Cultural Racism and Structural Violence

William Oliver PhD [a]

[a] Criminal Justice Department , Indiana University. , USA
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SECTION I:
A NEW LOOK
AT STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Cultural Racism and Structural Violence: Implications for African Americans

William Oliver

SUMMARY. This article discusses why it is important to consider how cultural racism contributes to the construction of motives and justifications among individuals who have committed acts of structural violence, including, lynching, hate crime and police violence against African Americans. Cultural racism is also discussed as a factor that contributes to interpersonal structural violence in situations involving black offenders and victims. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

William Oliver, PhD, is Associate Professor of the Criminal Justice Department of Indiana University. He received his PhD in Criminal Justice from the State University of New York (Albany). Dr. Oliver has written widely in the area of criminal justice, and his book, *The Violent Social World of Black Men* has been highly acclaimed in the social science community.

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KEYWORDS. Cultural racism, structural violence, institutional violence, interpersonal violence, lynching, hate crime, police violence

INTRODUCTION

Within the last forty years, the study of violence has evolved as a major concern of social scientists. Indeed, the scope of violence research is very broad, including: war, riots, terrorism, child abuse, partner abuse, hate crime, police violence, and interpersonal and community violence, and police brutality (Graham & Gurr, 1979; Silberman, 1978). As a distinct group, a great deal of attention has been directed toward analysis of violence perpetrated by and against African Americans (Curtis, 1975; Ginzburg, 1988; Hampton, 1987; Oliver, 1998; Wolfgang, 1958). This is partially due to the disproportionate representation of African Americans among victims and perpetrators of interpersonal violence.

For example, in 1998 African Americans represented 13 percent of the general population in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999), yet they accounted for 53 percent of persons arrested for murder, 55 percent arrested for robbery, and 36 percent arrested for aggravated assault (U.S. Department of Justice, 1998). Furthermore, African Americans have higher rates of violent crime victimization than whites across all age and income groups (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1999). For example, young black males 15-24 years of age have higher homicide death rates than any other race-sex subgroup in the United States. In 1995, the homicide death rate for young black males 15-24 was nearly nine times greater than that of similar aged white males, 123 per 100,000, 14 per 100,000 respectively. For every age range from age 1 to 85, African Americans have higher homicide death rates than white males and females of similar ages (National Center for Health Statistics, 1998).

The primary goal of this paper is to examine how cultural racism functions as a structural factor, that contributes to violent acts, committed against and by African Americans. A major assumption of the argument presented here is that cultural racism is a dimension of racism which is rarely considered among the various structural factors which are generally attributed significance as being positively correlated with violent acts perpetrated by and against African Americans. Finally, strategies will be proposed for addressing the problem.

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING CULTURAL RACISM

Currently, there is a sharp division among scholars regarding the use of theory for most discussions–especially for an issue as thought-provoking as cultural racism and structural violence. For some, theory would be little more

than a set of working concepts or hypotheses by means of which observations could be classified and ordered. For others a theory is a set of interrelated and structured propositions whose purpose is primarily eminently etiological (Rex & Mason, 1980).

It is clear therefore that we live in an age in which there is a deep mistrust of theories (Gilligan, 1998). In fact, a call to eliminate theories, or at least minimize them (See, 1998) in research, in practice, and in efforts such as an analysis of cultural racisms gaining momentum (Gilligan, 1996; See, 1998). The intellectual arguments regarding the relatively new phenomenon of theory utilization is spirited but is outside the parameters of this paper. Be that as it may, until the intellectuals can provide more compelling evidence on why theory should be ameliorated, eradicated or differentially crafted, we must continue with our traditional use of theory and thus set boundaries for examining violence from the view of cultural racism.

In this paper three overarching theories and perspectives may be useful in providing a causal explanation of cultural racism. These include: general systems theory, (Von Bertalanffy, 1968; Churchman, 1968)–the post-modernist or deconstructionist theory–(Baudrillard, 1991; Best & Kellner, 1997)–and the structural-cultural perspective (Oliver, 1989, in press). Taken together these theoretical formations have considerable utility in a discussion of cultural racism. For example See (1998), argues that ''systems theory is basically a mathematical model that emerged from the second law of thermodynamics. . . . The important tenets of the systems perspective is that there must be interaction and interrelatedness if the system is to function without disequilibrium. Systems are regulated through negative and positive feedback, and causal influences are curvilinear. Thus, change in one part of the system cause change in the entirety of the system.''

It can be argued therefore that from a systems perspective, if cultural racism is eradicated at the highest level of our social system, it will become non-existent at the lower echelons of society since a change in one part of there system affects the entire system.

Postmodernist or deconstruction theory represents a new theoretical paradigm that is both embraced and condemned. Baudrillard (1991) perhaps the most eloquent high-profile theorist of this perspective, whose works upstages that of Foucault (1980), questions the validity of basic concepts in critical social theory. He attacks Freudo-Marxian theories. In brief he provides an alternative perspective on contemporary society concerning the ways in which signs and images function as mechanisms of control within contemporary culture. The signs and images in the American social system at the highest levels of government have not forcibly condemned cultural racism. Therefore, See (1998), and Jenkins (1983) alluded to the post modernistic perspective with this declaration: '' . . . there is a clarion call to ''junk'' all

fallacious and stereotypical theories and research on Black people and start all over again . . . ''

The third paradigm that has underpinning for the conceptualization of cultural racism is found in the structural-cultural perspective, which is articulated in the paper.

