RACE, CRIME, AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

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Although strain and social control theories assign a central role to the influence of the American dream on criminal behavior, little research has examined its impact on African Americans. Furthermore, while the criminology literature is replete with studies of the influence of aspirations and expectations on behavior, few of these have emphasized the economic goals so central to the core tenets of the American dream. In contrast, this study is based on a sample approximately half African American and measures the American dream in economic terms. The findings indicate that African Americans maintain a stronger commitment to the American dream than do Whites, but the nature of its influence on behavior offers little support for social control theory among either Whites or Blacks. Its effect is, however, consistent with strain theory, but only among Whites. The implications of the inapplicability of both strain and control theories to African Americans are discussed.

Two of the most dominant theories in the field of criminology—strain and social control—have for some 30 years taken opposing stances on the behavioral consequences of adherence to the American dream, with strain theory stressing its negative implications and social control theory emphasizing its decidedly positive impact. Consistent with these contrasting themes, few observers would question the power of the American dream both to frustrate and inspire the citizens of this country. While there are a variety of components to this dream, none competes with the promise of economic and material success. It is extolled in the family, from the pulpit, in our schools, via the media, and by politicians. Simply put, it is quite impossible to live in the United States and not be bombarded by images of materialism and economic

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achievement. That this reality has had both positive and negative consequences should be no surprise. The dream has inspired heroic individual success stories, but it also has expressed itself in nightmares and human misery. As society continues to grapple with the reality of inequality, the promise of the American dream is brought into sharp relief, and many have questioned whether it holds any sway over those who continue to face failure in its wake.

This research explores the extent to which African Americans, a group historically denied full access to the American dream, subscribe to the goals of economic and material success, relative to the importance attached to these goals by their White counterparts, and with what behavioral consequences. There certainly is ample evidence to suggest that many individuals recalibrate their definition of success in the face of failure, and the supposition by some observers is that African Americans have downgraded the importance of economic and material success on the basis of their inability to realize these goals historically. Indeed, some commentators believe that many African Americans have forsaken the American dream altogether, concluding that it applies to Whites only. On the other hand, others claim that the goal of economic success continues to captivate the imagination of African Americans and to motivate their behavior.

Surprisingly little research has focused directly on the comparative salience of various success goals among African Americans (see, however, Hochschild 1995 for an excellent review of the empirical literature that does exist; also see Nightingale 1993 for a historical account of the American dream among poor Black children). Instead, much of the research in this area has concentrated on social class differences in aspirations and expectations, implicitly assuming that class is a reasonable proxy for race. The result is that we actually know very little empirically about the salience and behavioral consequences of the American dream among African Americans.

Uncertainty about the influence of the American dream extends beyond the issue of race to the nature of the relationship between success goals and social position in general. In this regard, two quite opposed perspectives have staked a claim to the truth. One, championed most influentially by Merton (1938) and subsequent strain theorists in the field of criminology, holds that there is a universal set of goals toward which all Americans, regardless of background and position, strive. Chief among these is monetary success. The other position, represented most prominently by Hyman (1953), posits the existence of class-based goals and holds that many deprived Americans adapt to their circumstances by lowering their aspirations for success. Interestingly, both positions have been supported by research evidence: Some studies indicate that numerous lower-status individuals have aspirations that are as high as those of their middle-class counterparts, while others reveal that some deprived Americans do lower their aspirations as an adaptation to the

frustration generated by their inability to compete in a stratified society (Agnew and Jones 1988:315-16).

In addition to these equivocal research findings, there are three other limitations to the work in this area. First, very little research in the field of criminology has focused specifically on economic goals, concentrating instead on educational or occupational aspirations (Agnew et al. 1996; Farnworth and Leiber 1989). To the extent that economic and material success represents the essence of the American dream and is central to the strain theory formulation, the existing research may actually tell us very little about the empirical status of either the dream or the theory. Second, little attention has been paid to the extent to which either of the above models applies specifically to African Americans. For example, although Agnew et al. (1996) have recently examined the influence of economic dissatisfaction and frustration on criminal behavior, their analysis was confined to White respondents. More generally, race is rarely treated as anything other than a control variable in the considerable body of criminological research in which aspirations and expectations assume central roles. Whatever the reasons for this "race gap" (see Matsueda and Heimer 1987 for a discussion of some of these), it represents a serious omission. Third, researchers typically have ignored another significant way in which deprived individuals might adapt to their circumstances: by actually raising expectations to quite inflated levels. As in the case with lowering aspirations, this brings aspirations and expectations into alignment and reduces frustration levels (Agnew and Jones 1988:316).

The notion of inflated goals is consistent with social control theory, a model in which high aspirations are seen as inhibiting deviant behavior because they represent a "stake in conformity" (Hirschi 1969). The control model, of course, poses a direct challenge to the strain interpretation, and considerable evidence does indicate that high aspirations function to inhibit rather than produce deviant behavior. Still, these data usually are generated from demographically undifferentiated or White male samples, rarely concentrating on African Americans and typically ignoring strictly economic aspirations (Farnworth and Leiber 1989).

In short, even though strain theory stresses the critical importance of economic goals and was intended from its inception to explain the deviant behavior of lower-status and underprivileged populations, we actually know very little about how it applies specifically to African Americans. Control theory, the dominant competing alternative to the strain perspective, also stresses the importance of aspirations but ignores African Americans by design, purporting to be a universal explanation of deviant behavior. The result is that while two of the most respected and thoroughly researched theories in the field of criminology assign a major role to economic aspirations,

we do not know much about the economic goal orientation of African Americans or how this orientation affects their behavior.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Social control and strain theories have been two of the most influential explanatory models in the field of criminology. While strain theory has the longer history of the two, it had begun to lose some of its luster, particularly during the 1980s, in the face of negative research findings and as a result of the increasing popularity of the social learning and social control models. However, it has made a resurgence in recent years, thanks in large part to Agnew's (1992) introduction of his related General Strain Theory. For its part, social control theory has seen a continual increase in popularity since Hirschi's (1969) influential formulation (for earlier versions of control theory, see Nye 1958; Reckless 1961) and is attracting even more attention as a consequence of Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) introduction of their related General Theory of Crime.

We are interested in the strain and social control models in this research because both assign a central role to the influence of the American dream on behavior, although they posit different behavioral consequences for individuals with high aspirations. In general, strain theory proposes that high aspirations among those with limited opportunities generate pressures to deviate, while social control theory asserts that high aspirations ensure conforming behavior regardless of the level of available opportunities. Although control theory does not define aspirations in relation to the American dream per se, we believe that our conceptualization stressing material and economic success is consistent with the control theory perspective. That is, a critical focus of control theory is on the "motivation to strive for conventional goals" (Hirschi 1969:162). In direct contrast to the strain model, control theory avers that the delinquent is not motivated to achieve conventional goals; rather, the delinquent is a nonstriver, a nonaspirer: "The greater one's acceptance of conventional (or even quasi-conventional) success goals, the less likely one is to be delinquent. . . . It is not true that ambition leads to crime; on the contrary, ambition reduces the chances of crime" (Hirschi 1969:227). In addition, as Jensen (1995:154-55) has noted, Hirschi does not limit theoretically the types of aspirations that function to inhibit delinquency—even crass materialists are less prone to crime and delinquency than are low and nonaspirers. For control theory, ambition and high aspirations are central in producing conformity (Hirschi 1969:21). Because there is little question that material and economic success are dominant success goals in American society, we believe it is reasonable to index high aspirations—as defined by control

theory—by the degree of commitment to the American dream as we have conceptualized it.

At the empirical level, considerable research has found the highest deviance rates among those with low aspirations, apparently supporting control theory. However, much of this research has operationalized success goals in educational and occupational terms, rather than as monetary success per se, a surprising orientation given the emphasis Merton and subsequent strain theorists placed on monetary goals (Agnew 1995:310). Educational and occupational aspirations obviously are related to economic success, but they are not at the heart of the American dream itself. In fact, Messner and Rosenfeld (1994:78) have pointed out that noneconomic goals and roles are actually devalued relative to economic success in American society. Education, for example, is not valued for its own sake but as a means to occupational attainment. Occupational attainment, in turn, is valued primarily because it is capable of producing economic rewards.

To the extent that researchers have ignored economic goals, they have failed to capture the essence of the American dream. To be sure, there are exceptions to this trend in the literature. For example, Farnworth and Leiber (1989) explicitly examined economic aspirations and found that failure to achieve monetary goals, especially in combination with low educational expectations, was a significant predictor of delinquency, while frustrated educational goals were relatively unimportant. This research stands out as much for its emphasis on economic goals as it does for its specific findings. Farnworth and Leiber's argument that the failure to properly operationalize strain theory may well account for its lack of empirical support historically is perhaps the most important contribution of their work.

Jensen (1995) has argued, however, that while Farnworth and Leiber (1989) show that the gap between aspirations and expectations is correlated with delinquency independent of the effects of aspirations, they failed to model the main effects of expectations in their analysis. This is critical because strain theory predicts an interaction between aspirations and expectations beyond the main effects of the two variables. As a result, the effects of strain and expectations are confounded in Farnworth and Leiber's research. In a reanalysis of their data—one in which strain and expectations are not confounded—Jensen finds that expectations produce the effect that Farnworth and Leiber mistakenly attributed to strain. That is, his reanalysis shows that the higher the aspirations, the greater the delinquency; similarly, the higher the expectations, the lower the probability of delinquency involvement. He finds no significant aspirations-by-expectations interaction and thus no need to incorporate the concept of strain into an explanation of delinquency (Jensen 1995:141-42, 146).

