THE COST OF INEQUALITY: METROPOLITAN STRUCTURE AND VIOLENT CRIME*

JUDITH R. BLAU
State University of New York at Albany

PETER M. BLAU
Columbia University and *State University of New York at Albany*

The hypothesis tested is that variations in rates of urban criminal violence largely result from differences in racial inequality in socioeconomic conditions. Data on the 125 largest American metropolitan areas (SMSAs) are used to ascertain whether this hypothesis can account for three correlates of violent crime differently interpreted in the literature. Criminal violence is positively related to location in the South, which has been interpreted as the result of the Southern tradition of violence. It is positively related to the proportion of blacks in an SMSA, which has been interpreted as reflecting a subculture of violence in ghettos. And it is positively related to poverty, which has been interpreted as the emphasis on toughness and excitement in the culture of poverty. The analysis reveals that socioeconomic inequality between races, as well as economic inequality generally, increases rates of criminal violence, but once economic inequalities are controlled poverty no longer influences these rates, neither does Southern location, and the proportion of blacks in the population hardly does. These results imply that if there is a culture of violence, its roots are pronounced economic inequalities, especially if associated with ascribed position.

Public perception of crime as a major social issue increased in the 1960s (President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, 1967), and recent surveys reveal continuing concern (Harris, 1973; Garofalo, 1977). When Americans worry about crime, what they are most anxious about are murder, rape, robbery, and assault, the four major types of violent crime against persons. The growing public anxiety about violent crime is a reflection of high and increasing rates of these crimes.

There is a paradox here. Crimes against persons as well as property crimes are correlated with poverty, yet the United States, a very affluent country, has one of the highest crime rates in the world. At comparable levels of urbanization and industrialization, the homicide rate in the United States is more than ten times that in Western Europe (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1979:182). Moreover, the reported rate of violent crimes has been increasing; it rose from 253 in 1967 to 401 per 100,000 in 1978 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1979:177). These crimes are predominantly urban: their rates for large cities (over 250,000) are about five times that for small towns (under 10,000) and ten times that for rural areas (Harries, 1974).

Two questions must be clearly distinguished in the study of crime. To ask why certain individuals have tendencies to commit violent crimes (Toch, 1969) requires comparing the characteristics and experiences of offenders and nonoffenders. However, to ask why rates of criminal violence differ from place to place or from time to time requires ascertaining which variations in social conditions are associated with the differences in crime rates. The second question is the one pursued in this study: not what kind of indi-

viduals tend to commit violent crimes, but what social conditions make it likely that many people commit them.

VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

As early as 1835 Quetelet published an analysis of crime rates in various regions of Western Europe. Regional differences in crime continue to fascinate us nearly a century and a half later, and so do two other factors often considered causes of violent crime: poverty and race. Although these three factors have been consistently found to be correlated with violent crime, the data to be presented suggest that theories based on these empirical findings are misleading.

Region and Race

Early studies by Brearley (1934) and Lottier (1938) indicate marked regional variations in homicide, with the highest rates being observed in the South. The high Southern rates of violent crime, notably homicide and assault, have been repeatedly documented (Shannon, 1954; Hackney, 1969; Harries, 1974; Pyle, 1976). While the regional gap is narrowing, it is still substantial. In 1978, the homicide rate (per 100,000) was 11.6 in the South and 7.7 in the rest of the country.

The major interpretations of the high rates of Southern crime are based on the thesis that violence is part of the Southern subculture and pervades interpersonal relations there. Thus, Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967) maintain that social values in support of violence become embedded in a particular group for historical reasons and are then transmitted to successive generations. Hackney (1969) suggests that the Southern culture of violence has its historical roots in the defeat in the Civil War and the subsequent economic exploitation by the North, which created collective grievances and a low threshold for aggression (see also Cash, 1941). Both Hackney (1969) and Gastil (1971) analyzed data to show that the regional difference in homicide rates persists when a variety of social and economic conditions are controlled, and Reed (1972) reports that Southerners are more tolerant of violence than others. On the other hand, Erlanger's (1975) analysis of Harris polls discovered no substantial regional difference in attitudes about violence.

A major alternative explanation to the Southern subcultural hypothesis is provided by Loftin and Hill (1974). Their analysis of state variation in homicide rates showed that the poorer economic conditions in Southern states account for their higher rates of murder. Although Sykes (1978:150–51) cautioned that the debate over how to explain regional differences in crime rates was far from ended, recent studies (Humphries and Wallace, 1980; Smith and Parker, 1980) conclude that regional influences on crime rates are better understood in economic rather than in cultural terms.

Another explanation for the high rates of criminal violence in the South involves racial composition, inasmuch as the South has proportionately more blacks and blacks have substantially higher crime rates than whites.[1] Some of this difference in crime rates results from discrimination in arrests, bias in official records, variations in racial age composition, and other factors. Yet some of it probably reflects actual differences in criminal offenses, as noted by Sutherland and Cressey (1978:141): "Despite the limitations of the official statistics on the crimes committed by members of various races, it seems reasonable to assume that in the United States the general crime rate among blacks is considerably higher than the rate among whites."

Criminal violence in black ghettos has also been interpreted as an expression of a subculture that condones and legitimates violence because life is tough and success depends on the ability to fight and to strike first. Moreover, many children in black ghettos are reared in broken homes, reducing strong identification with societal norms. Oppression and exploitation further undermine respect for the laws and mores imposed by the alien majority.

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[1] For example, blacks accounted for more than half the arrests for the four major types of violent crime in 1978 (F.B.I., 1979:199). Constituting only slightly more than one tenth of the population, their arrest record, therefore, was about ten times that of whites.