CULTURAL RACISM DEFINED

Within the social science literature there exists a long history of attributing the high rates of social problems and violent behavior among African Americans to racism. What is unique about this literature, however, is that most discussions limit the definition and examination of racism to its institutional dimensions. That is, in most social science literature, which examines social problems among African Americans, racism is conceptualized as the systematic deprivation of equal access to opportunity (Blauner, 1972; Knowles & Prewitt, 1969; Wilson, 1987). In practice, institutional racism involves denying individuals, based on race, access to the political, educational and economic systems and institutions which are the legitimate means used to earn a living and pursue upward mobility in American society (Knowles & Prewitt, 1969). Consequently, racism is often defined as a major source of structural pressure which leads to high rates of social problems, including: unemployment, poverty, lack of vocational training, substance abuse, property crime and interpersonal violence, (Clark, 1965; Staples and Johnson, 1993). Some violence researchers have also sought to explain various acts of collective or institutional violence (e.g., lynchings, race riots, and police violence) as consequences of racist practices (Graham & Gurr, 1979). In contrast to much of the existing literature which assumes a link between institutional racism and violence, the position argued here is that while it is important to consider how blocked access (structural violence) to opportunity creates social pressure which provides a context and catalyst for the occurrence of violence, the concept institutional racism as it is generally defined does not provide an adequate description of the breath of racism as a social practice. Thus it can be argued that movement toward a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between racism and violence perpetrated against and by African Americans must consider the effects of cultural racism.

The term cultural racism represents a deliberate effort to expand the definitional range of racism as a concept and to acknowledge its complexity as a social practice, which results in numerous adverse consequences for African Americans. Thus the term cultural racism is defined here as the systematic manner in which the white majority has established its primary cultural institutions (e.g., education, mass media and religion) to elevate and glorify European physical characteristics, character and achievement and to denigrate

the physical characteristics, character and achievement of nonwhite people (Oliver, in press). Cultural racism is an institutionalized feature of American society. Consequently, it is another manifestation of institutional racism. However, in general usage, the term institutional racism does not connote an emphasis on biased or discriminatory cultural practices. Therefore, for purposes of this discussion, institutional racism has as its primary goal blocking African Americans from equal access to the legitimate opportunity structure; whereas, the primary goal of cultural racism is to diminish the cultural image and integrity of African Americans (Akbar, 1984).

A significant example of cultural racism as a social and institutional practice and an example of structural violence involves the conspicuous absence in most elementary and high school social studies curricula of a substantive discussion of the contributions of Africans and African Americans to the development of human civilization (Ben-Jochannan, 1991). Given the importance of history and social studies as a means by which a society introduces its young people to its celebration story, the conspicuous absence of African Americans in history textbooks reinforces and promotes racist ideology and racial stereotypes (Schafer, 1993). Such practices also distort the history and cultural image of African Americans (Akbar, 1984).

All forms of mass media in America have been involved in perpetrating cultural racism. For example, the early minstrel shows were constructed around the creation of characters and routines in which African Americans were portrayed as ignorant, childlike, promiscuous, foolish and violent (Riggs, 1986). Moreover in the evolution of mass media from minstrel shows, vaudeville, radio, film and television, these media have relentlessly presented content that promotes and justifies racial bias against African Americans. For example, in his interpretive history of blacks in American film, Bogle (1973) found that in the first fifty years of American film, African Americans were primarily portrayed as Toms, coons, tragic mulattoes, nannies, and brutal bucks.

Negative images of African Americans are also promoted in television programs. For example, the overwhelming majority of black actors are employed in comedic roles (Schafer, 1993). Moreover, Lichter and Lichter (1988) found that a third of high school students feel that television entertainment is an accurate representation of real life of African Americans.

The infusion of racial bias and stereotypes related to African Americans was also infused into American society through the creation and dissemination of practical artifacts used in the course of daily routine. For example, there is a long consumer history involving the construction and dissemination of stereotypical black images as a means of advertising and promoting both manufactured goods and services (Goings, 1994). Thus during the post Civil War era well into the twentieth century distorted images of African Ameri-

cans have been used to sell products and subsequently reinforce racial stereotypes and the racial ordering of society (Goings, 1994).

CONSEQUENCES OF CULTURAL RACISM

Exposure to cultural racism has had a distinct set of consequences for whites and African Americans. A major consequence for whites has been a generalized acceptance of racist folklore and stereotypes as being truthful portrayals of African Americans (Fredrickson, 1971). In a study designed to examine agreement with negative stereotypes about African Americans, the Anti-Defamation League found that 76 percent of a national random sample of white Americans agreed with one or more of the following antiblack stereotypes: ''blacks are more prone to violence,'' ''prefer welfare over work,'' ''are less ambitious,'' and ''possess less native intelligence.'' The study also found that 55 percent of the respondents agreed with two or more stereotypes and nearly 30 percent agreed with four or more (Anti-Defamation League, 1993).

Among African Americans, exposure to cultural racism has contributed to the emergence of a cultural crisis. There are three factors that are characteristic of the African American cultural crisis. First, the loss of historical memory as a result of being subjected to macro-structural and cultural practices in which African Americans have been deliberately disconnected from their history and traditional cultural practices. Second, a lack of appreciation of the physical characteristics and cultural practices unique to Africans and African Americans. And third, a lack of cultural confidence leading to a lack of cultural competence (Karenga, 1982). The lack of cultural confidence diminishes the competence of a people to believe that they can collectively work to achieve broad-based goals that benefit the group.

Pettigrew (1981) for example, has suggested that the majority of white Americans are mentally unhealthy given their tendency to accept many of the racial fictions and myths, which represent the expression, and social practice of cultural racism. Feagin and Vera (1995) agree and suggest that ''at an individual level white racism indicates a massive breakdown in empathy across the color line'' (p. 174). Wright (1975) has argued that in cases where there is an extreme lack of empathy, whites may experience what he has described as a psychopathic racial personality. Finally, Welsing (1991) has suggested that ''white supremacy is in fact like other neurotic drives for superiority or domination and, as a neurotic drive, it is founded upon a deep and pervading sense of inadequacy and inferiority'' (p. 4). In sum, racist attitudes and myths are inherent in the structure of this society and therefore represent structural violence against African Americans.