The significance of Farnworth and Leiber's (1989) and Jensen's (1995) findings notwithstanding, some criminologists have de-emphasized the results of such research because strain is operationalized via perceptual measures. Critics have argued that because strain theory is a structural model, only ecological measures can properly test the theory. However, this criticism fails to appreciate the distinction between microlevel and macrolevel strain theory (Agnew et al. 1996). The strain model clearly has applications at the individual level, and the history of research on the theory is replete with individual, perceptual measures of strain and blocked opportunity. Our purpose in this research is not to enter into this debate, much less resolve it. We acknowledge the dispute but remind the reader that our goal is to examine the behavioral consequences of commitment to the American dream among African Americans. We have chosen to do this via perceptual and behavioral measures because they best address the specific issues we are examining. This focus is consistent with the recent argument by Agnew et al. (1996:682-83) that researchers have virtually ignored the central variable in strain theory: dissatisfaction/frustration with one's current monetary status. As an indicator of individual-level strain, Agnew believes that it is economic frustration or dissatisfaction, more so than any other variable, that distinguishes strain theory from alternative explanations. Defined in this fashion, strain necessarily must be measured at the individual level.

Related to the neglect of economic goals per se is the apparent inability of strain theory to explain why many objectively deprived individuals with high aspirations do not behave in the way the theory predicts (i.e., why they do not become frustrated and turn to deviance). The favored explanation has been that such individuals are able to avoid the frustration predicted by strain theory because they have lowered their aspirations; that is, they "settle for" lower levels of achievement and thus insulate themselves from the view that they are failures. An alternative mechanism of adaptation ignored by strain theorists but noted by Agnew and Jones (1988:316) is the raising of expectations to a level congruent with the promise of the American dream. This not only reduces frustration levels but also bolsters self-image since the expectation is that high achievement levels are indeed possible.

The notion of inflated aspirations and/or expectations is consistent with social control theory, which posits that high aspirations do not lead to deviance in the manner proposed by strain theory but actually insulate individuals from deviant involvement because they reflect a commitment to conformity. There is, in fact, considerable research supporting the control theory position (e.g., Hirschi 1969; Johnson 1979; Liska 1971). In addition, Agnew and Jones (1988:317) point to evidence in the status attainment literature indicating that inflated expectations are quite common. In regard to race, for example, this evidence shows that while Blacks have significantly lower levels of

educational attainment than do Whites, they have similar levels of educational expectations. Such findings call into question the assumption that structural factors such as class and race overwhelm passive individuals who are unable to resist or adapt to their impact. Instead, these data show that many deprived individuals apparently maintain aspiration levels that bear little relation to the objective conditions under which they live (Agnew and Jones 1988:332)—yet another indication of the spell the American dream casts.

This line of reasoning is consistent with Hochschild's (1995:72, 159-61) review of the research on the vitality of the American dream among African Americans. Her review reveals an interesting paradox: While belief in the American dream has declined sharply among the economically best-off African Americans over the past 30 years, it has retained its hold on the economically worst off. In fact, poor African Americans believe as much in the American dream today as they did some 30 years ago, even though Black poverty levels have become much more severe during this time span. Moreover, most of the poor Blacks who continue to adhere to the American dream express a great deal of confidence in schooling and hard work as the mechanisms for success. Hochschild (1995:218) claims that this incongruity between dream and reality persists because the internal contradictions of the American dream actually make it easier rather than harder for poor African Americans to believe in it. That is, the structural determinants of failure to achieve in American society—such as racial discrimination and the lack of jobs—are absent in the ideology's explanation of failure. Instead, individualistic explanations predominate. If the reasons for failure are viewed as individual in nature, then they can be overcome by individuals through dedication, hard work, and education.

Hochschild (1995:217) also believes that because lower-status Blacks experience poverty as a more severe day-to-day problem than racism, they have virtually no ideological alternatives to the American dream that offer a way out. Their belief that their odds of success are improved by following the promise of the dream is reinforced by the flexibility of what counts as success according to the rules of the dream. That is, the American dream permits relative levels of gratification as opposed to absolute success. In addition, Hochschild (1995:193) reminds us that the line between legitimate and illegitimate striving is often blurred in American society. Consequently, some find it acceptable to turn to criminality when they are unable to realize the promise of the dream via legitimate avenues.

The basic argument that the American dream is alive and well among African Americans also finds support in MacLeod's (1987) ethnographic study of lower-class teenage boys. In contrast to the White boys (the "Hallway Hangers") he studied, MacLeod found that his Black respondents (the "Brothers")

were much more optimistic about their futures, were more strongly attached to conventional morality and the American dream, and had "excessive ambitions" that were encouraged by parents and peers. While the Hallway Hangers had modest hopes for the future and viewed the opportunity structure as relatively closed, the Brothers saw it as open to all and were quite optimistic about their ability to compete. They took school seriously, followed its basic rules, and respected their teachers (MacLeod 1987:5, 42, 67-79, 96, 126). In other words, even though their objective life chances were quite unfavorable, the African American youths maintained a strong commitment to the American dream, and this orientation affected their outlook on life as well as their behavior in significant ways.

Although there was little evidence that it had paid dividends for earlier generations of African Americans, MacLeod (1987:129-30) theorizes that the Brothers were able to subscribe to the American dream because they could point to past racial discrimination, which in more recent times has abated, as the cause of their parents' and other Blacks' failure to realize the dream. For the same reason, the Brothers' parents could now actively encourage commitment to the dream for their children. The Hallway Hangers, on the other hand, rejected the promise of the American dream because to accept it would be to admit that their parents were either "lazy or stupid or both" since there was no racial discrimination on which to blame their failure. Similarly, the Hallway Hangers' parents did not encourage high achievement levels among their children because they thought it both unrealistic and foolish to do so. Commitment to the American dream clearly posed a much more serious threat to the self-esteem of the White as compared to the Black youths in this study.

Such evidence makes it clear that there is sufficient reason to believe that the American dream continues to generate high levels of commitment among African Americans. However, studies such as MacLeod's (1987) are both rare and limited. In addition, MacLeod admits that the Brothers may not be representative of young Blacks in the United States; in fact, they may be quite atypical. Consequently, despite the contribution of such studies, we know relatively little about the extent to which African Americans are committed to the American dream, how important economic goals are relative to other goals, and what behavioral consequences that commitment to the American dream has for African Americans.

With this background in mind, the purpose of this research is to examine the behavioral impact of commitment to the American dream among a sample of young adults. Specifically, we are interested in the level and the effect of economic aspirations. Although there need be no necessary relationship between the level and the effect of success goals (i.e., differential levels of commitment to economic goals do not necessarily result in differential

behavioral outcomes), there certainly is sufficient theoretical justification to expect an association. That is, strain theory predicts that high aspirations among the objectively deprived increase the likelihood of negative behavioral outcomes such as crime and deviance, while control theory proposes that high aspirations ensure conformity, regardless of the level of economic deprivation.

Beyond evaluating which of these two alternative theoretical perspectives most accurately captures the empirical reality of economic success goal orientation, our research is guided by a desire to understand more about the aspirations of African Americans and how these compare to those of their White counterparts. Although control and strain theories have been dominant theoretical models in the study of crime, delinquency, and deviant behavior, neither has spawned a systematic study of the role of race. This is because neither model directly addresses race theoretically: control theory because its key predictors are proposed to be invariant across racial boundaries (i.e., race "doesn't matter") and strain theory because it is a class-based model that deals with race only by implication (i.e., race differences are generally assumed to parallel class differences). Contrary to this orientation, we focus explicitly on race.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Sample

Agnew (1995) has noted that much of the research that fails to support classic strain theory is based on samples of high school students, ignoring both adults and the hard-core urban poor. He speculates that the basic strain model may, in fact, be more applicable to adults, "to whom the pursuit of money is a more serious matter, and to the hard core poor, who face the greatest barriers to goal achievement" (Agnew 1995:310-11). Our sample generally meets the criteria proposed by Agnew: It is composed of young adults just embarking on their quest of the American dream, includes many hard-core urban poor, and is approximately half African American, a group substantially overrepresented among the economically deprived.

Two related data sources are the basis for this study: (1) a sample of individuals living in private households and (2) a sample of previously institutionalized offenders. Respondents in both of these samples were interviewed initially in 1982 when they were adolescents and subsequently in 1992 (the household sample) and in 1995 (the previously institutional respondents) as young adults.[1] With the exception of our prior delinquency measure, all variables included in this research are measured at the time 2 interview period.

Household sample. The 1982 household study was based on a sample of 942 youth ages 12 to 19 living in private households in the Toledo, Ohio, metropolitan area. A multistage modified probability sampling procedure was employed in which area segments were selected with known probability. The most recent census data available at the time (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1980) were used to stratify the sample by racial composition and average housing value. Within area segments, eligible household respondents were selected to fill specified gender and race quotas; no specific age quotas were allocated, although the ages of respondents were tracked as the interviews were conducted to ensure adequate representation of all age groups. The respondents were equally divided among males and females and Blacks and Whites.