Normative conflict between subcultures has been traditionally considered a major cause of high crime rates in an area (Wirth, 1931; Sellin, 1938; Sutherland, 1947).

Labeling theory (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1972) has also been used to analyze the influence of social reactions to deviance on further deviance. Nonconformists, whether they are actually delinquents or merely have views and engage in practices that differ from the ideas and folkways of the majority, are labeled as outsiders and deviants and thus as potential delinquents. Stereotyping extends the social label to all members of a group—all Italians or all blacks. Such labels make persons more likely to be suspected of crime, to be arrested, and to be convicted, and these experiences, including notably the learning experience in prison, increase the probability that they will subsequently engage in criminal conduct. Although labeling theory is criticized by many (Gove, 1975), few deny that law enforcement does not treat all people the same and that the risks of arrest and conviction are much greater for members of groups typed as criminal than for others (Quinney, 1975; Swigert and Farrell, 1977).

Poverty

The significance of the urban socioeconomic conditions for the incidence of crime was early recognized in the ecological studies at the University of Chicago. In the most famous of these, Shaw and McKay (1942) compared delinquency rates in various areas within 21 cities and showed that the same variations in delinquency among socioeconomically different urban areas persisted for several decades even though their populations and ethnic compositions completely changed during that time. This is a beautiful illustration of the roots of crime in the social structure, independent of the individuals involved. Shaw and McKay concluded that three urban conditions promote high delinquency rates: poverty, heterogeneity, and mobility, with poverty being the most important factor. Numerous other studies also observed the highest crime rates in poor slums (Schuessler,

1962; Quinney, 1966; Curtis, 1974). A linkage between crime and economic conditions has been found at higher levels of aggregation as well, for cities (Humphries and Wallace, 1980) and for states (Loftin and Hill, 1974; Smith and Parker, 1980).

Notwithstanding much empirical evidence of the correlation between poverty and crime, the notion that poverty breeds crime has been questioned. Lander (1954) and Bordua (1958) tested Shaw and McKay's conclusion that economic level is the major influence on delinquency rates and rejected it, because they found that an area's economic level was not directly related to its delinquency rate when other conditions were controlled. On the basis of a factor analysis, Lander suggested that anomie rather than economic conditions is the prime source of delinquency. But Kornhauser (1978:83–87) noted that Lander's data support rather than contradict the Shaw-McKay thesis that an area's poor economic (and other) conditions lead to social disorganization which in turn leads to delinquency, since Lander's anomie is essentially the same concept as their social disorganization, and since his procedure conceals the indirect effects of economic level.

Miller's (1958) theory of the culture of poverty as the basic cause of delinquency resembles Lander's anomie interpretation but grounds criminal conduct even more strongly in poverty than Shaw and McKay do. Urban slums create a subculture valuing toughness, smartness, excitement, and fatalism, and these subcultural values often bring young persons into conflict with the law. Thus, Miller interprets delinquency not in terms of individual poverty but in terms of the shared cultural values that tend to develop in the impoverished conditions of urban slums. Banfield (1968, 1974) advances a more extreme argument that claims that the lower class has an inherent propensity to crime.

Inequality

Although numerous earlier studies attributed crime to poverty and its consequences, they did not explicitly focus on economic inequality. However, Marxian

theories and theories of opportunity structure are implicitly concerned with inequality. Bonger (1916), an early Marxist criminologist, held that the major sources of crime are the exploitation and oppression of the poor by the rich and the avarice capitalism stimulates in rich and poor alike. Since crime is an inherent part of the capitalist system of property relations, improving the living conditions of the poor does not suffice to cope with it; only restructuring the relations of production does. Quinney (1974:24) has recently emphasized the same Marxian theme. He views crime as generated by the inherent contradictions of capitalism and as a primitive form of insurrection against oppression by the ruling hegemony. The importance of inequalities in Marxian theories is made explicit by McDonald (1976:22): "Inequalities in power, economic or political, were ultimately responsible for the nature of the criminal law established, its enforcement, and the pattern of criminal behavior appearing."

Merton's ([1949] 1968:185–248) theory of deviance as depending on the opportunity structure also exemplifies a conception that implicitly pertains to inequality. He stresses that opportunities are unequally distributed among the classes in a social structure and that their distribution determines which classes are most likely to deviate and what form their deviation is most likely to take. Cohen (1955) supports Merton's thesis that blocked opportunities tend to give rise to delinquency. Cloward and Ohlin (1960) have extended this theory by noting that delinquency depends not only on blocked legitimate opportunities but also on available illegitimate opportunities for becoming successful. The poor boy who has no opportunity to go to college nor any opportunity to learn to steal will become neither a successful lawyer nor a successful thief. J. Braithwaite (1979:119–75) discovered that the theory of differential opportunity and the theory of normative conflict have contradictory implications. This is a rare occurrence in sociology, because it makes it possible to test two alternative theories by directly confronting them. Braithwaite does so by comparing the delinquency rates of poor boys who live in poor areas and of poor boys who live in class-mixed areas. If normative conflict among groups with different backgrounds engenders delinquency, the boys in class-mixed areas should have the higher rates. But if delinquency depends on opportunities for learning criminal skills and differential association with experienced delinquents (Sutherland, 1947), the boys in poor areas, where there are more delinquents than in class-mixed ones, should have the higher rates.[2] Data from several studies reveal that the delinquency rates of poor boys are higher in poor slums than in class-mixed areas, which supports the theory of differential opportunity and association and conflicts with the theory of normative conflict.

Only recently has the influence of economic inequality on crime been explicitly investigated. Most studies show that inequality and crime are positively related, whether metropolitan areas are analyzed (Eberts and Schwirian, 1968; J. Braithwaite, 1979:212–20), historical trends are traced (Danziger and Wheeler, 1975), American states are compared (Loftin and Hill, 1974), or entire nations are examined (Messner, 1980).

