

# THE NATIONS WITHIN: RACE, CLASS, REGION, AND AMERICAN LETHAL VIOLENCE

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## INTRODUCTION

In *Crime Is Not the Problem: Lethal Violence in America*, Franklin Zimring and Gordon Hawkins provide a refreshingly novel, informative, and provocative account of crime and violence in American society.<sup>1</sup> Compared to authors of other noteworthy books written on the subject during the last several decades, Zimring and Hawkins do not avoid difficult policy questions nor cloak in academic jargon their own public policy preferences. From beginning to end, the book is testimony to the authors' belief that public policies regarding crime and justice can and should be based on solid facts and evidence.

My own critique of their work will center primarily on their chapter 5, "New Perspectives on African-American Violence."<sup>2</sup> The themes explored by the authors in this largely echo those found in earlier and later chapters; therefore, my comments also reflect a broader reading of the book. The authors note at the beginning of chapter 5 that no discussion of either crime or violence within the American context can avoid a consideration of racial differences.<sup>3</sup> I have made similar observations in my own writing on this subject.<sup>4</sup>

In their examination of the race-violence nexus, Zimring and Hawkins seek to counter what they believe to be two false inferences that have flowed from longstanding findings of higher rates of crime and lethal violence among African Americans as

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1. FRANKLIN E. ZIMRING & GORDON HAWKINS, *CRIME IS NOT THE PROBLEM: LETHAL VIOLENCE IN AMERICA* (1997).

2. *Id.* at 73-87.

3. *See id.* at 73.

4. *See* Darnell Hawkins, *Introduction* to *ETHNICITY, RACE, AND CRIME: PERSPECTIVES ACROSS TIME AND PLACE* 1, 1-2 (Darnell Hawkins ed., 1995) [hereinafter *ETHNICITY, RACE, AND CRIME*].

compared to persons of European ancestry in the United States.<sup>5</sup> These false inferences are said to take the form of two basic beliefs or propositions:

1. that black violence is just a part of a general tendency for blacks to commit large numbers of criminal offenses, both violent and nonviolent; and
2. that rates of violence in the United States are disproportionately higher than those of other industrialized countries only because of the high rates of violence among African-Americans.<sup>6</sup>

Acknowledging the widespread public and scholarly acceptance of these propositions, Zimring and Hawkins argue and provide data in support of two counterclaims. First, they propose that violence among blacks, as among the larger American public, is not primarily a crime problem.<sup>7</sup> That is, serious violence among African Americans displays rates and patterns that differ in important ways from their involvement in nonviolent crime.<sup>8</sup> Second, the authors offer data designed to show that violence in the United States is not a black problem, rather it is a problem that affects all demographic segments of the American population.<sup>9</sup> These positions are quite consistent with the data and lines of argument presented by the authors in the preceding four chapters.

Although there is much in the chapter with which I fully agree, my criticism of the authors' handling of the discussion of race and lethal violence largely center around two major areas of concern. First, the book displays what I consider to be significant areas of omission, oversight, and incompleteness in the marshaling of facts and evidence to prove that lethal violent offending and victimization can be found throughout American society, including the nation's various regions and its diverse ethnic and racial groups. The failure to do so sometimes results in an inadvertent reinforcement of public perceptions of urban African Americans as the archetype of the violent criminal offender—a result quite at odds with the authors' stated objectives.

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5. See ZIMRING & HAWKINS *supra* note 1, at 74.

6. *Id.*

7. See *id.* at 74-79.

8. See *id.*

9. See *id.* at 79-82.

Second, to a certain extent the authors tend to de-contextualize the problem of race and serious violence in the United States. In particular, their discussion often lacks an acknowledgment and assessment of the impact of the political and ideological currents that have shaped American race relations and continue to affect how Americans *respond* to acts of violence. Issues of race affect not only differences in rates of violent offending and victimization, they also have a profound impact on the making of American public policy in the crime and justice arena. Thus, the likelihood of success for many of the legal and public health prevention strategies advocated by the authors may depend on the extent to which race and race differences affect their implementation.

In offering such criticism, I do take note of the caveats provided by Zimring and Hawkins at the outset of their discussion. They noted that their chapter falls "short of a comprehensive treatment of African-American violence,"<sup>10</sup> and that they make "no attempt . . . to outline a history of, or offer a theory or set of theories regarding, black violence."<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, I propose that their examination of race and violence would have benefitted greatly from a fuller consideration of the sets of issues which I now describe.