An effort was made in 1992 to locate and reinterview all of the original 942 household respondents. Respondents who had moved significant distances from the region completed mailed questionnaires. Most respondents, however, lived in geographically proximate areas and were interviewed personally. The overall completion rate for the second wave of interviews was 77 percent of the original sample (adjusting the base rate for 10 confirmed deaths); of these, 82 percent completed personal interviews. Of the 721 respondents interviewed at time 2, 45 percent were male and 47 percent were White. Of the non-Whites, most (95 percent) were African American. The respondents ranged in age from 22 to 29 years, with a mean of 25.31 years at the time of the reinterview. The average household income of the respondents was $21,100. Of the household respondents, 30 percent were unemployed at the time of the reinterview.

Institutional sample. The initial institutional data were derived from 254 personal interviews conducted in 1982, using the same interview schedule as for the household respondents. The respondents were drawn from the populations of three male juvenile institutions in the state of Ohio and the entire population of the only female juvenile institution in the state. Of the institutional respondents, 50 percent were female. Of the institutionalized respondents, 65 percent were White; the remaining non-Whites were predominantly Black (32 percent of the institutional sample).

In 1995, 210 of the initial 254 institutional respondents were reinterviewed. This represents an 83 percent reinterview rate (85 percent when the sample is adjusted for deceased respondents). The second wave of data was collected via face-to-face interviews (91 percent) as well as through a mailed version of the interview schedule. Of the reinterviewed respondents, 48 percent were male, and 63 percent were White. Of the non-White respondents, 84 percent were African American. The respondents ranged in age from 29 to 34 years, with a mean of 29.30 years. The average household income of the

institutional respondents was $14,900. Of the respondents, 39 percent were unemployed at the time of the second interview.

Combined sample. We combined the household and institutional samples for the present analysis to represent the full range of criminal offending levels; in particular, we wanted to ensure that the analytic sample included offenders at the high-frequency/high-seriousness end of the crime and delinquency continua. We do not believe that general population samples, such as our household-based one and other typical self-report surveys, represent serious chronic offenders in sufficient number for meaningful analysis. Although it is important to be cognizant of processing biases in the justice system, institutional samples are a logical source of chronic offenders. Our data show that the institutional offenders are, by their own admission, much more frequent and serious offenders than even the most hard-core offenders from the household sample (for a more complete discussion of the delinquency involvement differences between these two samples and of the issues involved in sampling for serious chronic offenders, see Cernkovich, Giordano, and Pugh 1985).

Due to our interest in African Americans in this research and because of the small number of other minorities included in our samples, the present analysis is limited to Black and White respondents from the household (n = 684) and institutional (n = 197) samples. This restriction resulted in a combined analytic sample of 881 respondents. Males comprised 45 percent of the combined sample, while 54 percent of the respondents were White. The average household income of the combined sample was $19,800. Of the respondents, 32 percent were unemployed at the time of the reinterview. Table 1 presents a more detailed description of the demographic characteristics of the household, institutional, and combined samples.

Logistic regression modeling of response/nonresponse indicated that follow-up respondents were slightly more likely to be White and female, although there were no significant social class or age differences between the two groups. Analysis of responses derived from the questionnaires in contrast to the personal interviews revealed few significant differences; however, those who completed the mailed version were somewhat more likely to be White and to report higher social status scores. Because of the possibility of overrepresenting the more conforming individuals found in the original samples, several sources of information (e.g., records of military service, driver license registration lists, criminal offender databases, relatives and neighbors of the respondent) for relocating and reinterviewing difficult-to-find respondents were used and successfully implemented. That these procedures were successful is reflected in a relocation rate for the previously institutionalized

TABLE 1: Demographic Characteristics of Samples (percentage distribution)

Variable (coding)	*Household Sample*	*Institutional Sample*	*Combined Sample*
Gender			
Male (0)	45	48	45
Female (1)	55	52	55
Race			
White (0)	47	63	54
Black (1)	50	31	46
Education			
Less than high school (1)	16	70	28
High school graduate (2)	43	20	38
Some college (3)	29	9	25
College graduate (4)	8	1	7
Postcollege (5)	3	—	2
Occupational status			
Executive, administrative, managerial (7)	4	—	3
Professional specialties (6)	9	2	8
Administrative support, clerical (5)	15	10	14
Sales, technical, military (4)	18	8	16
Protective services, production (3)	10	16	11
Private household, machine operators (2)	17	21	18
Nonhousehold service, laborers (1)	27	42	30
Employment status			
Employed (1)	70	61	68
Unemployed (0)	30	39	32
Household income			
Less than $7,000 (1)	12	27	15
$7,000-$9,999 (2)	8	15	10
$10,000-$13,999 (3)	8	11	9
$14,000-$17,999 (4)	9	10	9
$18,000-$20,999 (5)	6	5	6
$21,000-$24,999 (6)	9	7	8
$25,000-$29,999 (7)	10	4	9
$30,000-$34,999 (8)	10	6	9
$35,000-$39,999 (9)	9	7	8
$40,000-$49,999 (10)	7	4	6
$50,000 or more (11)	12	4	10

respondents (85 percent), which was higher than that for the household respondents (77 percent). Further analysis revealed no differences in prior delinquency involvement among those who participated in the reinterview and those who did not. In short, we are confident that those youth who were

the most conforming in 1982 were not overrepresented among the reinterviewed respondents.

A potentially more serious problem has to do with differential measurement error by race. Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis (1981) have presented evidence that Black males' self-reports of delinquency involvement are less valid than the reports of other groups: Black males underreport involvement at every level of delinquency, especially at the high end of the continuum. African American males may provide inaccurate estimates on a variety of other measures as well. If this is the case and if misreporting is more common among serious offenders, our parameter estimates could be affected, especially if our indicators are better predictors of serious as opposed to minor delinquency (or vice versa). While this has important implications for our analysis, it would be a mistake to conclude that such measurement error invalidates the data provided by the Black males in our sample. There are several good reasons to believe that it does not.

First, Hindelang et al. (1981) conclude that while differential validity by race means that self-reports are poor social indicators of the absolute volume of crime and delinquency among Black males, such data can still be quite useful in etiological research. Etiological research is less interested in the absolute frequency of delinquency than with how individual or group rankings on delinquency are associated with individual or group rankings on various independent variables of interest (Hindelang et al. 1981:215-16). The latter is clearly the focus of our research. Second, Hindelang et al. note that while the differential validity problem makes comparison across groups potentially misleading, analysis within groups is not compromised. This means that we can have confidence in the relative explanatory power of our independent variables within race subgroups. A third mitigating factor is our reliance on face-to-face interviews in the collection of these data—the method Hindelang et al. found to produce the least-biased self-reports among Black males (Hindelang et al. 1981:178). Finally, our research has incorporated the most basic implication of the Hindelang et al. findings: stratification by race in both sampling and data analysis.

In short, we believe our research design and analytic approach minimize any bias of differential self-reporting by race. While we have no illusions that we have eliminated this problem entirely, we believe that it is preferable to proceed with research on African Americans cognizant of such problems than to take the more radical approach of throwing the data out because the respondents may be less than completely candid. Although the differential validity issue means that comparisons across race groups must be made with caution, we believe we can have considerable confidence in our within-group analyses. Confidence in these data is bolstered by our previous research on the relationship between delinquency and family, as well as school and peer

relations (Cernkovich and Giordano 1987, 1992; Giordano, Cernkovich, and Pugh 1986), suggesting that if Black males are misreporting, they are not doing so in consistent and predictable directions. That is, the several family, peer, school, and crime and delinquency scales we have created evoke among Black males the full range of responses, in both a positive and a negative direction and in ways that do not suggest social desirability or response set biases.

A related problem is the potential of differential validity and reliability of our measures across sample type. Although there have been numerous studies examining the measurement properties of scales created from the self-reports of respondents similar to those in our household sample, we actually know very little about this issue in regard to serious and persistent offenders (see, e.g., Hagan et al. 1997). Although not the focus of this research, our data are quite encouraging on this matter in that the reliabilities of our scales are generally comparable for the institutional and household respondents. In short, we do not believe that differential reliability is a problem in these data. Simply because our scale reliabilities are acceptable does not mean, of course, that there is not a problem of differential validity across sample type. However, as was the case regarding race differences in validity, we believe that the likelihood of this sort of bias has been minimized by our data collection and analytic procedures, our focus on theory testing, and our within-sample analyses.

Additional data not used in the current analysis but gathered as part of this research also support the conclusion that differential validity across race and sample type is not a significant problem. First, formal arrest history data collected from police agencies throughout the state are strongly correlated with respondents' self-reports of their offending and arrest careers; this is true across all groups of offenders, including African Americans and those previously institutionalized. Second, in-depth narrative data derived from semi-structured interviews conducted after completion of the structured survey indicate that our interviewers established very high levels of rapport with the respondents. This is evidenced by their voluntary disclosure of quite sensitive and discrediting types of information, bolstering our confidence in the veracity of the information provided in all portions of the interview. In short, these two supplementary sources of respondent information further increase our confidence in the general validity of the data.