A predominant theme in the scholarship of African American psycholo-

gists and psychiatrists is that exposure to racism has distorted the personality and mental health of African Americans (Azibo, 1989; Baldwin, 1984; Clark, 1965; Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Welsing, 1981). Psychiatrists Grier and Cobbs, (1968), for example, argued, based on the treatment issues presented by their patients, that African Americans tended to experience a sense of psychological rage as a consequence of their exposure to racism and inhumane treatment.

Many contemporary African American psychologists and psychiatrists support Baldwin's (1984) observation that ''psychological misorientation is the most fundamental psychological disorder in the black personality.'' According to Baldwin (1984), ''psychological misorientation'' is a personality disorder that exists among African Americans resulting from intergenerational exposure to social pressures and institutions (e.g., the educational system, mass media, and religion) that promote and disseminate anti-black ideologies, socialization messages, and images. Self-destructive behavior is a common behavioral manifestation of psychological misorientation. Examples of some typical patterns of self-destructive behavior related to psychological misorientation include: defining manhood in terms of toughness or sexual conquest, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, drug trafficking, criminal activity and spending an inordinate amount of time participating in street corner-related activities (Akbar, 1984; Oliver, 1998; Wilson, 1990).

The mental health of African Americans is also negatively affected by what psychiatrist Chester Pierce (1970) has defined as offensive mechanisms. According to Pierce (1970) the term offensive mechanisms refers to ''the collective micro-offenses by whites to minimize the social importance of any black or any black achievement so that blacks will see themselves as useless, unloved, unable'' (p. 268). Thus, ''culture makes offensive mechanisms automatic and perhaps obligatory on the part of whites'' (p. 282). There are a broad range of verbal and non-verbal behaviors that whites engage in toward blacks that constitute offensive mechanisms or acts of micro-aggression, including: store clerks who assume that white patrons were first in line; security guards who specifically feel compelled to follow African Americans in stores; being denied front line employment; in interactions with blacks, many whites assume that they are uneducated and raised in the ghetto on welfare; and law enforcement officers, who without probable cause, stop African American motorists for what amounts to ''driving while black.'' In the long-term, that is over the course of one's life-span, exposure to acts of micro-insults and micro-aggression has a negative cumulative effect on the collective mental health of African Americans (Pierce, 1970).

The adverse effect associated with exposure to racism is also reflected in the prevalence of traditionally defined mental illness among African Americans. For example, African American men are hospitalized for psychiatric

reasons at a rate 2.8 times higher than white men and African American women at a rate 2.5 times greater than white women (National Institute on Mental Health, 1987). More specifically, African Americans are disproportionately diagnosed as schizophrenic or psychotic and make up a large percentage of people receiving services from public mental health facilities (Singleton-Bowie, 1995).

CULTURAL RACISM AND PATTERNS OF STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Structural violence is violence that occurs in the context of establishing, maintaining and extending, reducing or as a consequence of the hierarchal ordering of categories of people in society (Iadicola & Shupe, 1998). For example, acts of violence directed toward African Americans that function to reinforce and promote white hegemony is structural violence. Structural violence can also be interpersonal or institutional violence, depending on the context of the violent event and the specific roles combatants represent in violent encounters. In the discussion which follows below, a description of how several patterns of violence (e.g., lynching, hate crime, racial hoaxes, police brutality and black-on-black violence) perpetrated against and by African Americans are forms of structural violence that are influenced by the adverse effects of cultural racism.

LYNCHING AND HATE CRIME

In contemporary times, the term hate crime has been used to refer to criminal acts motivated by racial bias. However, the peak of hate crimes occurred early in the history of America in the form of lynching during the late 1800s. In the 1924 edition of Criminology, Sutherland (1924) defined lynching as the unlawful assault, killing or both of an accused person by mob action. At the end of the Civil War and beginning with the Reconstruction Era into the mid 1930s, lynching was a common response directed toward African Americans whom southern whites sought to intimidate or punish for violation of the existing racial codes (Russell, 1998). Between 1865 and 1955 an estimated 5,000 lynchings of African Americans occurred (Demaris, 1970).

The beliefs, attitudes, and social practices characteristic of cultural racism were salient in the construction of motives and justifications to lynch African Americans (Ginzburg, 1988). Lynching was clearly a form of structural violence in that there were dramatic increases in lynch mob violence immediate-

ly after the end of the Civil War and the subsequent Emancipation of African Americans from slavery. Lynching and other acts of mob violence were a means by which whites fearful of the newly freed slaves could reinforce the racial status quo which existed during the slavery era (Ginzburg, 1988). For example, Richard Maxwell Brown (1979) found that from 1868 through 1871, the Klan engaged in a massive campaign to lynch and intimidate African American men. In his research he recorded over 400 Klan lynchings of African Americans in the South between 1868 and 1871.

As social events lynchings had ritual importance to whites as a means to publicly proclaim one's support of a white superiority status quo. In addition, lynchings provided an opportunity for adults to socialize young whites on how to respond to African Americans who violate rules established by the white majority. For example, Messerschmidt (1997) observed that ''. . . the typical lynching became a white community celebration, with men, women and children cheering a mutilation and hanging, burning, or both, at the stake'' (p. 32).