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The objective of this study is to test a hypothesis about inequality and violence which is derived from a general macrosociological theory (Blau, 1977). The hypothesis stipulates that a specific form of inequality is most likely to engender pervasive conflict, which finds expression in a high incidence of criminal violence. The summarized findings of earlier research and their interpretations are used as a starting point for indicating where and how the analysis here departs from previous work.

Most sociological theories, including theories of crime, employ both structural and cultural concepts. Yet theories of crime are often classified as structural or cultural (see Nettler, 1978:141; Korn-

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[2] Although poverty is not directly related to crime rates when other factors are controlled, there is no question that the two are correlated, which means that there are more delinquents in poor slums than in class-mixed areas. (Kornhauser, 1978:100).

hauser, 1978:200–04) on the basis of whether the central explanatory terms refer to objective structural conditions, such as the division of labor or the class structure, or to cultural values and norms, such as religious beliefs or political ideologies. Marx's emphasis on productive relations and class conflict illustrates a structural theory; Weber's emphasis on the Protestant ethic, a cultural one. In many structural theories of crime, a central explanatory concept is inequality, even though inequality is never explicitly mentioned. This is the case for Marxian explanations in terms of increasing exploitation under advanced capitalism, and it is the case for Merton's explanations in terms of the relative deprivation of the poor in rich countries.

Cultural theories of crime usually do provide explicit definitions of their explanatory concepts, but they use them as hypothetical variables for which no empirical evidence is supplied. The typical explanatory format is that empirically observed relationships between objective conditions and crime rates are interpreted on the basis of cultural factors assumed to constitute the links between the antecedent variables and the rates, without any empirical evidence corroborating the linkages. This is the underlying scheme of interpretations of high Southern crime rates, high crime rates in poor slums, high crime rates of blacks or other ethnic minorities, and of habitual crime. These interpretations raise basic questions that empirical data can answer. If an observed correlation between an antecedent and crime rates can be shown to be accounted for by a structural condition that can be empirically measured, it obviates the need to advance conjectures about cultural influences that cannot be so demonstrated. Indeed, structural intervening variables that fully explain the observed correlations constitute evidence that any alternative cultural explanation is incorrect.[3]

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[3] Any explanation—structural as well as cultural—that does not take into account empirically demonstrated links between two variables but assumes the existence of different links is incorrect. Of course, more abstract theoretical concepts may be substituted for the empirical variables, as long as the theoretical propositions logically imply the connections between the empirical variables (R.B. Braithwaite, 1953:50–87).

At the core of the theory from which the central hypothesis is inferred is a conception of social structure as referring to the size distributions of a population along various lines. Three central concepts are: heterogeneity, defined by the distribution among nominal groups in one dimension, such as racial heterogeneity; inequality, defined by the distribution based on a hierarchical ordering, like income inequality; and the extent to which two or more dimensions of social differences are correlated and consolidate status distinctions, for example, how strongly race is related to education and income. The original theory deals with the influences of these formal structural conditions and their many empirical manifestations on "positive" social relations in a population, for example, patterns of marriage and friendship. Thus, a theorem deduced from primitive concepts and assumptions is that consolidated social differences inhibit marriage and friendship between persons in different positions.

The extension of the theory now being suggested refers to the implications of these structural conditions for "negative" social relations, notably interpersonal conflict. Economic inequality entails conflict of interest over the distribution of resources; much inequality spells a potential for violence. Not all kinds of inequality, however, are experienced as illegitimate and a source of aggression. Which ones are depends in part on the institutional system. In a democracy inequalities in rewards for differences in skills tend to be viewed as justifiable, but slavery and castes are not. Generally, inequalities for which individuals themselves can be considered responsible, even though differential advantages make this a fiction, are held to be legitimate, whereas inborn inequalities that distribute political rights and economic opportunities on the basis of the group into which a person is born are feudal survivals condemned as illegitimate in a democracy. Such inborn inequalities exist, in effect, if membership in ascriptive groups, such as race, is strongly related to socioeconomic position.

The hypothesis inferred is that socioeconomic inequalities that are associated with ascribed positions, thereby con-

solidating and reinforcing ethnic and class differences, engender pervasive conflict in a democracy. Great economic inequalities generally foster conflict and violence, but ascriptive inequalities do so particularly.[4] Pronounced ascriptive inequalities transform the experience of poverty for many into the hereditary permanent state of being one of the poor (Simmel, [1908] 1923:345–74). A realistic reaction of the underprivileged would be to organize collective violence to overthrow the existing order and redistribute resources or, at least, to fight for a larger share of them. However, the very differences manifested in great inequalities tend to deprive the lower strata of the strength and resources to organize successful collective action, such as a strike or even a revolution, which appears to be least likely when inequality is most extreme (although there is some disagreement on this point).[5] Coser (1968) notes that conflict of interest that cannot find realistic expression in striving to achieve desired goals frequently finds expression as "nonrealistic conflict," by which he means diffuse aggression, with people being more driven by hostile impulses than governed by rational pursuit of their interests. It is such diffuse hostility that ascriptive inequalities engender and that criminal violence manifests.

Ascriptive socioeconomic inequalities undermine the social integration of a community by creating multiple parallel social differences which widen the separations between ethnic groups and between social classes, and it creates a situation characterized by much social disor-

ganization and prevalent latent animosities. Pronounced ethnic inequality in resources implies that there are great riches within view but not within reach of many people destined to live in poverty. There is much resentment, frustration, hopelessness, and alienation. The state is akin to Durkheim's concept of anomie, particularly if we place less stress than Durkheim did ([1897] 1951:246–58, 270–73) on lack of regulation of passions by internalized norms and emphasize rather the prevalent disorganization, sense of injustice, discontent, and distrust generated by the apparent contradiction between proclaimed values and norms, on the one hand, and social experiences, on the other.