Measures

Success goal orientation: the American dream. The Life Role Salience Scales provide a useful index of success goal orientation because they measure the "personal importance or value attributed to participation in a

particular role and . . . the intended level of commitment of personal time and energy resources to enactment of a role" (Amatea et al. 1986:831). The roles included in the scale—parental, marital, occupational, and home care—are generally considered to be the major stabilizing influences in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. One of the advantages of the items included in our interview schedule is that they allow a common set of responses across all respondents, regardless of whether they are currently engaged in these roles. In addition, the items reference not only the perceived desirability of a given role (i.e., "My life would seem empty if I never had children") but also the strength of a respondent's commitment to that role ("I expect to devote whatever time and energy it takes to move up in my job/career"). The life salience items included in our interview schedule were pretested, and the scales were evaluated for potential gender, race, and social class bias. With this in mind, we deleted several "home care" items and added items concerning commitment to religion, as well as to monetary goals.

We factor analyzed 13 life salience items and used two of the five resulting subscales: material salience and career salience (the other three subscales were not relevant to this research). Response categories for the two scales range from 1 to 5, with high scores indicating high salience levels. The Material Salience Scale (alpha = .766) is composed of three items: "Having lots of money is one of my major goals in life," "I will sacrifice a lot of other things to have a lot of money," and "I intend to do whatever it takes to have some of the really expensive things in life." The Career Salience Scale (alpha = .768) is made up of two items: "I expect to make as many sacrifices as are necessary in order to advance in my work/career," and "I expect to devote whatever time and energy it takes to move up in my job/career field." We believe that the items comprising these scales operationalize success goals in realistic and concrete terms, rather than in the ideal or utopian terms that have been characteristic of the research in this area historically.[2]

Economic satisfaction. Agnew et al. (1996:682-83) have argued that very little of the research testing strain theory has properly operationalized the strain construct. That is, most of this research has focused on occupational and educational aspirations, occupational and educational exceptions, and often on the disjunction between aspirations and expectations. Agnew et al. (1996) believe that this traditional focus has been misdirected, and they propose instead that the central variable in strain theory is dissatisfaction with one's current economic situation—a variable rooted in the concrete reality of the moment, rather than in some future or ideal reality suggested by the concepts of aspirations and expectations. Consistent with this argument, the focus in this research is on the respondent's assessment of his or her current economic situation. The interview schedule included a global life

satisfaction item ("How satisfied these days are you with your life as a whole?") followed by 20 more specific items indexing satisfaction in relation to a variety of personal arenas, including health, employment, finances, physical appearance, personal and family relations, housing, and spiritual needs. The structure of these items is similar to that developed for Campbell and Converse's (1980) Quality of Life Study. Because of our interest in economic aspirations, we combined (with the aid of a factor analysis of the 21 life satisfaction items) 6 of the items into a scale measuring how satisfied respondents were with their economic situation: "How satisfied are you these days with your employment (or job prospects)? Your financial situation? Your personal achievements? Your educational achievements? Your economic prospects for the future? Your material possessions?" Scale scores ranged from 1 through 4, with high scores indicating high levels of economic satisfaction. The alpha reliability coefficient for the scale is .761.

Social class. Following House (1981), Jarjoura and Triplett (1997), and Tittle and Meier (1990), we operationalized several individual components of social class rather than relying on a composite measure. This approach is based on the logic that if social class predicts crime and delinquency because lower-status individuals are more economically deprived than their higher-status counterparts, for example, then it makes more sense to measure deprivation directly rather than to use a composite measure of class that may obscure the effects of deprivation (Tittle and Meier 1990:294). That is, rather than combine the effects of deprivation along with those of education and income, for example, in a composite measure of social class, this approach permits a consideration of the independent effects of each (Jarjoura and Triplett 1997:767; also see Farnworth et al. 1994). This research incorporates several separate socioeconomic variables: education, occupational status, household income, and employment status.

Educational level. Educational level of the respondents ranges from 4 years or more of college (coded 5) to less than a high school education (coded 1). The mean educational level of the sample was 3.825 with a standard deviation of 0.995.

Occupational status. This is intended to be a very general prestige ranking. The occupations range from executives, administrators, and managers (coded 7) to service workers and laborers (coded 1). The mean occupational status was 4.976 with a standard deviation of 1.823.

Household income. This is rank ordered across 11 categories, ranging from less then $7,000 annually (coded 1) to $50,000 and above annually

(coded 11). The mean income of the respondents was 5.611 with a standard deviation of 3.340.

Employment status. Employment status was determined via a single item: "Are you employed now?" Of the respondents, 32 percent were unemployed at the time of the second interview. Responses were dummy coded, with 1 representing those who were employed at the time of the second interview.

It is important to note that our use of several individual indicators of social class creates potential collinearity problems. However, correlational data (see appendixes) indicate that while education, occupation, income, and employment status are significantly correlated with one another in the household, institutional, and combined samples, none of these associations is of sufficient magnitude to present collinearity problems. In addition, education, occupation, and income were all centered at their means for the analyses that follow, reducing substantially any multicollinearity present in the data (Aiken and West 1991:12-15, 35-38). Indeed, in the numerous regression models that we estimated, almost all of the variance inflation factors were under 2.00, and none exceeded 4.00, well under the threshold that is customarily accepted as indicative of collinearity problems.

Criminal involvement was measured at the time 2 interview by a modified version of Elliott and Ageton's (1980) Self-Report Delinquency Scale. This scale indexes the respondent's reported level of involvement in property and personal crimes, as well as drug and alcohol use, during the past year. Items were deleted that would have been inappropriate for an adult sample (i.e., status offenses). Each offense item was assigned a ratio score seriousness weight derived from the National Survey of Crime Severity (Wolfgang et al. 1985:46-50; also see Cernkovich and Giordano 1992), ranging from 1.42 for drug use to 25.85 for rape. Because of strain theory's historical focus on income-generating and other acquisition-oriented offenses, the dependent variable in this study is a specific offense subscale derived from the more general crime scale—income-generating crime involvement (alpha = .855). The total income-generating crime involvement score for a respondent is the mean of the sum of the products of each item's frequency and its seriousness weight. Prior delinquency involvement (alpha = .917), an independent variable in the analyses that follow, was measured at time 1 as the self-reported involvement in a variety of status, property, and violent offenses. The scale items were weighted and calculated in the manner described above. The appendix contains the items comprising the income-generating crime and prior delinquency scales along with pertinent descriptive statistics.

Sample. Because of the possibility that the influence of the variables we are examining in this research may differ for the household and previously

institutionalized respondents, thereby confounding any results based on the combined sample, we will include in the regression analyses that follow a variable that distinguishes between the two samples. This variable is dummy coded, with the household sample as the omitted category.

Interaction terms. Although strain and social control theories are distinct conceptual models, they actually share many variables in their explanations of crime and delinquency. What differentiates the two theories is the prediction each makes regarding the effects of these shared variables. For example, both theories attach a great deal of importance to economic aspirations as a cause of crime. However, while strain theory proposes that high economic aspirations combined with limited opportunities are likely to be productive of crime, control theory avers that high aspirations, regardless of the level of objective opportunity to realize these aspirations, will result in conformity. Thus, to assess the relative merits of control and strain theories, our modeling must incorporate interaction terms that represent the conditional relationships proposed by strain theory. To this end, we created 10 product terms involving each of our two measures of commitment to the American dream (material salience and career salience) and five indicators of economic attainment (economic satisfaction, education, occupational status, income, and employment status). With the exception of employment status (which is a dummy variable), all of the variables involved in the product terms were centered (i.e., expressed as deviation scores so that their means are zero) to minimize collinearity problems and to permit a more meaningful and straightforward interpretation of any interaction effects (Aiken and West 1991:9, 12-15, 35-38).

Because most of the variables included in our analysis—material salience, career salience, economic satisfaction, occupation, education, income, and employment status—are indicators of both strain and control theories, we will consider control theory to be supported if our findings show that high levels of material and career salience are associated with conforming behavior, net of the other variables in the model. In other words, social control theory proposes that commitment to the American dream should be a strong predictor of crime: Those with high levels of commitment are those who are, by definition, strongly bonded to the society and its basic values. Consequently, they should be insulated from any significant involvement in crime. If control theory is correct, high levels of material salience and career salience should inhibit crime; income level, education, occupational status, degree of economic satisfaction, and employment status should not matter. Strain theory, on the other hand, predicts a more conditional relationship: Those respondents with a strong attachment to the American dream, combined with low levels of education, occupation (or who are unemployed), income, and

economic satisfaction should be more likely to engage in crime because of the frustration and anger such a disjunction between aspirations and actual attainment produces. Finally, both strain and control theories will be supported if income, education, occupation, unemployment, and economic dissatisfaction are predictive of income-producing crime (i.e., these variables are indicators of social bonding as well as individual strain).

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Table 2 presents mean scores by race[3] for the life salience, socioeconomic, and criminal involvement variables, for the combined sample, and for the household and institutional samples separately. The combined sample data reveal significant race differences for all but one of the examined variables. Whites report significantly higher levels of prior delinquency, while African Americans report higher mean scores on material and career salience, education, and income-generating crime. Blacks have lower incomes than Whites and are more likely to be unemployed.

These data indicate that the Black respondents maintain a very strong commitment to the American dream when it is conceptualized in career and material salience terms. The magnitude of the *F*-statistics are impressive and indicate that Blacks are much more strongly committed to economic success goals than are their White counterparts and report that they are prepared to work harder and sacrifice more to realize them.[4] This willingness to work harder may be viewed as a necessity by African Americans, as 81 percent of the Black respondents, compared to only 34 percent of the Whites, agreed or strongly agreed with the following statement presented near the end of the interview: "In order to get ahead, minorities almost always have to work harder than members of the White majority." This attitude helps explain why such a strong commitment to economic success can exist side by side with low incomes and high levels of unemployment.