Allegations that an African American man had raped a white woman was a common charge directed against black men who were targeted for lynch mob violence (Ginzburg, 1988). During the 1880s through 1900 the majority of lynch victims were charged with alleged sexual offenses (Brundage, 1993). Alleging rape was a certain means of precipitating white mob violence against African American men regardless of whether or not the act actually occurred or the dispute between the white and the African American involved a completely different issue (Brundage, 1993). Given the rigid racial status quo and prohibitions against black male-white female sexual relationships, allegations of rape had significant cultural and structural implications in southern society (Messerschmidt, 1997). Black men who flirted with white women, engaged in consensual sexual relations with white women or raped white women were perceived as having engaged in the ultimate violation of the racial status, that is, attempting to act like a white man.

Ritualized castrations of African American men were a common feature of lynchings motivated by allegations of rape (Ginzburg, 1988). These castrations reflected a deeply ingrained white male obsession with the alleged size of black male penises and a generalized acceptance of racist stereotypes which had been used to construct an image of black men as possessing an animalistic sexuality. Thus on a symbolic level lynchings motivated by allegations of rape provided white men with an opportunity to reinforce the stereotype that African American men were animalistic rapists, and that southern white men were chivalrous and righteous protectors (Dowd Hall, 1983).

The lynching of African Americans is illustrative of what Iadicola and Shupe (1997) refer to as interpersonal structural violence. That is, lynchings

were acts of violence generally committed by individuals acting outside of formal institutional authority. However, the primary motivation for committing these acts of violence involved an effort to maintain and reinforce the institutionalized racial status quo (see Figure 1).

HATE CRIME

The term hate crime refers to criminal acts motivated by bias, that is, prejudice against a race, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity/national origin, as well as disability (U.S. Department of Justice, 1997). In response to the passage of the Hate Crime Statistics Act of 1990, the U.S. Congress has mandated that the Attorney General designate the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Programs to collect national data on hate crime (U.S. Department of Justice, 1997).

During 1997, a total of 8,049 bias-motivated criminal incidents were reported to the FBI by 11,211 law enforcement agencies in 48 states and the District of Columbia (U.S. Department of Justice, 1997b). Racially biased hate crimes are the most common type bias-motivated crime reported to the FBI. For example, of the 8,049 incidents reported in 1997, 4,710 (58%) were motivated by racial bias. African Americans are more likely than any other racial group to be victims of racially biased hate crime. The FBI reports that in 1997 blacks represented 3,951 (65%) of 6,084 victims of racially biased

FIGURE 1. Interpersonal Structural Violence
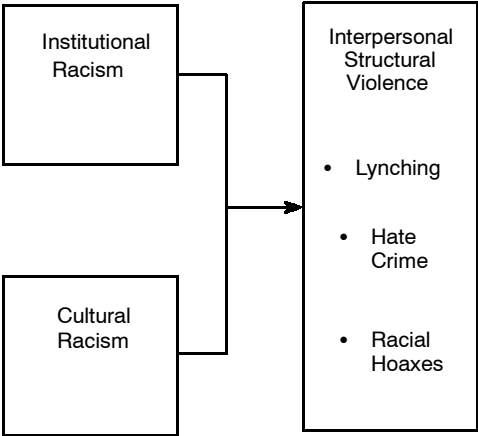
hate crime. In contrast, of the known offenders, 63 percent were white and 19 percent were black (U.S. Department of Justice, 1997).

Many whites prefer to view violent racist acts as the work of marginalized ideologues. However, Feagin and Vera (1995), have suggested that the ritual character of recurring antiblack acts indicate that they have become a traditional part of white communities and of the larger society and thus represents structural violence. Feagin and Vera's (1995) observation is supported by a recent study which found that only 5 percent of hate crimes are committed by individuals who are actively involved in organized groups (Levin & McDevitt, 1993). Moreover, Feagin and Vera (1995) argue that the proliferation of antiblack views is evident in the substantial support that former Klansman David Duke and his protégé Tom Metzger received in their unsuccessful bids for the senate and congress, respectively. For example, Duke, a former grand wizard of a national Klan federation was elected to the Louisiana state legislature and ran a primary campaign for the U.S. senate in which he received a majority of the white votes. Poll results suggest that both Metzger and Duke may not be as far outside the mainstream of white thought as some journalists and moderate politicians have suggested (Feagin & Vera, 1995).

Hate crimes are also being committed by individuals who are members of organized hate groups (Holmes & Holmes, 1994; Levin & McDevitt, 1993). While the majority of hate crimes are committed by individuals who are not active members of hate groups, hate motivated homicides are more likely to involve organized hate groups like the World Church of the Creator or various skinhead factions (Fox & Levin, 2000). Indeed, the number of racially-biased hate groups are increasing in the United States (Levin & McDevitt, 1993; Southern Poverty Law Center, 1999). Over the last decade several white supremacy groups have emerged as the most important in terms of recruitment of new members, and committing violent acts which receive national attention. Included among these groups are (1) the White Aryan Resistance, who has played a major role in recruiting and organizing young white males involved in the skinhead movement; (2) skinheads, especially those groups that have been mentored by the White Aryan Resistance; (3) the World Church of the Creator, a group that advocates race war to advance the interest of the white race; and (4) the Christian Identity Movement. The Christian Identity Movement has developed a religious theology upon which diverse white supremacy groups are uniting. Their theology teaches that whites are the true ''chosen people'' of God. They believe that whites are naturally superior to other races, and that all people of color are subhuman and more akin to animals than the white race. They also believe that the second coming of Jesus Christ will be preceded by a nationwide race war followed by a communist attack upon the United States. Subsequently, the

only survivors will be members of the identity movement (Feagin & Vera; Holmes & Holmes, 1994; Iadicola & Shupe, 1998).