#### I. IS BLACK VIOLENCE "THE" PROBLEM?: RACE AND THE PUBLIC'S FEARS

Beginning in the first chapter and continuing throughout the book, Zimring and Hawkins use the public's fear of violence as the linchpin of their empirical analysis, line of argumentation, and policy recommendations.<sup>12</sup> They argue that lethal violence (as compared to other forms of criminal conduct) is the most frightening threat to the average citizen in the United States and every other modern industrial nation.<sup>13</sup> In support of this thesis, the authors provide in their introductory chapter a thorough and convincing analysis of the economic, social, and psychological forces that shape Americans' perceptions and fear of crime.<sup>14</sup> Like

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10. *Id.* at 73.

11. *Id.*

12. *See, e.g., id.* at 3-21, 34-51, 185-217.

13. *See id.* at 10.

14. *See id.* at 3-21.

many earlier accounts of crime and justice in the United States, their appraisal of the potential effectiveness of crime-control policies is grounded in the belief that, to be effective, such policies must significantly ameliorate public perceptions.<sup>15</sup>

In this regard, Zimring and Hawkins observe in chapter 5 that, for many Americans, fear of violent offending most often translates into fear of African Americans, particularly young black males<sup>16</sup>—an observation also recently made in two provocative books written by Jerome Miller<sup>17</sup> and Kathryn Russell.<sup>18</sup> Responding to such race-based public perceptions, the authors devote much of chapter 5 (and other parts of the book) to an effort to separate fact from fiction in the discussion of African Americans and violence.<sup>19</sup> And, as the title of the chapter implies, the authors attempt to offer new insights into public discourse regarding the race-violence nexus. In pursuit of these objectives, Zimring and Hawkins advocate the “deracialization” of America’s lethal violence problem.<sup>20</sup>

Although these goals are certainly laudable, I think that the authors’ attempts at achieving them are only partially successful. Both their rhetoric and empirical analyses fall far short of their announced effort to bring new perspectives to the discussion of this decades-old problem. One major problem stems from the failure of the authors to provide data and research findings which would help the reader see beyond the contradictions that appear to result from the juxtaposition of the violence statistics they provide and the lines of argument they pursue. For example, it can be argued that their insistence that violence is not a black problem is not particularly persuasive when coupled with statistical evidence showing extremely high rates of involvement by African-American males in acts of crime and violence.<sup>21</sup>

Difficulty in dealing forthrightly with this dilemma is a problem that characterizes most accounts of race and crime in the United States, especially those that flow from “liberal” research

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15. *See id.* at 102-05.

16. *See id.* at 86.

17. JEROME MILLER, *SEARCH AND DESTROY: AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM* (1996).

18. KATHERYN K. RUSSELL, *THE COLOR OF CRIME: RACIAL HOAXES, WHITE FEAR, BLACK PROTECTIONISM, POLICE HARASSMENT AND OTHER MACROAGGRESSIONS* (1998).

19. *See, e.g.,* ZIMRING & HAWKINS *supra* note 1, at 73-87.

20. *See id.*

21. *See id.* at 63-66.

traditions.<sup>22</sup> Like their predecessors in this research tradition, Zimring and Hawkins must accept the accuracy of some aspects of public perceptions of the race-crime-violence link, while also aiming to reframe the nature of the public discourse on this subject. Their efforts to do so in chapter 5 fall far short of their stated objectives. For instance, despite a brief section designed to do so,<sup>23</sup> it is my opinion that the authors' rather brief discussion of African Americans in chapter 5 does little to counter the *prima facie* case presented in chapters 3 and 4 that serious violence in American society is indeed largely a "black problem."<sup>24</sup> In both chapters, transnational comparisons highlight the uniqueness of the American violence problem, leading to the obvious question of what accounts for America's statistical "outlier" status. Further, to the extent that homicide victimization data presented in chapter 4, Figure 4.9 clearly document the overrepresentation of African Americans,<sup>25</sup> neither chapter 3 nor 4 offers sufficient additional evidence to lead the average reader away from a conclusion that the American lethal violence problem is largely due to the presence of African Americans. Therefore, the authors also fail in their effort to refute the argument that there is a logical basis for white fear of black violent offenders.