Many of the race differences noted in the combined sample persist in the household and institutional subgroups identified in Table 2, suggesting a powerful race effect, particularly in regard to the relative salience of economic goals. While the magnitude of the *F*-statistics is smaller for the institutional respondents, this is not unexpected given the small sample size. Nonetheless, it is significant that race differences exist in both samples for material and career salience, income, employment status, and income-generating crime. The only inconsistencies across samples involve economic satisfaction and occupation: Economic satisfaction levels are significantly lower for Blacks than for Whites in the institutional but not the household sample, while occupation differences are significantly lower among African

TABLE 2: Mean Scores of Life Salience, Social Bonding, Economic, and Criminal Involvement Variables, by Sample Type

	Combined Sample (N = 881)			*Household (n = 684)*			*Institutional (n = 197)*		
	White	*Black*	F	*White*	*Black*	F	*White*	*Black*	F
Material salience	2.71	3.03	33.18***	2.66	3.01	33.92***	2.85	3.13	4.40*
Career salience	3.54	3.94	58.14***	3.50	3.94	56.54***	3.65	3.90	4.99*
Economic satisfaction	2.22	2.14	3.56	2.24	2.18	1.70	2.16	1.93	5.97***
Education	2.12	2.28	5.52*	2.36	2.46	1.80	1.48	1.35	1.36
Occupation	3.11	2.94	1.65	3.37	3.08	4.10*	2.39	2.22	0.51
Income	6.05	5.26	11.61***	6.55	5.62	13.48***	4.70	3.39	7.18**
Employment status	0.74	0.63	10.68***	0.75	0.67	5.63**	0.70	0.44	11.57***
Income-generating crime	6.99	8.29	14.48***	6.52	7.22	9.54**	8.25	13.95	20.01*
Prior delinquency	39.42	24.93	9.04**	8.98	9.54	0.11	120.78	106.29	0.75

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Americans than Whites in the household but not the institutional sample. These exceptions notwithstanding, it is clear that the Black respondents in our sample are more likely than their White counterparts to endorse the basic tenets of the American dream, and this is true in both the household and institutional samples.

The findings in Table 2 are consistent with MacLeod's (1987) ethnographic research in which he found that Black youths, despite their unfavorable economic circumstances, were more optimistic than their White counterparts about their futures and ability to compete, were more strongly committed to the American dream, and generally had very high levels of self-esteem and ambition. We find hints of the same pattern in our data: Even though the young Black adults in our study report low incomes, are more likely to be unemployed than are Whites, and (among the institutional respondents) report lower levels of economic satisfaction, they continue to maintain a very strong commitment to the American dream. This suggests that money and material possessions can be terribly important to those who do not have them and lack access to conventional opportunities for obtaining them. This may be especially the case among Blacks, who are generally devalued in American society because of their race and who often are denied access to the broader criteria of prestige available to Whites. In this sort of environment, a material/monetary yardstick becomes a critical and very tangible symbol of having "made it." It is also likely that many African Americans define "lots of money" and career advancement differently than do

Whites, and this may also account for some of the race differences in our data. However, since we measured the relative strength of one's goal commitment rather than the precise amount of money or type of career desired, this explanation must remain speculative in nature.

In general, the data in Table 2 are consistent with the strain theory perspective on success goal orientation and crime. That is, African Americans are more materialistic and career oriented than their White counterparts, but they are more likely to be unemployed, to have low incomes when they are employed, and (among the institutional respondents) to report lower levels of economic satisfaction than Whites. In addition, they report higher levels of income-generating crime than do Whites. While we cannot be certain of the temporal ordering of these variables, these relationships are informative. Far from lowering their aspirations or abandoning their pursuit entirely, the Black respondents in our sample clearly maintain a strong commitment to the American dream, even in the face of low levels of socioeconomic attainment. Although these data are consistent with strain theory, they do not directly address the relationships between the American dream, attainment levels, and criminal involvement.

Table 3 presents the results of analyses in which income-generating offense involvement was regressed on the independent variables described above, for the combined sample and for Blacks and Whites separately. All of the independent variables were entered into the equations as a single block. In general, the data in Table 3 show that prior delinquency, the dummy variable distinguishing between the institutional and household samples, economic satisfaction, and employment status are the most consistent predictors of income-generating crime across the three groups. Among respondents in the combined sample, prior delinquency (Beta = .264) is the single best predictor: Those who were delinquent as adolescents are the most likely to report current involvement in crime. In addition, Blacks, those who were institutionalized as adolescents, those who are dissatisfied with their current economic situation, and the unemployed are the most likely to be involved in income-generating crime.

The data in Table 3 show that our model does a somewhat better job of accounting for the offense involvement of Blacks in comparison to Whites (R^2 = .253 and .160, respectively). However, prior delinquency and the sample variable are the only significant correlates of offending among Blacks; that is, once these two offense-based measures are controlled, the other variables included in the model do not contribute significantly to the explained variance.[5] Among Whites, prior delinquency is the best predictor of income-generating crime (Beta = .258), but career salience, dissatisfaction with one's current economic situation, and unemployment are significant correlates as well. While these results are generally consistent with strain theory, the

TABLE 3: Regression Coefficients for Income-Generating Offense Involvement, for Combined Sample and Race Subgroups

	Combined Sample (N = 881)[a]		*Blacks (n = 407)*[b]		*Whites (n = 474)*[c]	
	Beta	b	*Beta*	b	*Beta*	b
Sample	.102	1.213*	.167	2.867*	.047	.345
Prior delinquency	.264	7.495*	.339	.036*	.258	.011*
Gender	–.055	–.544	–.069	–.877	–.059	–.388
Race	.148	1.464*				
Material salience	.026	.158	.001	.010	.052	.223
Career salience	.059	.371	.070	.630	.107	.430*
Economic satisfaction	–.083	–.720*	–.077	–.796	–.101	–.629*
Education	–.033	–.166	–.009	–.054	–.036	–.121
Occupation	–.026	–.070	–.037	–.126	–.012	–.022
Income	.037	.055	.003	.005	.093	.096
Employment status	–.068	–.727*	–.040	–.519	–.106	–.800*

a. $R^2 = .180$.
b. $R^2 = .253$.
c. $R^2 = .160$.
*$p < .05$.

influence of unemployment and economic dissatisfaction can be explained from a control theory perspective as well since these variables are indicators of weak conventional bonding.

These findings notwithstanding, the data in Table 3 may be of greatest interest for what they do not show than for what they reveal. That is, our two basic measures of the American dream—material salience and career salience—are not significant predictors of offending among Blacks, and only career salience is related to White offending but in a direction opposite to that proposed by control theory. In fact, the economic salience variables are not related to criminal involvement in the manner proposed by social control theory among any of the groups represented in Table 3; that is, high levels of material and career salience are not associated with low levels of criminal involvement net of the other variables included in the model. Thus, our data to this point do not appear to offer very strong support for either social control or strain theory. Before we conclude that this is the case, however, we must examine the conditional relationships that are so critical to strain theory—those that evaluate the effect on criminal involvement of adherence to the American dream at various levels of socioeconomic attainment.

The reader will recall that strain theory proposes a conditional relationship between adherence to the American dream and anticipated/actual socioeconomic attainment: Those individuals with a strong commitment to the American dream, combined with low levels of education, occupation (or who

are unemployed), income, and economic satisfaction, will be more likely to engage in crime than those not experiencing a disjunction between their aspirations and actual attainments. To examine these conditional relationships, we created 10 product terms involving our two measures of commitment to the American dream (material salience and career salience) and five indicators of attainment (economic satisfaction, education, occupational status, income, and employment status). With the exception of employment status (a dummy variable), all of the variables involved in the product terms were centered at their means. Centering reduces substantially any multicollinearity present in the data, and it allows for a meaningful interpretation of the main effects of the variables making up the product term[6] (Aiken and West 1991:12-15, 35-38).

Table 4 presents the coefficients for those interaction terms that are statistically significant when entered into the main effects models reported in Table 3. Because our intent is to evaluate the empirical veracity of each conditional relationship proposed by strain theory, each product term was entered into the equation singly and tested for its explanatory contribution. At the outset, it is important to note that none of the product terms is a significant correlate of income-producing crime among the African Americans in our sample. In short, once prior delinquency and an institutional past are factored into the equation, none of the other variables included in our model matters much, including the interaction terms. This is not to say that strain or social control theory may not be useful in explaining the prior delinquent and criminal involvement of these respondents, only that they do not contribute much to our understanding of their involvement in income-producing crime as young adults. An identification of other factors that may account for the criminal involvement of African Americans is beyond the scope of this research; we only know from our data that the strain and social control variables we have examined provide little insight into their criminality. This is not the case, however, when the model is tested among Whites.