During the 1980s and 1990s, official reports and newspaper accounts of bias-motivated acts of vandalism, arson, intimidation and violence increased dramatically (Levin & McDevitt, 1993; U.S. Department of Justice, 1997). For example (Fox & Levin, 2000), have reported that there appears to be a distinct trend toward the commission of increasingly brutal hate crimes. There are several notorious cases of serious bias-motivated violence which confirm the empirical findings of organizations which systematically monitor hate crime. For example, in 1988, Mulugeta Seraw, an Ethiopian American was beaten and killed in Portland, Oregon by three skinheads who had ties to Tom Metzger's White Aryan Resistance group (Holmes & Holmes, 1994; Feagin & Vera, 1995). In 1989, eighteen year old Yusef Hawkins was chased and shot by a mob of young white males after he wandered into a community in Bensonhurst, Queens, New York looking to purchase a used car which had been advertised in the newspaper. On July 4, 1990 more than thirty white youths attacked a black family with baseball bats as they watched a firework display in Queens, New York (Ladicola & Shupe, 1998). In 1998, James Byrd Jr. was killed after three white men, who had affiliations with an organized hate group, picked him up as he was attempting to hitch a ride home. After being picked up by the men, Byrd was driven to a wooded area where he was stomped and beat and then he was chained to a pickup truck and dragged along a paved road until his head and right shoulder separated from his body (Curry & McCalope, 1999).

The acts of violence described above may be categorized as containing elements of interpersonal violence and structural violence. They are acts of interpersonal violence, in that they are acts of violence that occur between people acting outside the role of agents or representatives, for example, law enforcement (Iadicola & Shupe, 1998). They are also acts of structural violence in that the perpetrators of these racially biased acts of violence are attempting through their actions to promote the superiority of whites and to subordinate African Americans (Iadicola & Shupe, 1998). The motivational catalyst and justification for these acts is rooted in the perpetrators exposure and acceptance of cultural racism (Feagin & Vera, 1995). Perpetrators of hate crimes perceive blacks as less than human, as not worthy of respect, as wanting something for nothing, as contributing to the social and economic deterioration of America generally and to the loss of jobs and status among working-class white men particularly (Feagin & Vera, 1995; Levin & McDevitt, 1993). Their familiarity with racial stereotypes and the cult of racial hate reduces their inhibitions against committing acts of severe violence. Moreover, frustration with the circumstances of their personal lives combined with a racist ideology lead them to seek social esteem by defining themselves as

righteous warriors who possess the courage to seek justice for white America (Hamm, 1996).

THE RACIAL HOAX

The racial hoax is another form of structural violence, which has been routinely perpetrated against African Americans. According to Russell (1998), a racial hoax occurs when someone fabricates a crime and blames it on another person because of his race or when an actual crime has been committed and the perpetrator falsely blames someone because of his race. While there is greater awareness and discussion of racial hoaxes today, the racial hoax perpetrated against blacks by whites has a long history. Historically, rape was the most common criminal hoax played upon African American men (Russell, 1998). For example, in 1931 in the case of the Scottsboro Boys, two young white women accused nine ''Negro boys'' of assaulting and raping them. The women told this story after they had voluntarily rode in a train boxcar with the black boys, who had earlier fought with a group of young white males over who would ride in a covered boxcar. Subsequently, when the train was stopped and the white women were discovered with the black boys, the women panicked and claimed they had been raped. After a speedy trial eight of the nine black boys were sentenced to death.

In contemporary times there have been two racial hoaxes directed against African Americans which represent exemplars of the racial hoax as a form of structural violence influenced by cultural racism. The first of these cases involved Charles Stuart. In November 1989, Stuart reported to police that he and his wife Carol were shot and robbed by a black man as they were returning home from a Lamaze birthing class. Carol Stuart and the unborn child died following the attack. This case received a great deal of media attention given the racial dynamics, that is, an all-American middle-class couple, expecting their first child are shot and robbed by a black man. Subsequently, the wife and child die and the husband is left to recover from his gun shot wound and the loss of his family. The Boston police mounted a massive investigation in the black area where the alleged crime occurred. Many black men were subjected to interrogations, searches and police lineups. Charles Stuart eventually picked a black man named Willie Bennett as the person who attacked him and his family. Upon further investigation of the inconsistencies of Stuart's account and incriminating information from his brother, who Stuart had solicited to kill his wife, Stuart committed suicide (Feagin & Vera, 1995; Russell, 1998).

The other notorious case involving a racial hoax perpetrated against African Americans by a white offender is the Susan Smith case. In October 1994, Susan Smith, a young white South Carolina mother, reported to the police

that she had been the victim of a carjacking. The carjacker was described as a young black male, 20 to 30 years old. After gaining control of her car, Smith claimed that the carjacker drove off with her two sons, ages three and fourteen months. In response to the account provided by Smith, a massive statewide search was initiated. Nine days after the search began, Smith confessed that she had murdered her sons by allowing her car to become submerged in a local lake. Her motive for doing so was to make herself more desirable to a man who had broken off a relationship with her because she had minor children (Russell, 1998).

Russell (1998) suggests that racial hoaxes are devised, perpetrated and successful because they tap into widely held fears and stereotypes. That is, the belief that black men are violent is used to shift criminal responsibility from the white offender, the actual offender in the incident, to what Russell (1998) refers to as the fictional ''criminal black man.'' An exaggerated fear of the image of the ''criminal black man'' persists despite the fact that the majority of whites who experience violent crime victimization are victimized by white offenders (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997). For example, in 1998, 84 percent of white murder victims were slain by white offenders (U.S. Department of Justice, 1998).

The racial hoax is a unique type of interpersonal structural violence. Unlike most acts of interpersonal structural violence, the racial hoax is not generally directed toward a specific individual. Rather it is structural violence perpetrated against a distinct racial group. However, it is interpersonal in that the perpetrator of the hoax is not acting as a representative of institutional authority, but is motivated by self interests. A racial hoax may also precipitate acts of institutional structural violence. For example, as in the Stuart case, it is common for law enforcement agencies to engage in overtly aggressive police practices (e.g., searches of homes and vehicles, on the street interrogations of individuals who are of the same sex and race of the alleged offender, and arresting individuals on suspicion of committing a crime). Indeed, encounters between the police and African American males subsequent to the promotion of a racial hoax have a great potential to escalate into violence given the anger of the police and the resentment of those African Americans who feel they have been unfairly targeted by the police because they are black.