If inequalities associated with ascribed positions produce a state of social disorganization and disorientation, they should also be reflected in other indications of anomie. Moreover, such a state of disorganization or anomie should increase Coser's nonrealistic conflict, and thus violent crime. Our data do not include information on economic fluctuations, one of Durkheim's indicators of anomie, but they do include rates of divorce and separation, Durkheim's other main indicator of it. Previous research found various manifestations of social disorganization and instability, such as high unemployment and much migration, positively related to the incidence of divorce (Fenelon, 1971; Jones and Demaree, 1975). Accordingly, extent of divorce and separation is predicted to be positively related to both inequality and rates of violent crime. We shall also ascertain whether the prevalence of divorce mediates some of the influence of inequalities on criminal violence.

Although the original theory deals little with interpersonal conflict, one of its assumptions does and is relevant for crimes against persons, namely, that "overt interpersonal conflict depends on opportunities for social contact" (Blau, 1977:114). Crimes against persons illustrate the dependence of such conflict on contact. Mayhew and Levinger (1976) predict that social contact and hence crimes against persons increase with city size, and they provide empirical evidence for their mathematical model that the rate of increase is

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[4] J. Braithwaite (1979) reports racial inequality to be unrelated to crime rates when overall inequality is controlled, based on SMSA data. We are convinced that this is incorrect. A possible reason for his finding, which disagrees with ours, is that his measure for racial income inequality—the "difference between median income for Negroes and median income for whole city" (p. 219)—is probably strongly correlated with the controlled measure of overall inequality—the "difference between median income and average income of poorest 20% of families" (p. 218).

[5] Stern (1976) finds inequality and strikes to be inversely related. Davies (1971:133–47) reports that a prolonged decline in inequality followed by a short increase makes revolutions most likely. Gurr (1971) and Russett (1971), however, conclude from their research that inequality and collective violence are positively related.

a logistic curve. Since the influence of size rests on entirely different mechanisms from that of inequalities, both must be analyzed together, and they are expected to exert independent influences.[6]

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is based on the 1970 data for the 125 largest metropolitan areas (SMSAs) in the United States. The major source is the public use sample of the U.S. Bureau of the Census. From the one-in-a-hundred sample for counties, data were extracted for all individuals living in an SMSA of more than a quarter million people, and these data were aggregated by SMSA.[7] The data base comprises 1,223,000 persons, who are a one-percent sample of the American metropolitan population in 1970. All independent variables delineating the metropolitan structures were derived from this sample.

The early steps in the analysis involved aggregating the data on individuals to generate many population distributions for every SMSA, to construct numerous measures of metropolitan structure, and to compute these for each SMSA. The study includes several relevant measures of inequality which are highly correlated. The one to be used as an index of overall eco-

nomic inequality is the Gini coefficient for family income.[8]

The dependent variables are the rates (per 100,000) of major violent crime—murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault—known to the police. The data source is the *Uniform Crime Reports* (F.B.I., 1971). Official crime statistics have been severely criticized. Hindelang (1974:2) enumerates 14 different shortcomings of these data which various critics have pointed out; yet he concludes that "the weight of the evidence is that the UCR data provide robust estimates of the *relative* incidence of index offenses known" (p. 14). Savitz (1978:78) discusses two dozen serious limitations of the UCR but also concludes "that it is the most adequate general measure available of change in the incidence of criminal behavior." In short, many criminologists agree that, despite its known shortcomings, the UCR furnishes fairly valid indications of comparative frequencies of serious crimes, though not of their absolute frequencies.

The seven independent variables are: the SMSA's population size, percent black, percent poor, geographical region, income inequality, percent divorced, and racial socioeconomic inequality. Population size, which is highly skewed, is used in logarithmic transformation (to base ten). Percent black is the indicator of the SMSA's racial composition, which was substituted for percent nonwhite, since blacks are the minority most discriminated against and the one most relevant for comparisons of North and South. Besides, percent nonwhite has an outlier, Honolulu, which is not an outlier on percent black. Percent poor is based on the poverty index developed by the Social Security Administration, which takes into account family size, sex of family head, number of children, and farm-nonfarm residence. Region is a dummy variable distinguishing SMSAs located in the

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[6] It should be emphasized that the original theory dealt with influences on the positive social relations between members of *different groups* whereas this paper deals with negative social relations (conflict) between persons regardless of whether they belong to the same or to different groups. A basic reason is that the data on crimes against persons do not indicate the group memberships of the individuals involved. Besides, the original theory is a deductive system, whereas most of the extensions made here are more conjectural and inferential.

[7] The SMSAs in most of the United States comprise entire counties, and they consequently could be exactly matched by the county data on the Census public-use sample. But the SMSAs in New England cross county lines; the pubic use sample has approximated the New England SMSAs in terms of entire counties, and these approximations for the New England SMSAs are used in this research. The *Uniform Crime Reports* present data on corresponding approximations (SEAs) for the New England SMSAs, and these data are used here, in order to match the units to which the dependent and independent measures refer.

[8] The variable is computed only for heads of households that are families. It is based on the combined income of all family members. Income includes wages or salary, income from self-employment (including farm), social security, public assistance, pensions, and all other income (e.g., dividends, interests). It does not exclude taxes.