While Table 4 presents the product term data for the combined sample as well as for Whites, we will confine our discussion to the effects of these interactions among Whites. These data show that all but one of the interaction terms (Career Salience × Income) are significant correlates of offending among the Whites in our sample. Although material salience has a significant main effect on criminality in only one instance (the equation in which it interacts with unemployment), career salience has a significant main effect on criminality in all of the equations represented in Table 4. The reader should be aware of this distinction when interpreting the meaning of the effects of these variables. In the case of the product terms involving career salience, it is appropriate to conclude in all instances that the main effects of career salience on criminal involvement are statistically significant, and these effects

TABLE 4: Interaction Terms for Income-Generating Offense Involvement

	Combined Sample (N = 881)			*Whites (n = 474)*		
	Beta	b	R^2	*Beta*	b	R^2
Material Salience × Satisfaction				–.113	–.899	.173
Material salience				.059	.251	
Satisfaction				–.088	–.551	
Material Salience × Education	–.075	–.428	.185	–.122	–.504	.174
Material salience	.029	.172		.048	.205	
Education	–.039	–.195		–.065	–.218	
Material Salience × Occupation	–.074	–.249	.185	–.121	–.292	.174
Material salience	.018	.113		.039	.169	
Occupation	–.025	–.066		–.010	–.017	
Material Salience × Income				–.093	–.128	.168
Material salience				.053	.228	
Income				.089	.091	
Material Salience × Employment Status	–.124	–.904	.184	–.274	–1.332	.176
Material salience	.128	.769*		.293	1.257*	
Unemployment	–.068	–.724*		–.124	–.932*	
Career Salience × Satisfaction	–.085	–.875	.187	–.129	–.976	.176
Career salience	.074	.463*		.124	.500*	
Satisfaction	–.076	–.662*		–.092	–.570*	
Career Salience × Education	–.091	–.544	.188	–.138	–.535	.179
Career salience	.068	.427*		.117	.474*	
Education	–.041	–.203		–.049	–.162	
Career Salience × Occupation	–.078	–.252	.186	–.106	–.222	.171
Career salience	.069	.429*		.111	.448*	
Occupation	–.023	–.062		–.011	–.019	
Career Salience × Income	–.067	–.122	.184			
Career salience	.076	.473*				
Income	.040	.060				
Career Salience × Employment Status	–.142	–1.051	.185	–.413	–1.937	.202
Career salience	.177	1.110*		.446	1.802*	
Unemployment	–.071	–.754*		–.130	–.979*	

NOTE: Only the coefficients for those product terms that result in statistically significant increases in the explained variance—as measured by the incremental R^2 when the product term is added to the main effects model presented in Table 3—are shown. The R^2s reported above represent the total explained variance accounted for in income-generating crime when the interaction term is included in the full model. The main effects of the two variables that constitute each product term are shown for interpretative purposes. Even though the coefficients for the remaining variables included in the models vary somewhat from those reported in Table 3, this variation is statistically and substantively unimportant, and the coefficients are not reported here to conserve space.
* Main effect statistically significant.

also vary significantly by level of economic satisfaction, education, occupational status, and employment status. In the case of the material salience interactions, however, the main effects are not statistically significant (except in the equation modeling Material Salience × Unemployment). Consequently, it is not appropriate to conclude that material salience has a significant main effect on income-producing crime, only that there is a statistically significant difference in its effect at varying levels of economic satisfaction, education, occupation, and income.

To facilitate the interpretation of these product terms, we calculated the effects of material salience and career salience at the mean and at one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean of each of the attainment variables (Aiken and West 1991:12-15). These data are presented in Table 5. The data in Tables 4 and 5 are strongly supportive of the strain theory hypothesis of a conditional relationship between commitment to the American dream and criminal involvement. That is, the precise effect of material salience and career salience on criminal involvement depends on the level of economic attainment. Furthermore, the direction of these effects is as proposed by strain theory: At low levels of economic satisfaction, education, occupational status, and income and among those who are unemployed, high levels of material salience and career salience are productive of involvement in income-producing crime. At high levels of attainment, on the other hand, commitment to the American dream is associated with low levels of involvement in crime.

Two examples illustrate these conditional relationships. The data in Table 4 show that the regression coefficient for the interaction between material salience and economic satisfaction is –.899, indicating that the impact of material salience on income-producing crime varies inversely with the level of economic satisfaction. The data in Table 5 show that at high levels of economic satisfaction, the effect of materialism on crime is moderately negative (–.224), indicating that among those who are economically satisfied, the higher the level of material salience, the lower the level of involvement in crime. On the other hand, at low levels of economic satisfaction, the effect of materialism is strongly positive (.726): High levels of material salience increase the likelihood of criminal involvement among those who are economically dissatisfied. At mean levels of satisfaction, the effect of material salience is also positive but of significantly less magnitude (.251).[7] Similarly, the impact of career salience on criminal involvement is conditioned by level of education. At the educational mean of the Whites in our sample, high levels of career salience are associated with high levels of income-producing crime (.474). This relationship is in the same direction but significantly stronger among those with low levels of education (1.004) and in the opposite direction and quite weak (–.056) among those with high levels of education.

TABLE 5: Effects of Material Salience and Career Salience at Selected Levels of Economic Satisfaction, Education, Occupation, Income, and Employment Status

	Combined Sample (N *= 881)*	*Whites* (n *= 474)*
Effect of material salience at		
Satisfaction mean + 1 *SD*		–.224
Satisfaction mean		.251
Satisfaction mean – 1 *SD*		.726
Effect of material salience at		
Education mean + 1 *SD*	–.254	–.294
Education mean	.172	.205
Education mean – 1 *SD*	.598	.704
Effect of material salience at		
Occupation mean + 1 *SD*	–.341	–.363
Occupation mean	.113	.169
Occupation mean – 1 *SD*	.567	.701
Effect of material salience at		
Income mean + 1 *SD*		–.184
Income mean		.228
Income mean – 1 *SD*		.640
Effect of material salience when		
Unemployed	.769	1.257
Employed	–.135	–.075
Effect of career salience at		
Satisfaction mean + 1 *SD*	–.029	–.015
Satisfaction mean	.463	.500
Satisfaction mean – 1 *SD*	.955	1.015
Effect of career salience at		
Education mean + 1 *SD*	–.114	–.056
Education mean	.427	.474
Education mean – 1 *SD*	.968	1.004
Effect of career salience at		
Occupation mean + 1 *SD*	–.030	.044
Occupation mean	.429	.448
Occupation mean – 1 *SD*	.888	.852
Effect of career salience at		
Income mean + 1 *SD*	.066	
Income mean	.473	
Income mean – 1 *SD*	.880	
Effect of career salience when		
Unemployed	1.110	1.802
Employed	.059	–.135

The pattern of associations apparent in these two illustrations is characteristic of all of the relationships reported in Tables 4 and 5. That is, the effect of both material salience and career salience on criminal involvement is consistently positive among those with low levels of attainment and uniformly

negative among those with high levels of attainment. In short, these data are strongly supportive of the strain theory argument that the effect of commitment to the American dream is conditioned by socioeconomic attainment levels. This is the case, however, only for the Whites in our sample.

Although our findings that economic variables better explain the criminality of Whites than of African Americans are counterintuitive to our theoretical expectations, we certainly are not the first to report such results. For example, a number of studies have found that while poverty and other economic indicators are major determinants of homicide among Whites, they have relative weak effects among Blacks (Messner and Rosenfeld 1999; also see Messner and Golden 1992; Peterson and Krivo 1993; Smith 1992; Smith, Devine, and Sheley 1992). In an attempt to account for why our economic measures are significant predictors among the Whites but not among the African Americans in our sample, we examined the effect of several interaction terms involving prior delinquency and our salience and socioeconomic variables. We also modeled several product terms involving sample type (household or institutional) and the salience and socioeconomic variables. The logic underlying these analyses assumes that a strong economic orientation and/or the experience of economic strain is most likely to lead to adult criminality among those with a history of involvement in antisocial behavior. In short, high levels of economic salience and/or the presence of strain may provide the final push or allow for a seamless entry into adult criminality among those with a history of antisocial behavior but may not be sufficient to do so among those without this previous high level of involvement. Following this logic, it may only be among African Americans with a prior history of antisocial involvement that our economic variables are predictive of adult criminality.

To examine this possibility, we conducted several interaction analyses, focusing on respondents with high and low levels of prior delinquency involvement, as well as on those who had and had not been previously institutionalized. While these data (not shown) reveal several significant interaction effects among both Whites and African Americans, none of these account for the general inapplicability of our model to African Americans. For example, the two interaction terms for prior delinquency and sample type with our strain measure (economic satisfaction) are significant predictors only among Whites: Economic dissatisfaction is most strongly associated with adult criminality among those with high prior delinquency scores and among those who were previously institutionalized. There is no significant interaction between our strain measure and prior delinquency/sample type for African Americans.

While there are several product terms that are associated with adult criminality among both Blacks and Whites, these do not substantially improve the

fit of our model to African Americans. For example, the effect of high levels of career salience is to increase the likelihood of adult criminality among Blacks and Whites with high prior delinquency scores and to decrease it among those with low prior delinquency scores. Similarly, high levels of career salience were more likely to lead to high rates of criminality among the institutional than the household respondents. This was true for both White and Black respondents. Unemployment also increases the likelihood of adult criminality, but while this effect is greatest among Whites with high prior delinquency scores, it is greatest among Blacks with low prior delinquency scores. The effect of unemployment on crime also was conditioned by sample type, although this effect was in contrasting directions for Whites and Blacks. For Whites, unemployment was most likely to lead to increased criminality among the household respondents, while for African Americans, it was among the previously institutionalized respondents that unemployment was most strongly related to adult criminality.