## POLICE VIOLENCE

Police violence against African Americans may be appropriately classified as institutional violence, structural violence or institutional structural violence. Police violence is institutional violence given that it is violence that occurs by the actions of societal institutions and their agents (Iadicola & Shupe, 1998). When police officers interact with citizens and they initiate

necessary, unnecessary or excessive acts of violence against such citizens, their violent actions are governed by the roles they are playing in an institutional context as agents of government. Thus police violence is a form of institutional violence. However, it may also be a form of institutional structural violence, particularly when it is directed against African Americans. That is, police violence against African Americans has historically served the function of maintaining an American racial hierarchy in which the criminal justice system as an institution is used to perpetuate white dominance and black subordination (Higginbotham, 1978; Mauer, 1999; Miller, 1996) (see Figure 2).

There is a lack of adequate national data on police use of force, consequently, researchers must often rely on a variety of city-specific studies in order to discuss the prevalence of its occurrence. What the available data does suggest, however, is that there exists significant racial disparities between whites and African Americans relative to experiencing adverse contacts with the police (Bayley & Mendelsohn, 1968; Kuykendall, 1970). For example, in a recently published national study of police use of force, it was reported that African Americans and Latinos were 70 percent as likely as whites to a have face-to-face contact with the police (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997).

A significant source of data on police violence are studies which analyze complaints against the police. In an analysis of complaints against the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) from 1987 through mid-1990, it was

FIGURE 2. Institutional Structural Violence
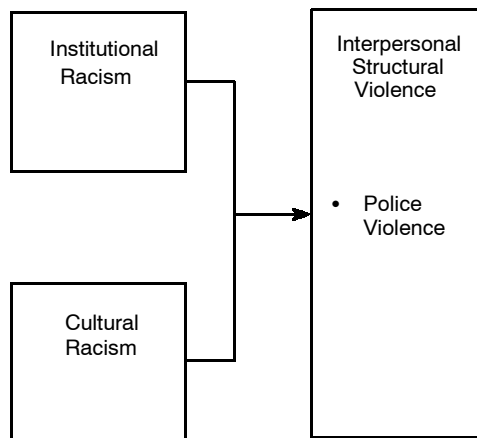
found that African Americans, who constitute 13 percent of Los Angeles' population, filed 41 percent of the complaints. In contrast, Latinos who constitute 40 percent of the population, filed 28 percent of the complaints, and whites who are 37 percent of the population filed 30 percent of the complaints (Rohrlich & Merina, 1991).

Statistics published by the New York City Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) also indicate that African Americans are disproportionately represented among victims of public abuse and violence. For example, in their 1995 bi-annual report the CCRB reported that three quarters (75.9%) of the people who had filed complaints against New York City police officers between January and June of 1995 were African American (50%) and Latino (26%) (Amnesty International, 1996).

Most incidents of police violence are not reported to law enforcement, nor are they brought to the attention of the public through media accounts. However in a content analysis of major national and regional newspapers for the time frame January 1990 through May 1991, Learch (1993) found reports of 130 incidents of serious police brutality against citizens. Her findings revealed that white police officers were centrally involved in 93 percent of the reported cases of police assault and that African Americans or Latinos were the victims in 97 percent of the police assaults reported in the newspapers she examined.

One of the most notorious contemporary cases of police violence was the Rodney King beating which occurred in Los Angeles in March 1991. The facts surrounding the incident suggest that King, an African American male, was severely beaten by the police after he led the police on an eight mile car chase. The police had initially asked King to stop his car after he had been observed speeding. When King finally stopped the vehicle, he was yanked from the car by officers who felt that he was not moving fast enough. Once out of the car he wiggled his butt at a female police officer who had ordered him at gunpoint to lie down on the ground. Finally, he heaved four male officers off of his back when they attempted to handcuff him. Subsequently, he was shot with an electric taser gun, which didn't seem to phase him. When a second electrical shot failed to incapacitate him, King was struck in the face with a police baton. Upon falling to the ground King was severely beaten by several of the twenty-seven police officers who had participated in the car chase. At the criminal trial of the police officers charged with engaging in excessive force, it was revealed through analysis of videotape of the incident that King had received fifty-six blows in eighty-one seconds. The doctors who examined King reported that they found bodily damage: nine skull fractures, a shattered eye socket and cheekbone, a broken leg, a concussion, injuries to both knees, and facial damage (Mydans, 1991).

The four officers who were charged with criminal assault in the Rodney

King incident were subsequently acquitted by an all-white suburban jury. What was unbelievable to many people who had followed the trial was that evidence of guilt appeared to be overwhelming: several officers at the scene testified that the beating was unnecessary and a videotape of the incident was introduced which substantially contradicted the testimony of the accused officers.

The not guilty verdict in the first Rodney King criminal trial is an interesting case study of how the perception of African American men as dangerous criminals pre-conditioned a group of white jurors to disregard overwhelming evidence indicating that the police had engaged in excessive use of force.

