy temporary structures called portables, *but more important to our discussion of Black juvenile delinquency rates was the double shift remedy*. School schedules were altered and one school might serve two or *more* shifts of students every school day! Although rare in White neighborhoods, the number of multiple-shift schools in the ghetto climbed from four in 1931, to seven in 1936, and to thirteen in 1940. Compared to White students, Black students were spending 20% to 40% fewer hours in school. At Black high schools where overcrowding was most acute, the situation was nearly impossible. *For the age cohort most vulnerable to delinquency trends, Black adolescents were literally being turned out into the streets by the very institution designed, in part, to prevent delinquency through educational engagement*. The consequences of this predicament were predictable:

School overcrowding . . . hurt both youth and the community as a whole by offering double-shift students too many chances to get into trouble. Observers pointed out that the shift system made it easy for pupils to become truants. A white women's club officer testified, "Any child on the street at any hour can explain his presence by saying, 'I went to school this morning,' . . . or 'I go to school in the afternoon.'" Even youngsters who were dutiful about attending classes had, in the words of the civic leader Irene McCoy Gaines, "a half day in school and a half day on the street." Children from households that had no adult home during the day spent their afternoon or morning without supervision. Half-day sessions, grumbled one South Sider, allowed boys and girls "time to learn all kinds of devilment." Children barred from school by seat shortages passed their time on the street corners, in adult entertainment establishments, and in unchaperoned apartments. "We have seen dozens of boys traveling in gangs for want of anything to do," a black newspaper columnist reported . . . Journalists, Urban League personnel, and PTA leaders blamed shortened school hours for the ghetto's high incidence of youth crime. As Alterman Earl B. Dickerson asked rhetorically in 1941, "Is it any wonder that our juvenile delinquency rate is one of the highest in the country?" (Homel, 1984, pp. 82–83)

In effect, Frazier's assertion that crime and juvenile delinquency go hand and hand with a pathogenic Black culture was more about myth making than fact. Frazier earned his doctorate from the University of Chicago and his work on the Black family and Black adolescence was published by the University of Chicago in 1939. A great deal of the information that went into the making of his text on

the Black family reflected the observations he made of Black families living in Chicago. How he came to miss the role of school overcrowding and double-shift schools is not clear. It is interesting to note that his chapter on rebellious youth, which was described a few paragraphs back, contains not a single reference or commentary about schools or the school system.

Today, in a similar fashion, we do violence to Black people in general, and Black males in particular, by accepting as fact that Blacks are genetically predisposed (Duster, 1992) or "culturally" primed (Payne, 2001) for involvement in crime, drug usage, and drug trafficking (Lusane & Desmond, 1991). We are so accepting of the Black-crime/Black-culture connection that there is little outrage about the disproportionate number of Black men who have some connection to the prison or parole systems (Miller, 1996). Just as Chicagoans in the 1930s and 1940s failed to perceive double-shift schools as a form of racialized-education, so today many people do not view our current penal code as having racialized drug usage (Duster, 1997). National surveys have established that Blacks are no more likely to use illicit drugs than are Whites (SAMHSA, 1997), although crack cocaine is readily found in Black communities while powdered cocaine is found in White suburbs (Duster, 1997). The so-called war on drugs turns on the crack versus powdered cocaine distinction, in that punishment is stronger for crack cocaine arrests than for powdered cocaine arrests, and therefore Blacks are arrested more, because crack is more readily available in Black communities. With the passage of drug laws in the 1980s, upwards of 90% of juvenile drug arrests have involved Blacks (Duster, 1997; Miller, 1996; Mauer, 1999; Tonry, 1996). Not only did the laws create an incredibly differential arrest ratio based on race, but also mandatory sentencing guidelines meant more Blacks would spend longer periods of time in prison. Before 1986, the average drug sentence for Blacks was 6% longer than for Whites, but four years later as the mandatory sentencing locked into application, the average sentence became 93% higher for Blacks (Tonry, 1996). In a few short years, the racialization of drug use and imprisonment became the norm. Duster (1992) points out that in 1983, 63% of the prison commitments for the state of Virginia involved Whites and only 37% involved minorities. By 1989, the pattern was reversed, with new commitments showing 34% Whites and 65% minorities, even though, as we need to keep in mind and as was pointed out earlier, drug usage by Whites and Blacks could not be differentiated, and in some instances it was actually higher for Whites. The pattern found in Virginia has been documented to be true for other states across the nation (Lusane & Desmond, 1991). Even after experts have explained to the general public that the drug laws are racially and socio-economically slanted, there has been little support for changing the laws at either the state or federal levels (Rep. Rangel [D-NY] introduced H.R. 2031, Crack-Cocaine Equitable Sentencing Act of 1997, but it failed to pass). It is as though people are saying that yes, maybe the laws don't help, but the real reason for all those folks in prison cannot possibly be the law itself. This likely echoes

what was said back in the 1940s that yes, now that you point it out to me, double-shifting probably does not help matters, but there must be some cultural or genetic reasons why so many Black teens keep getting into trouble.

Conclusions

The scope of contemporary Black problems sometimes causes scholars to wonder whether the seemingly intractable problems reveal a crippled culture the origin of which was slavery. We explored the legacy of slavery concept and found it wanting. If anything, the evidence presented turns the legacy of slavery concept on its head, in that Blacks exited slavery with the type of social capital, family attitudes, and positive achievement motivation that could have readily facilitated their rapid acculturation into the mainstream of American society, had society wanted them.

If there is a message from this analysis it is that observers who are deeply immersed in the present and who sincerely want to find a way to both explain and solve certain Black problems should not assume that the legacy of slavery thesis is, to borrow a phrase from the study of law, "settled" history. Ogbu's attempt in 1991 to link contemporary Black achievement problems with slavery should never have seen the light of day because, by 1991, evidence to the contrary was abundant. The historical record is there but if it is not studied first hand, one begins the search for solutions to Black problems by committing violence against the history of the very people one professes to want to help. Finally, this analysis suggests that a group's disproportionate involvement in crime does not automatically bring into question the integrity of that group's culture. For example, our analysis confirmed the high rate of Black juvenile delinquency for Blacks living in Chicago, circa 1930 to 1940. However, as soon as it was revealed that for the time period in question, Black adolescents were spending upward to 40% less time in school because of a double-shift policy, then it became easy to comprehend that such a policy was essentially pushing Black youth toward mischief making and the streets, and no amount of Black cultural integrity could have prevented the trend. Consequently, the co-existence of Black crime rates and Black cultural integrity is not a contradiction, when systemic forces neutralize or undermine the *ameliorative potential* of Black culture (Mullings and Wali, 2001).

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