South (South Atlantic, East South Central, or West South Central) from those located in the other regions. Income inequality refers to pretax family income of all kinds, based on the Gini coefficient (see note 8).[9] Percent divorced is a shorthand term for the number of divorced plus the number of separated divided by the number of persons 14 years or older in the SMSA. The measure of socioeconomic inequality between races is the difference in average socioeconomic status between nonwhites and whites, based on Duncan's (1961) SEI scores. The choice of this measure is largely based on an earlier analysis using a different one.[10]

[9] Annual incomes are coded in the original source in $100's. For computing the Gini coefficient, midpoints are used by adding .5 (representing $50) to every category; in addition, the open-ended highest category ($50,000 or more) was increased by 50%, giving it a value of 750.5. (This procedure for treating the open-ended highest category is suggested by Morgan [1962]. Rough calculations indicate that the figure for the highest category is probably somewhat too low, which implies that the Gini coefficients are probably slightly underestimated, but the underestimation applies to all SMSAs.)

[10] The measure originally used for racial economic inequality was the eta (the square-root of the correlation ratio) of the relationship between the racial dichotomy (white-nonwhite) and income. But the multicollinearity between this measure and the original measure of racial composition, percent nonwhite (.80), made it impossible to distinguish reliably between the influence of the two on crime rates, and removing the outlier (Honolulu) made the multicollinearity worse (.94). The problem can be solved by substituting another index of racial inequality. (We are grateful to Joseph E. Schwartz for pointing this out and suggesting alternative measures.) The one selected is the difference in mean socioeconomic status between whites and nonwhites, partly because it conveys a clearer idea of racial inequality than a more complex index (such as the logarithm of the ratio of means) and partly because socioeconomic status encompasses education and prestige as well as income and, probably for this reason, yields stronger coefficients than a measure based on income. (But the results using the income measure are parallel, as will be noted.) The Gini coefficient based on Duncan's SEI has not been used, because some claim that the SEI does not meet the ratio-scale assumptions required for the Gini coefficient (Allison, 1978). Finally, when percent black was substituted for percent nonwhite as the measure of racial composition, it was impossible to make the corresponding change for racial inequality, because the necessary data were not in our file and going back to the original tape was not economically feasible. But the two variables (percent black and percent nonwhite) are

The five dependent variables—the rates for all major types of violent crime combined and the rates for the four major types separately—have been logarithmically transformed (to base ten) to counteract the floor effect of these negatively skewed distributions. Reliability analysis of the five rates shows that the logarithmic transformation reduces nonadditivity and increases the homogeneity of the variances, thus improving the measures.[11]

Regression analysis, based on ordinary least-squares, is the technique employed. Both metric coefficients (b) and standardized ones (β) are reported. The tables present the regression of crime rates on various combinations of structural conditions that test the theoretical inferences.

RESULTS

The first question to be raised is whether urban poverty or economic inequality is the major source of criminal violence. Of course, the two economic conditions are closely related; the correlation between inequality in family incomes and the proportion of poor people in an SMSA is .70. Moreover, poverty is related to criminal violence, as often noted (for our data, r = .30). But the important question is whether this relationship indicates an influence of poverty on violent crime or merely reflects the fact that much inequality entails much poverty, and inequality is what fosters criminal violence.

The answer the data in Table 1 gives is unequivocal: income inequality in a metropolis substantially raises its rate of criminal violence. Once economic inequality is controlled, the positive relationship between poverty and criminal violence disappears.[12] This finding cannot

virtually identical, except for the outlier (without outlier, r=.99; with outlier, r=.84).

[11] Item analysis indicates that the ratio of maximum to minimum variance is reduced from 452 using actual rates to 2 using transformed rates. Besides, the transformation increases α from .51 to .89.

[12] Although there is some multicollinearity in the regression analyses in Table 1, the results of the four independent replications of the initial combined rates indicate that the influences of the two variables can be distinguished. The same is true for the multicollinearity in Table 2, which is also not excessive (see Appendix).

Table 1. Income Inequality, Poverty, and Violent Crime

	Total[a]		Murder[a]		Rape[a]		Robbery[a]		Assault[a]	
	b	β	b	β	b	β	b	β	b	β
Income Inequality	5.22**	.52	6.73**	.56	2.45*	.26	5.72**	.49	4.81**	.47
Poverty	−.01	−.07	.01	.09	.01	.11	−.03*	−.30	.01	.12
R^2		.23		.40		.12		.12		.32

[a] Log. 10 transformation.
* At least twice its standard error.
** At least three times its standard error.

be dismissed as indicating an indirect influence of poverty mediated by the variable that has been controlled. Economic inequality cannot be considered an effect of poverty that mediates its influence on violent crime. If anything, poverty is the result of great income inequality, although it is preferable to conceptualize the two as part of the same syndrome, with growing economic inequality being accompanied by expanding poverty and declining inequality by raising income levels of the poor. The only violent crime also affected by poverty is a crime involving property as well as persons—robbery—and, contrary to poverty theory, it is negatively related to poverty. Apparently the relative deprivation produced by much inequality rather than the absolute deprivation produced by much poverty provides the most fertile soil for criminal violence.

The theory of the Southern tradition of violence fares no better than the theory of poverty as a basic source of violent crime. To be sure, our data show—as previous studies have shown—that location in the South is correlated (.41) with the SMSA's rate of all violent crimes, but structural conditions account for this, as Table 2 indicates. Overall income inequality and racial socioeconomic inequality are greater in the South than in other regions, and both of these conditions promote criminal violence, their effects being additive and cumulative. When these two forms of inequality are controlled, the total rates of criminal violence are virtually no different in Southern SMSAs than in those elsewhere,[13] and the same is true for three of the four major types. The only excep-

tion is murder, which reveals higher rates in the South even when inequalities are controlled. Moreover, the influence of racial inequality exceeds that of general economic inequality in four of five comparisons. The results support the hypothesis advanced here that inequality— especially ascriptive inequality— engenders violence and can explain the higher incidence of most violent crimes in the South, obviating the need to interpret it with conjectures about a Southern tradition of violence.