The Abner Luima case is another recent incident of police violence against an African American that has received substantial national media attention. In this incident, Luima, a Haitian immigrant was arrested after he had observed a man with blood on his face shouting that he had been hit by the police. In response, Luima claims that he said to the police, . . . ''even if somebody do something, the officer want to make an arrest, they are not supposed to hit him, because the person have his rights'' (Indianapolis News, 1999). One of the officers who heard Luima's comments said to him, ''Stupid nigger, I'm going to teach you a lesson on how to respect cops.'' Luima was immediately struck in the face with a police radio by the officer and physically assaulted by two other police officers who were present. After the beating, Luima was arrested and taken to a police precinct. At the precinct he was subjected to additional beating which ended when two officers forced him into a bathroom and stuck a police baton in his rectum and then put it into his mouth. The demeaning acts of brutality which were committed in the Luima incident are strikingly reminiscent of many lynchings of African American males committed in the first half of the twentieth century (Ginzburg, 1988; Messerschmidt, 1997).

Finally, one of the most notorious contemporary cases of police violence involves the case of the African immigrant, Amadou Diallo. In 1999, Diallo, an unarmed African was shot at 41 times and hit 19 times. This act of excessive force was precipitated when Diallo reached for and displayed his wallet when he was encountered by four New York City police officers, assigned to the proactive NYPD Street Crime Unit. The Diallo case has generated national debate about aggressive police practices based on the zero tolerance model of policing (Editorial, 1999).

Acts of unnecessary and excessive use of police violence against African Americans can not be fully understood if such acts are narrowly defined as examples of institutional or institutional structural violence. There is a cultural context in which police violence against African Americans is situated. According to Morales (1972), police recruited from the dominant society reflect the values, attitudes and prejudices of the majority community. Moreover, a

California study found that law enforcement officers were primarily recruited from the lower-middle and upper-lower classes; social groups which have been found to manifest high degrees of racial prejudice (Mann, 1993; Swett, 1969). The generalized societal disrespect for African Americans and internalization of antiblack stereotypes are often imported into the police occupational role from the larger society. Thus encounters with African Americans are substantially influenced by racially biased socialization experiences which predate the assumption of the police officer role (Levin & McDevitt, 1993).

For many white police officers conflict-ridden encounters between themselves and African Americans are attributed significant symbolic meaning. Given the pervasiveness of ''the violent black man'' stereotype, one of the great fears and challenges of police work involves learning how to successfully manage potentially threatening encounters with ''the violent black man.'' These encounters are often characterized by dual tensions, including danger and victory, loss of respect or the acquisition of a valued status among police officer peers, and life or death. Such concerns emerge as a result of police officers familiarity and acceptance of distorted stereotypes of African American men as dangerous because they possess superhuman strength (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993). Thus, I disagree with those who have suggested that the disproportionate rates of police violence against African Americans are exclusively the result of self-confident overt racism and hatred. Indeed, overt racism and hatred of African Americans is a significant factor leading to the high rates of police violence committed against them. However, I argue from a situational perspective, that as specific police encounters with African American suspects unfold into violent incidents, the primary motivation leading to police violence is white male fear of black males. It is the fear of African American males which leads police officers to respond to the slightest verbal or physical gesture with overt violence. In his classic study of police violence Chevigny (1969) found that the first step in the process leading to excessive force involves a perception by the police of a challenge to authority. In police encounters with African American males, violent actions tend to evolve as a consequence of fear of not being able to successfully meet the stereotypical brute force challenge that the animalistic violent black man represents.

Finally, police violence against African Americans may also be motivated by a conscious desire to reinforce the racial status quo (Myrdal, 1941; Jacobs and O'Brien, 1998). In incidents where this is a salient concern of the police, police officers use violence as a means of teaching the victim a lesson about the importance of knowing and staying in his place (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993). This concern and motive for police violence against African Americans is indistinguishable from the concerns and motives of white lynch mobs. For

example, Messerschmidt (1997) observes: ''African American men who engaged in any practice defining a masculinity that indicated that they were acting like a white man became appropriate subjects for white male violence'' (p. 27). African American men who challenge police authority by asking why they were stopped or asking for the police officer's badge number or verbally expressing anger about the inconvenience of a stop put themselves at risk for violent retaliation (Russell, 1998).

BLACK ON BLACK VIOLENCE

Given that most acts of interpersonal violence involve an interracial victim-offender relationship pattern (U.S. Department of Justice, 1997a), when these acts occur among African Americans, they are commonly referred to as black on black violence (Oliver, 1998).

Incidents of black on black violence may also be appropriately characterized as a type of institutional structural violence. Iadicola and Shupe (1998) have used the term interpersonal structural violence to refer to incidents in which individuals or groups acting outside of the role of interpersonal agents commit violent acts to maintain, extend or reduce hierarchical structures in society. From this perspective, a typical example of this type of violence is a race riot or other acts of race, gender, ethnic or class violence committed by individuals acting outside of the institutional structure of society. A significant aspect of Iadicola and Shupe's (1998) definition of interpersonal structural violence is that they assume that individuals who commit this type of violence do so as a means of supporting the goals and interests of the dominant institutions in society. With regard to the characterization of black on black violence as a type of interpersonal structural violence, Iadicola and Shupe's (1998) definition has been extended here to also include acts of interpersonal violence which are precipitated by the way in which the American social structure has been organized to have an adverse affect on African Americans (Blauner, 1972). That is, in most instances when African Americans engage in acts of interpersonal structural violence they do not manifest any conscious intent to maintain or extend the racial status quo, even though that is one of the social consequences of the high rates of black on black violence. Black on black violence is a major social problem in the African American community primarily because it occurs disproportionately. For example, African Americans represent 13 percent of the general population, however in 1997 they were over-represented among persons arrested for violent crime: 56 percent of murder arrests, 40 percent of rape arrests, 57 percent of robbery arrests and 37 percent of aggravated assault arrests (U.S. Department of Justice, 1997, 1997a). Moreover, for both African American males and females, 15-24 years of age, homicide is the leading cause of death

(National Center for Health Statistics, 1998). There is no singular cause which explains the disproportionate rates of interpersonal violence among African Americans. Moreover, there is very little consensus among criminologists and other social scientists relative to what causes the high rates of violence among African Americans. Explanations have ranged from institutional racism and economic inequality (Blau & Blau, 1982; Silberman, 1978), the economic transformation of the economy and the emergence of a black underclass (Wilson, 1987), commitment to values and norms which condone violence as a means of resolving disputes (Wolfgang & Ferracuti, 1967), adherence to a southern tradition of violence (Gastil, 1971), the cheapening of black life by the criminal justice system (Hawkins, 1983), racial inequality and displaced aggression (Poussaint, 1983), to street gangs and drug trafficking (Taylor, 1990).