While these interaction effects are interesting, it is important to underscore that these results are generally consistent with those from our overall analysis: The product terms are more likely to be significant correlates of adult criminality among Whites than among African Americans, and when these terms are entered into the equation, the resulting models continue to be relatively uninformative regarding the criminality of African Americans.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

We began this research with the goal of exploring the extent to which African Americans subscribe to the promise of the American dream—economic and material success—and the implications of this for criminal behavior. Although two of the most well-respected theories in criminology—strain and social control—assign a central role to the influence of the American dream on criminal and deviant behavior, surprisingly little research has examined its impact on African Americans. In addition, while the criminology literature is replete with studies of the influence of aspirations and expectations on criminal and deviant behavior, few of these have emphasized the economic goals that are so central to the core tenets of the American dream. In contrast, this study was based on a sample approximately half African American in racial composition and measured the American dream in strictly economic terms.

Our data indicate that African Americans maintain a very strong commitment to the American dream. Blacks report higher levels of commitment to economic success goals than do their White counterparts and indicate that they are prepared to work harder and sacrifice more to realize them. Even though the young Black adults in our study report low incomes and are more

likely to be unemployed than are Whites, they continue to maintain a very strong commitment to the American dream. Such a commitment in the face of economic adversity may be due to the role of economic and material success as symbols of success—they function as tangible indicators for many African Americans that, despite the many disadvantages to which they are subjected, they have in fact "made it."

Our regression analyses show that the main effects model, including prior behavior, material and career salience, and several economic and demographic variables, does a somewhat better job of accounting for the income-generating offense involvement of Blacks in comparison to Whites. Once prior delinquency and having been institutionalized as a juvenile are controlled, however, the other variables included in the model do not contribute significantly to the explanation of criminality among African Americans. For Whites, on the other hand, career salience, dissatisfaction with one's current economic situation, and unemployment are significant correlates of criminal involvement, although prior delinquency is the single best predictor. While these results are generally supportive of strain theory, the influence of unemployment and economic dissatisfaction is consistent with the social control model as well.

Because economic aspirations assume such a central role in both social control and strain theories, we were surprised that our two basic measures of the American dream—material salience and career salience—were not related to offending among Blacks. Although career salience was related to White offense involvement, it was in the direction opposite to that proposed by control theory. Thus, the findings regarding the impact of the American dream on behavior offer little support for social control theory among either Whites or Blacks: High levels of material and career salience are not associated with low levels of criminal involvement. This was surprising because of our expectation that social control theory would be particularly relevant in accounting for criminal behavior during young adulthood. This is the time of life during which most of our respondents have married, started families, and are busily pursuing jobs and careers. The American dream is no longer an abstract phenomenon but has taken on a very concrete reality. If control theory is correct, we would expect those who maintain a strong commitment to the American dream at this point in their lives to be quite conforming in their behavior. Yet our data show either no relationship between commitment to the American dream and criminal behavior (among African Americans), or high levels of career salience increase rather than decrease the probability of involvement in income-producing crime (among Whites). In short, there is little evidence in our data that the indicators of social control theory we have examined help account for the involvement of young adults in criminal behavior. This does not mean, of course, that elements of control theory that

we did not explore in this research—such as family bonding—are unrelated to criminal involvement. Indeed, prior research has indicated that such variables are important correlates of crime (see, e.g., Cernkovich and Giordano 1987; Sampson and Laub 1993). Still, our findings concerning one aspect of social control theory—the relationship between economic aspirations and criminal involvement—are not supportive of the theory.

Does strain theory fare any better, particularly in regard to African Americans? To evaluate the explanatory merit of strain theory, we examined the conditional relationships that are central to this model—those that model the effect of commitment to the American dream on criminal involvement at various levels of economic attainment. This analysis revealed that none of the product terms was a significant correlate of income-producing crime among African Americans. On the other hand, all but one of the interaction terms were significant predictors among Whites: At low levels of economic satisfaction, education, occupational status, and income and among those who are unemployed, high levels of material salience and career salience are productive of involvement in income-producing crime. At high levels of attainment, on the other hand, commitment to the American dream is associated with low levels of criminal involvement.

These findings are consistent with the strain theory position that the effect of commitment to the American dream is conditioned by anticipated and/or actual attainment of economic goals. At the same time, these data challenge an important component of social control theory. That is, control theory proposes that commitment to the American dream inhibits crime under all circumstances because such commitment reflects a "stake in conformity." For social control theory, actual attainment levels are not an important consideration—they do not influence the impact of high aspirations on behavior. However, our data indicate that attainment levels do matter. Among those with high levels of attainment, commitment to the American dream inhibits crime. On the other hand, among those with low levels of attainment, a continuing commitment to the American dream is actually productive of criminal involvement. This is contrary to the control theory position but easily accounted for by the strain model. Compared to previous research, we suspect that we successfully modeled strain effects not simply as a result of our focus on monetary goals but because our goal measures were operationalized in very concrete terms and because we examined the disjunction between these goals and actual achievements.

This focus on concrete economic and material goals also suggests an explanation for the lack of support for social control theory in our data. That is, commitment to the economic goals of the American dream may be a significant exception to the normal social controls resulting from a conventional normative orientation. While commitment to values and norms such as

honesty, hard work, and delayed gratification can be expected to inhibit antisocial behavior, commitment to material and economic success—the hallmarks of the American dream—may often necessitate and justify deviant behavior. In this way, commitment to the American dream may actually impede the effective operation of other social controls. This interpretation suggests an area of complementarity between control and strain theories, wherein commitment to the American dream actually facilitates deviant behavior. Alternatively, our respondents may have exaggerated the degree of their commitment to the American dream as a way of justifying their antisocial behavior. This is most likely to be the case among the Whites in our sample since it is among them that commitment to the American dream is associated with high levels of criminal involvement. Just as some individuals inflate their expectations to bring them into line with high aspirations, others may inflate their aspirations to excuse misbehavior. Thus, while high aspirations may insulate individuals from deviant involvement among those who are truly committed to the American dream, such aspirations may facilitate antisocial behavior among those who purposively exaggerate their commitment to the dream to provide a convenient excuse for misbehavior. If this indeed is the case, it suggests a modification of control theory along the lines of Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralization. Our data are not inconsistent with the concept of appeal to higher loyalties in that respondents may be reasoning that "the dream made me do it" or "the dream required that I do it." While these interpretations are speculative in nature, they are not inconsistent with our data and suggest the need for social control theory to more explicitly address the role of material and economic goals. The status of such goals is currently quite ambiguous in control theory, and it is unclear whether commitment to economic and material success produces the same consequences as commitment to conventional noneconomic goals.

Our findings also underscore the need to better understand why the strain theory variables we examined were significant correlates of crime among the Whites in our sample but not among the African Americans. One explanation for the inapplicability of our model to young Black adults is the possibility that the African Americans in our sample, especially those who were previously institutionalized, did not respond with total candor during the reinterview. It is not unreasonable to expect that those respondents with a history of legal trouble might be reluctant to report certain behaviors, particularly those that are violations of probation or parole guidelines. We noted above the steps that were taken in the collection of these data to minimize this sort of bias, but ultimately we cannot determine the extent to which such a bias might have affected our findings. We doubt that it had a significant impact, but we cannot say with certainty that the effect was nil.

Alternatively, the differential findings by race may be due in part to the possibility that Whites are more likely than African Americans to feel frustrated when they are unable to realize the promises of the American dream. That is, Whites may not anticipate or expect failure to the same extent as African Americans, and such failure, when it does occur among Whites, may generate high levels of anger and frustration and result in criminal behavior in some instances. In short, even though African Americans experience greater levels of objective deprivation, Whites may experience greater levels of subjective or relative deprivation. Because African Americans have been subjected to a long history of racial and economic discrimination, economic failure, while never welcomed, is not entirely unexpected. Indeed, African Americans have developed a repertoire of survival strategies to cope with a hostile environment that often fails to deliver on its promises (see, e.g., Bowman 1989; Gary 1981; Hill 1971). In short, Blacks may have adopted a very practical interpretation of the American dream: They recognize that despite its promises and their efforts to compete by its rules, there is a good possibility of failure. This explanation is consistent with the segmented labor market theory (Bluestone and Harrison 1982; Doeringer and Piore 1971; Gordon, Edwards, and Reich 1982; Sullivan, 1989) view that there are two avenues of economic achievement in American society. The primary labor market is characterized by steady work and good wages, while the secondary market consists of "low-wage jobs, welfare, employment and training programs, informal economic activities and crime [that] must be alternated and combined because none of these economic activities alone can provide a steady living" (Sullivan 1989:11). Thus, although African Americans may aspire to the promises of the American dream, they are realistic enough to understand that their access to the primary market is limited at best. Instead, their opportunities often lie in the secondary market, and this necessitates a mix of low-wage jobs, welfare, and crime. To the extent that they have made this adaptation, we would not expect to find among African Americans a relationship between our strain measures and criminal behavior. The combination of low-wage jobs, welfare, and crime acts as a buffer against the frustrations and strain that might otherwise exist if they had to rely on the primary labor market alone.