There are substantial racial differences in rates of criminal violence, and there are substantial differences among SMSAs in racial composition. The correlation between percent blacks and rate of all violent crimes in an SMSA is .57. Socioeconomic inequalities account for this relationship in part but not entirely. Table 3 reveals that overall income inequality, racial income inequality, and racial composition all exert a positive influence on rates of criminal violence, except that rape is not significantly influenced by inequalities. The proportion of blacks in the population, which seems to account for nearly a third of the variation in all violent crimes (R^2) when no other conditions are controlled, accounts for only six percent of this variation (change in R^2) once the two forms of inequality have been controlled. Since most serious violence occurs among persons of the same race and not between members of different races (Pittman and Handy, 1964; Mulvihill et al., 1969:210), the findings suggest that general and racial inequalities produce social disorganization and discontent which find expression in frequent nonrealistic conflict and criminal violence.

The fact that a correlation disappears or diminishes when other variables are controlled does not always mean that the simple correlation is spurious and reflects no

[13] When racial income inequality (difference between black and white mean income) is substituted for racial inequality in socioeconomic status, the beta for it is .32 and the other coefficients are little changed, with that for South being again less than one standard error (in the regression of total rates).

Table 2. Income Inequality, SES Inequality in Race, South, and Violent Crime

	Total Violent Crime[a]		Murder[a]		Rape[a]		Robbery[a]		Assault[a]	
	b	β	b	β	b	β	b	β	b	β
Income Inequality	2.75*	.28	3.97**	.33	2.13*	.22	2.16	.19	3.07**	.30
SES Inequality in Race	.01**	.39	.01**	.36	.01*	.27	.02**	.43	.01**	.29
South	.01	.02	.13*	.19	−.01	−.03	−.12	−.18	.11	.18
R²		.34		.56		.16		.20		.42

[a] Log. 10 transformation.
* At least twice its standard error.
** At least three times its standard error.

causal influence. It may be spurious, but it may also manifest an indirect influence mediated by the controlled variables. Violent crimes are more prevalent in Southern SMSAs than in others, and what the findings in Table 2 show is that the greater inequalities in Southern SMSAs can explain this difference in general sociological terms, so that there is no reason to interpret it idiographically on the basis of the distinctive historical experience and cultural tradition of the South. Violent crimes are also more prevalent in SMSAs with larger proportions of blacks. Our data do not tell us who commits these crimes. Yet even assuming that the ecological correlation does reflect higher rates of violent crime among blacks than among whites, the findings in Table 3 indicate that most of this difference is attributable to the socioeconomic inequality between blacks and whites and the great income inequality in SMSAs with many blacks and, consequently, cannot be attributed to distinctive racial attributes— such as genetic traits or family composition (single-parent families)—that predispose blacks toward violence. However, the explanation of violent crime in terms of inequality is subject to the same criticism that has been advanced against other interpretations. Since other SMSA conditions are also expected to influence criminal violence, these must be controlled to sustain, or possibly modify, the inferred hypothesis.

FURTHER TESTING

Economic inequality, notably if associated with ascriptive position, is expected to raise the rates of criminal violence, and so are two other conditions: population size and anomie. The number of people who live in close proximity in an area governs the probability of social contacts of all kinds, including abrasive contacts that involve conflict and possibly criminal violence. By anomie we refer not primarily to the strength of normative regulations but to a general state of disorganization, distrust, and smoldering aggression which easily erupts into violence. The only available indicator for this generalized state of anomie is the proportion of an SMSA's adults who are divorced or separated. Adding these two independent variables to the regression analyses in Table 3 makes it possible to ascertain simultaneously their influence on criminal violence and whether controlling them modifies the influences of inequalities on it.

Table 3. Income Inequality, SES Inequality in Race, Percent Black, and Violent Crime

	Total Violent Crime[a]		Murder[a]		Rape[a]		Robbery[a]		Assault[a]	
	b	β	b	β	b	β	b	β	b	β
Income Inequality	1.78	.18	3.51**	.29	1.33	.14	.17	.01	2.98**	.29
SES Inequality in Race	.01*	.25	.01**	.25	.00	.16	.01*	.26	.01*	.23
% Black	1.03**	.33	1.52**	.41	.67*	.23	.98*	.27	.95**	.30
R²		.40		.63		.19		.23		.46

[a] Log. 10 transformation.
* At least twice its standard error.
** At least three times its standard error.

Table 4. Population Size, Income Inequality, SES Inequality in Race, Percent Divorced, Percent Black, and Violent Crime

	Total Violent Crime[a]		Murder[a]		Rape[a]		Robbery[a]		Assault[a]	
	b	β	b	β	b	β	b	β	b	β
Population Size[a]	.23**	.30	.08	.09	.09	.12	.41**	.45	.11*	.13
Income Inequality	.59	.06	2.68**	.22	−.26	−.03	−1.34	−.11	2.03*	.20
SES Inequality in Race	.01**	.25	.01**	.25	.01	.14	.01**	.27	.01*	.22
% Divorced	8.27**	.36	5.90**	.21	11.4**	.51	10.31**	.38	6.77**	.28
% Black	.69**	.22	1.33**	.36	.34	.11	.48	.13	.72*	.23
R²	.64		.69		.45		.62		.55	

[a] Log. 10 transformation.
* At least twice its standard error.
** At least three times its standard error.