A major limitation of most theoretical explanations of black on black violence is that they fail to consider how exposure to cultural racism contributes to the occurrence of violent behavior among African Americans. While it is important to consider traditional structural factors (e.g., racism, unemployment, poverty, female-headed families, etc.) to determine how strongly these factors may be correlated with violent behavior committed by African Americans, it is also important to note that violent behavior is ultimately a product of how situations or encounters with others are defined (see Figure 3) (Oliver, 1998).

FIGURE 3. Interpersonal Structural Violence Among African Americans
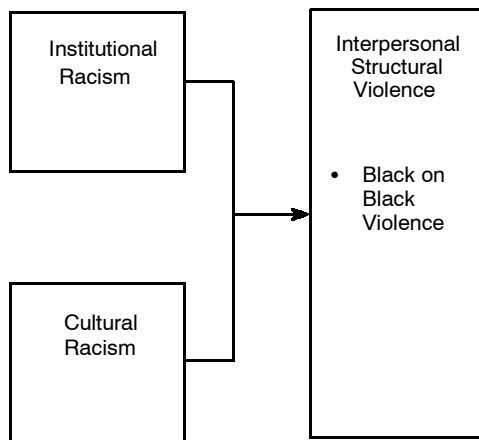
What, therefore, influences how African Americans define situations which they believe require that one resort to violence? I believe that exposure to cultural racism contributes to the existence of a definitional framework which influences how African Americans who are most at risk for engaging in violent behavior define themselves, others, their community and specific encounters. Cultural racism contributes to black on black violence through two distinct pathways (see Figure 3). First, cultural racism is one of several structural pressures–including institutional racism and the race neutral re-structuring of the economy–which have contributed to massive social disorganization and social isolation among African Americans who reside in areas characterized by high rates of unemployment, poverty, welfare dependency and female-headed families (Wilson, 1978, 1996). While institutional racism produces social disorganization by denying equal access to the legitimate opportunity structure (Staples & Johnson, 1994), cultural racism leads to social disorganization through the deliberate attack on the cultural integrity and image of African Americans (Akbar, 1984). Racial stereotypes about African Americans (e.g., the view that blacks are lazy, sexually promiscuous, violent, irresponsible and have never made a significant contribution to America or the world) are more likely to resonate with those African Americans who live their lives in communities experiencing concentrated poverty. Thus, the combined effects of institutional racism, cultural racism and the race-neutral restructuring of the economy contribute to the establishment of communities which become fertile fields for the unchecked display of violent behavior. Second, cultural racism influences how all African Americans perceive and define themselves. It is impossible as an African American to be unaware of ones membership in a stigmatized racial group. Moreover, those who are most at risk for participating in violent behavior have had a tendency to accept as valid certain stereotypical images of African Americans (Fishman, 1998). For example, it is not uncommon for African American males who are most at risk for engaging in violent behavior to define manhood in terms of toughness, sexual conquest and thrill-seeking (Anderson, 1999; Oliver, 1998). The inability to achieve manhood through conventional means, leads some African American males to embrace exaggerated and stereotypical images of manhood (Staples, 1982). What is problematic about this however, is that these alternative manhood roles increases one's risk of becoming involved in a violent encounter (Oliver, 1998; Wilson, 1990). For example, it is those African American males who tend to define manhood in terms of toughness, sexual conquest and thrill-seeking that are most likely to spend an inordinate amount of time hanging out on ''the streets,'' using drugs, selling drugs, and committing a host of criminal acts as a means of maintaining a street oriented lifestyle. Indeed, for many of these men their

attraction to ''the streets'' emerges as a consequence of being denied access to the conventional opportunity structure (Anderson, 1999; Oliver, 1998).

RECOMMENDATIONS

All levels of government must take the initiative to form partnerships with educational institutions, the business and faith communities, and civic organizations to eliminate racism. Indeed, a greater awareness of cultural racism as a social practice is a necessary requirement for the establishment and implementation of a comprehensive agenda to prevent various types of structural violence. For example, the elimination of cultural racism must be funded in a manner that is equal to the resources allocated to ''the war on drugs.'' Diversity training must be incorporated as a required component of the K-12 social studies curricula. Early exposure to antiracist education will have long-term benefits for society. Diversity training should also be included as a routine feature of pre-service and in-service training in the work place.

Within the criminal justice system it is critically important that efforts be undertaken to increase the representation of African Americans and other racial minorities in the numerous agencies that are responsible for administering the law. A specific focus of police training should include a workshop which describes how exposure to cultural racism leads to bias in the use of police discretionary authority. Moreover, such workshops should also examine how exposure to cultural racism contributes to the formulation of motives and justifications for various patterns of structural violence.

Finally, laws which prohibit hate crime must be vigorously enforced. In addition, perpetrators of acts of structural violence influenced by cultural racism must be required to participate in violence reduction and diversity awareness programs as a condition of probation, parole or continued employment.

CONCLUSION

The discussion that has been presented above strongly suggest that there are several patterns of structural violence in which the motives and rationalizations of violent offenders are to a degree influenced by their exposure to cultural racism. Consequently, the prevention of structural violence is dependent on proactive public policies and intervention strategies directed toward the elimination of racism in American society.

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