Such explanations notwithstanding, the general inapplicability of both social control and strain theories to the African Americans in our sample is one of the most important findings of our research. We certainly did not anticipate this, and if our results are supported by subsequent research, particularly that which taps dimensions of strain and control theories not examined here, they should encourage researchers to examine more explicitly the manner in which major theories of crime and delinquency apply to African Americans and other minorities. African Americans are overrepresented in

crime and delinquency statistics, and much of the racial tension in American society is related to the actual and perceived racial distribution of crime. Yet African Americans continue to be underrepresented as research participants in criminological research. Additional research on Blacks and other minority groups is essential if we are to better understand how our theories apply across racial groups and the implications this has for social policy. Our findings suggest that it may be erroneous to conclude that research based on White or demographically undifferentiated samples apply to African Americans in precisely the same fashion. Various theories may not be applicable to African Americans at all, may apply in dramatically different ways, or there may be more subtle variations across race groups that need to be identified. To explore these possibilities, researchers must move beyond treating race as a simple control variable and begin sampling African Americans and other minorities in sufficient numbers to permit comprehensive evaluations of the major theories of crime and delinquency.

APPENDIX A
Correlation Matrix for Combined Sample

	Material Salience	*Career Salience*	*Economic Satisfaction*	*Education*	*Occupation*	*Income*	*Employment Status*	*Prior Delinquency*	*Income-Generating Crime*	*Race*
Material salience	1.00	.348**	–.076*	–.078*	–.053	–.017	–.022	.106**	.129**	.191**
Career salience		1.00	.024	–.013	–.086*	–.013	.026	.017	.110**	.244**
Economic satisfaction			1.00	.293**	.161*	.312**	.296**	–.089**	–.148**	–.056
Education				1.00	.423**	.366**	.208**	–.285**	–.183**	.087**
Occupation					1.00	.274**	.166**	–.183**	–.145**	–.050
Income						1.00	.293**	–.136**	–.106**	–.111**
Employment status							1.00	–.031	–.117**	–.127**
Prior delinquency								1.00	.363**	–.105**
Income-generating crime									1.00	.108**
Race										1.00

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

APPENDIX B

Correlation Matrix for Household (above diagonal) and Institutional (below diagonal) Samples

	Material Salience	*Career Salience*	*Economic Satisfaction*	*Education*	*Occupation*	*Income*	*Employment Status*	*Prior Delinquency*	*Income-Generating Crime*	*Race*
Material salience	1.00	.376**	–.074	–.061	–.063	–.013	–.017	.041	.082*	.220**
Career salience	.259**	1.00	.009	–.046	–.083*	–.028	.014	.051	.080*	.267**
Economic satisfaction	–.060	.074	1.00	.278**	.121**	.320**	.287**	–.062	–.109**	–.045
Education	–.054	.029	.271**	1.00	.416**	.336**	.210**	–.141**	–.085*	.054
Occupation	.041	.102	.240**	.178*	1.00	.260**	.172**	–.124**	–.095*	–.084*
Income	.025	.053	.223**	.189**	.140	1.00	.270**	–.021	–.055	.137**
Employment status	–.018	.072	.300**	.132	.082	.322**	1.00	–.034	–.152**	–.112**
Prior delinquency	.176*	.003	–.019	.063	–.073	.052	.073	1.00	.160**	.038
Income-generating crime	.182*	.191**	–.169**	–.102	–.134	–.046	–.052	.282**	1.00	.099*
Race	.144*	.173*	–.166*	–.069	–.061	–.197**	–.236**	–.081	.283**	1.00

$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$.

APPENDIX C
Crime and Delinquency Measures

The Income-Generating Crime Scale is based on how often during the past 12 months the respondents reported (as adults) involvement in each of the following 11 offenses: steal or try to steal a motor vehicle, such as a car or motorcycle; steal or try to steal something worth more than $50; steal or try to steal things worth $5 or less; sell marijuana or hashish; sell drugs such as heroin, cocaine, or LSD; break into a building or vehicle or try to break in to steal something or just to look around; cheat on your income tax; take little things from work; take things from work worth more than $50; use or tried to use credit cards without the owner's permission or pass a bad check (intentionally overdrafting); or embezzle, that is, used money or funds for purposes other than intended. Descriptive statistics for this scale among the various sample subgroups are provided below.

Income-Generating Crime	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*	*Range*
Combined sample	7.708	5.191	5.94-43.35
Whites	7.195	4.059	5.94-43.35
African Americans	8.322	6.234	6.04-43.26
Household sample	6.919	3.200	6.04-43.35
Whites	6.608	2.461	6.04-43.35
African Americans	7.239	3.793	6.04-28.31
Institutional sample	10.414	8.662	5.94-43.26
Whites	8.712	6.358	5.94-41.64
African Americans	13.924	11.385	6.04-43.26

The Prior Delinquency Scale is based on how often during the past 12 months the respondents reported (as adolescents) involvement in the following 27 delinquent behaviors: vandalism, motor vehicle theft, theft more than $50, bought/sold/possess stolen goods, thrown objects at cars or people, run away, lied about age, carried hidden weapon, theft less than $5, aggravated assault, prostitution, sexual intercourse, gang fighting, selling marijuana, cheating on tests, simple assault, disturbing the peace, selling hard drugs, joyriding, rape, unarmed robbery, public drunkenness, theft $5 to $50, breaking and entering, truancy, drug use, and alcohol use. Descriptive statistics for this scale among the various sample subgroups are provided below.

Prior Delinquency	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*	*Range*
Combined sample	33.844	70.269	0.00-569.42
Whites	40.712	78.535	0.00-569.42
African Americans	25.880	58.349	0.00-410.79
Household sample	9.652	23.014	0.00-214.55
Whites	8.767	18.177	0.00-206.51
African Americans	10.537	26.997	0.00-214.55

APPENDIX C continued

Prior Delinquency	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*	*Range*
Institutional sample	118.702	105.740	0.10-569.42
Whites	124.751	108.734	0.10-569.42
African Americans	106.604	99.188	1.31-410.79

While the distributions of the crime and delinquency variables are somewhat skewed, it is important to recall that both income-generating crime and prior delinquency are continuous variables, and in large samples such as ours, a basic assumption of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression is that the coefficients are unbiased estimates and have normal sampling distributions. Along with the general robustness of the technique, we believe that this justifies the use of OLS regression in our analyses.

NOTES

1. While this is not an equal probability of selection sample, it was drawn to represent race and gender groups in sufficient numbers for meaningful analysis and to include a wide range of offending levels, from nonoffenders to serious chronic offenders. The reader is cautioned against generalizing beyond the data presented here.

It is important to note that the reinterview periods are different for the two subsamples (1992 and 1995). We believe that any bias introduced by this will likely be conservative, resulting in institutional respondents who are less criminal than they would have been had they been interviewed in 1992. Simply put, they have had three additional years to "mature out" of crime. On the other hand, it could be argued that these respondents have had additional time and opportunity to establish themselves in income-generating criminal careers; in this case, their reported criminal involvement in 1995 would be greater than that reported had they been reinterviewed in 1992. Regardless of which of these two opposing arguments is correct, the institutional respondents are considerably more delinquent/criminal than the household respondents, and consistent with our rationale for interviewing them for this research in the first place, their inclusion permits us to represent a wide range of offending levels in our sample.

2. In conceptualizing success goals for this research, we have purposely avoided defining them strictly as aspirations or expectations. The literature in criminology on the distinction between expectations and aspirations is quite extensive (e.g., Agnew 1983; Farnworth and Leiber 1989; Hirschi 1969; Jensen 1995), and there is considerable debate as to which is most important and whether a discrepancy measure based on the two is necessary. While we recognize the problems inherent in not making a distinction between aspirations and expectations, we are convinced by the theoretical rationale underlying the concept of life salience, as well as the empirical reliability of our scales, that we are measuring success goals in a sensible, realistic, and concrete way.

3. It might reasonably be argued that treating race as a variable independent of social class implies a subcultural as opposed to a strain theory line of reasoning. While our empirical focus on race differences in commitment to the American dream has necessarily resulted in some

sacrifice of theoretical purity, we believe this in no way compromises our analysis or the implications of our results for strain and social control theories.

4. The reader will recall that the career and material salience scales included such items as the following: "I will sacrifice a lot of other things to have a lot of money," "I expect to make as many sacrifices as are necessary in order to advance in my work/career," and "I expect to devote whatever time and energy it takes to move up in my job/career field."

5. Although the sample variable is a significant correlate of criminal involvement in the combined sample and among African Americans, we have not presented the results of separate analyses for the two sample groupings. Because there are only 65 Blacks in the institutional sample, we would have little confidence in the stability of the resulting regression coefficients. Consequently, we have used the variable distinguishing between the two samples as a control variable in the regression analyses.

6. Even though there is considerable debate as to whether it is appropriate to interpret main effects when an interaction term is included in a regression model, centering permits a meaningful interpretation of the main effect because it creates a variable with a mean of zero. For example, if x and z are centered variables and $x \bullet z$ is a product term included in the equation, the main effect of x on the dependent variable y can be interpreted as the effect of x on y at the mean of z (i.e., when $z = 0$). In short, "centering produces a value of zero on a continuous scale that is typically meaningful" (Aiken and West 1991:37).

7. By its very nature, this interaction term also permits an examination of the effect of economic satisfaction on criminal involvement as a function of level of material salience. However, because our interest is in the conditional effect of commitment to the American dream as specified by strain theory, we have chosen to limit our interpretation of the product terms to the manner in which the attainment variables condition the impact of material salience and career salience.

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