The results of the five regression analyses are in Table 4. The large size of an SMSA's population does, indeed, raise its rate of violent crimes, in accordance with the model by Mayhew and Levinger (1976) and the theory here under consideration. Since both inferences rest on the assumption that crimes against persons depend on opportunities for social contacts, it is perhaps not surprising that the two most serious crimes—murder and rape—fail to confirm the inferences, presumably because more important influences suppress those of contact opportunities.

Disproportionate numbers of divorced and separated in a population may be indicative of much instability, disorientation, and conflict in personal relations. Marital breakups entail disruptions of profound and intimate social relations, and they generally occur after serious estrangement, if not prolonged conflicts. Indeed, Table 4 shows that the percent divorced exhibits strong positive relationships with all forms of violent crime. Social disorganization as reflected in frequent disruptions in close personal relations seems to have a pronounced impact on criminal violence, which conforms to the conclusions of the ecological studies at the University of Chicago.[14] An important source of disorganization so measured seems to be economic inequality. The percent divorced and separated in an SMSA has a correlation of .44 with total

inequality in family income, and one of .31 with racial inequality in socioeconomic status.[15]

Both kinds of inequality influence violent crime, but their channels of influence are not the same. The overall income inequality in an SMSA includes, of course, the differences between blacks and whites. Since these racial differences are roughly controlled in Table 4 (by the variable in row 3),[16] the Gini coefficient of total income inequality (row 2) indicates largely within-race rather than between-race economic differences. Interpreted accordingly, the data in row 2 imply that intraracial income inequality exerts direct positive influences only on murder and assault but not on rape and robbery, and it has no significant direct influence on all four types of violent crime combined. Since murder and assault often involve persons who know each other, the findings suggest that within-race economic inequality directly affects criminal violence primarily between relatives, friends, and acquaintances. But within-race income inequality does have an indirect effect on the rate of all violent crimes, which is

[14] Of course, this ecological correlation does not justify the conclusion that divorced persons are more likely than others to commit violent crimes, which would require data on individuals.

[15] Its correlation with racial income inequality is slightly higher (.34) than its correlation with racial inequality in socioeconomic status (.31).
[16] A more accurate control would be if racial income differences were substituted for the racial differences in socioeconomic status in row 3. When this is done, the pattern of coefficients is essentially the same except that the beta for racial income differences, in the regression of all crimes combined, is only .13, which is not significant (1.7 times its standard error); the coefficient for total income inequality remains insignificant (1.1 times its standard error).

mediated by the proportion divorced and separated, the indicator of social disorganization.

Interracial inequality (row 3), on the other hand, has a substantial direct positive effect on violent crimes (which is significant for three of the four types separately as well as for all four combined). This direct influence contrasts with the influence of intraracial economic inequality, which is largely indirect, except for violence between persons who tend to know each other. In interpreting this difference, it is well to remember that whether an effect is seen as direct or indirect depends primarily on whether the investigator discovered the intervening variables mediating it. Since blacks constitute only eleven percent of the people in the average SMSA,[17] the extent of marital breakup in the entire population manifests mostly the conditions in the predominant majority of whites. The prevalence of divorce and separation in a whole population is not a good indication of the alienation and despair racial inequality engenders in the black ghettos, but it is a fairly good indication of the recurrent disturbances and disruptions of regular social life in the larger metropolitan community. The influences of both types of inequality are probably mediated by frequent disruptions of people's social life. But the only available indicator of these disruptions pertains largely to whites. Hence, the influence of within-race economic inequality, which also refers mostly to whites, appears as mediated by this indicator of social disruption, whereas the influence of between-race inequality, which adversely affects blacks, appears as direct, because we have no indicator of such disruption among blacks.

The findings corroborate the hypothesis that ascriptive economic inequality contributes to criminal violence, but they indicate that economic inequality that is not linked with ascribed position does, too. The assumption in this conclusion and

throughout the analysis is that the data reflect actual differences in crime rates and not merely differences in reporting, as labeling theorists sometimes argue. A complementary interpretation based on labeling theory can be suggested. The consolidation of racial differences by socioeconomic inequalities may promote repressive measures by the police and other agencies of law enforcement, including labeling blacks as criminals and reporting excessive numbers of crimes in their ghettos. Hence, great socioeconomic inequality between races may increase the official rates of reported violent crimes for two reasons, because it makes it more likely that such crimes are committed *and* that they are reported.

This interpretation is supported by Jacobs's (1979) study of the determinants of police strength in SMSAs. In 1960, the size of the police force is found to be mainly influenced by economic inequalities and the rate of crime, but by 1970, after a decade of urban social upheaval, the relative size of the black population also exerts a substantial effect on police strength. On the basis of these results and additional findings from a study by Jacobs and Britt (1979) on the tendency of police to resort to lethal violence, Jacobs (1979:923) concludes that the greater the economic cleavages the more likely will elites exercise coercive control, and under certain historical conditions, racial cleavages will have similar effects.

When all other known influences on crimes of violence are controlled, an SMSA's racial composition continues to exert some influence on it, though it is not great, and it is significant only for murder and assault (as well as all four types combined) and not for rape and robbery. This pattern parallels that observed for within-race economic inequality and indicates that racial composition primarily influences violence between persons who know each other, which does not at all correspond to the stereotype held by many whites, fearful of being attacked by a black stranger. In any case, more than three-fifths of the variation in rates of all violent crimes is accounted for by the four other independent variables in the regres-

[17] For the public use sample blacks comprise a little less than eleven percent of the population of the average SMSA. This is only slightly lower than the average based on 1970 census data for 243 SMSAs, which is twelve percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1979:17).

sion equation, and the addition of proportion of blacks adds only three percent to the explained variation.[18] To be sure, racial composition (percent blacks) does exert some indirect influence on the rates of violent crime, particularly as mediated by racial differences in socioeconomic status. But this is precisely the point. Even assuming that the ecological relationships presented reflect higher rates of violent crime for blacks than whites, the data indicate that most of this difference is the result of racial inequality.

CONCLUSIONS

High rates of criminal violence are apparently the price of racial and economic inequalities. In a society founded on the principle "that all men are created equal" economic inequalities rooted in ascribed positions violate the spirit of democracy and are likely to create alienation, despair, and conflict. The hypothesis derived from this assumption, which is also deducible from a general sociological theory, is that racial socioeconomic inequalities are a major source of much criminal violence.

When the implications of this hypothesis are compared with those of alternative theories of violent crime, the findings essentially support the hypothesis advanced here, though with some modifications. Socioeconomic inequalities, between races and within them, are positively related to high rates of violent crime in SMSAs, and when they are controlled, poverty is not related to these rates. Thus, aggressive acts of violence seem to result not so much from lack of advantages as from being taken advantage of, not from absolute but from relative deprivation. Southern cities have higher rates of criminal violence not as the result of the historical experience of the South that produced a tradition of violence but owing to the greater economic inequality there.

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[18] The only one of the four specific types of violent crime for which percent black adds more to the explained variation is murder (7%). When racial income differences are substituted for racial socioeconomic differences (see note 16), percent black accounts for 4% of the variation in all violent crimes not accounted for by the four other independent variables.

Although the proportion of blacks accounts for much of the variation in violent crime among SMSAs, once inequalities and two other conditions are controlled, racial composition accounts for little additional variation.

In accordance with the hypothesis, socioeconomic inequality between blacks and whites has a positive direct effect on criminal violence. The influence of inequality within races is more complex. The Gini index of income inequality among all families in an SMSA refers largely to the economic inequality within races if the difference between races is roughly controlled in the analysis. So conceptualized, within-race income inequality has no significant direct effect on the total rate of major violent crimes, but it does have an indirect effect on the total rate. It also has significant direct effects on murder and assault, both of which usually occur between persons who know each other, in contrast to robbery, which usually involves strangers. The indirect effect on the total rate is mediated mostly by the proportion of divorced and separated in the SMSA, which is assumed to be indicative of prevailing anomie, though primarily of such disruptive conditions among whites, who constitute nearly nine-tenths of the population in the average SMSA. The social process that may be inferred is that much inequality engenders alienation, despair, and pent-up aggression, which find expression in frequent conflicts, including a high incidence of criminal violence.

Economic inequalities appear to have even more impact on violent crimes than has been hypothesized. Inequalities generally, within as well as between races, promote criminal violence. One reason undoubtedly is that race is not the only ascribed position that blocks an individual's opportunities for economic advancement. Other ethnic groups suffer from discrimination, and many persons raised in the slums by uneducated parents, though they are part of the WASP majority, also experience economic deprivation. Indeed, great economic inequality itself may be an alienating experience that engenders conflict and violent crimes in a democracy. Racial inequality, however, does have

special significance. When overall inequality and its mediating influences are controlled, racial inequality still exerts an independent influence on criminal violence. Moreover, whereas intraracial inequality has a direct influence primarily on violence against persons one knows, interracial inequality also has a direct influence on violence against strangers.

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APPENDIX. Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Variables (N = 125)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Violent Crime[a]	—											
2. Murder[a]	.81											
3. Rape[a]	.79	.62	—									
4. Robbery[a]	.91	.66	.69	—								
5. Assault[a]	.92	.78	.74	.68	—							
6. South	.41	.61	.27	.19	.54	—						
7. Poverty	.30	.49	.29	.05	.45	.69	—					
8. Income Inequality	.47	.63	.34	.28	.55	.64	.70	—				
9. SES Inequality in Race	.53	.63	.36	.42	.54	.57	.39	.48	—			
10. % Black	.57	.71	.39	.43	.58	.67	.58	.52	.58	—		
11. Population Size[a]	.44	.21	.29	.57	.26	-.14	-.26	.06	.02	.12	—	
12. % Divorced	.63	.55	.63	.60	.56	.29	.25	.44	.31	.38	.30	—
$\overline{X}$	2.45	.81	1.23	2.06	2.13	.34	8.97	.34	12.63	.11	3.80	.05
σ	.28	.33	.27	.33	.29	.47	3.60	.03	7.95	.09	.36	.01

[a] Log. 10 transformation.

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STATUS SHIFTS WITHIN THE CITY*

HARVEY M. CHOLDIN

CLAUDINE HANSON
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

An analysis of changing status over a thirty-year period among Community Areas within the City of Chicago shows that, over time, residential areas follow the neighborhood life cycle. Three dimensions of status are measured, by means of indices of relative status, within the metropolitan context. Disaggregated, the data show six types of status careers over the thirty-year period, but the most prevalent is decline. Techniques of cohort analysis are employed to discriminate among areas constructed at different times. Two kinds of cohorts emerge in the city, prewar and postwar. The latter never attain the upper-middle status previously held by the older places. Hypotheses regarding the effects on status change of age-of-place, age and race composition, and housing are tested in multiple regression analyses. The analysis shows the dramatic decline of status among city areas relative to the suburban communities. Residential areas conform to the neighborhood life cycle; most city areas are in a stage of decline, although a few are rising in status.

INTRODUCTION

American cities of the Northeastern and Middle Western regions have changed radically in recent decades. After a cen-

tury of rapid expansion, many of these communities have stopped growing and some are losing population. Internally, there were also fundamental social changes in the cities in the period 1940 to 1970, the foremost being the loss of the growing middle and upper-middle class to the suburban zone and the massive immigration of Southern blacks. These macroscopic changes have had an impact upon the city's neighborhoods and districts. Nonetheless, urban sociological