Indeed, the potential use of the data presented in chapters 3 and 4 to generate such fear and conclusions is fully acknowledged by the authors.<sup>26</sup> In my opinion, however, the relative brevity of chapter 5 coupled with an inattentiveness to other crucial elements of the race-violence nexus results in a failure by the authors to provide lines of reasoning that might help counter the public's often irrational fear of black violent offenders. Consequently, the chapter lacks sufficient evidence to fully live up to the authors' concluding observation that "[v]iolence is not just a black problem, but it is an American problem that has the largest proportional impact by far among African-Americans."<sup>27</sup>

What kinds of research and data might have bolstered this claim and helped inform public opinion and social policy? First,

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22. See Darnell F. Hawkins, *Ethnicity, Race, and Crime: A Review of Selected Studies*, in *ETHNICITY, RACE, AND CRIME* 11, *supra* note 4, at 32-41.

23. See ZIMRING & HAWKINS, *supra* note 1, at 79-82.

24. See *id.* at 34-72.

25. See *id.* at 64 fig.4.9.

26. See *id.* at 17-20.

27. *Id.* at 87.

what we know about the link between public opinion, legal policies, and serious violent offending patterns from other studies<sup>28</sup> and from data provided by the authors elsewhere in the book,<sup>29</sup> is that crime statistics alone provide only part of the basis for the public's fear of crime and violence. Indeed, there is much evidence that the actual statistical overrepresentation of African Americans among violent offenders and victims provides much less of a basis for white fear of violent blacks than the images of black criminality fostered by the media and other sources.<sup>30</sup> This latter point is fully acknowledged by the authors, who allude to problematic images of the link between race and crime that emerged from the infamous "Willie Horton" affair.<sup>31</sup>

Yet, given their focus on the public's fear of violence and their attempt to provide a more "rational" grounding for American crime policy, Zimring and Hawkins's analysis of race and crime in chapter 5 might have included a more careful and detailed examination of the ways in which the perception of lethal violence in America has come to be a "racialized" social phenomenon. As part of that effort, I think that the authors might have given more attention to the following policy-related questions: (1) What are the determinants of white fear of black violence, particularly given the fact that three of the most feared violent acts—homicides, rapes, and serious assaults—in the United States tend to be intraracial and largely geographically concentrated? and (2) How has white fear of black violence affected the making of laws and public policies aimed at the amelioration of violence?

An exploration by the authors of these aspects of the race-violence nexus would have been beneficial on several counts. During recent years when lethal violence has come to be associated with urban youth gangs, drive-by shootings and the like, few would dispute the fact that race has come to be perceived by the

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28. See, e.g., RANDALL KENNEDY, *RACE, CRIME, AND THE LAW* (1997); MILLER, *supra* note 17; RUSSELL, *supra* note 18; Darnell F. Hawkins et al., *Race, Social Class, and Newspaper Coverage of Homicide*, 9 NAT'L J. OF SOC. 113, 113-40 (1995); John W.C. Johnstone et al., *Homicide Reporting in Chicago Dailies*, 71 JOURNALISM Q. 860-72 (1994).

29. See ZIMRING & HAWKINS, *supra* note 1, at 3-20.

30. See MILLER, *supra* note 17; SAMUEL WALKER ET AL., *THE COLOR OF JUSTICE: RACE, ETHNICITY, AND CRIME IN AMERICA* 49-52 (1996); Robin D. Barnes, *Interracial Violence and Racialized Narratives: Discovering the Road Less Traveled*, 96 COLUM. L. REV. 788 (1996).

31. See ZIMRING & HAWKINS, *supra* note 1, at 17-19.

American public (of all races) as one of the most important markers of the risk of violent offending and victimization. For example, apart from pure stereotype, high rates of black crime and violence have provided a basis for the ready acceptance by the American public of victim, eyewitness, and offender accounts which target blacks even when white offenders are actually responsible for the reported acts of violence.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, it is clear that the media depictions and resulting media-driven perceptions of black criminality have aided such deception by exaggerating the threat to whites posed by acts of lethal violence by black offenders.

Research on the public's perceptions of crime also sheds light on the nature of the social forces that shape fear of serious violence. Much of that research has revealed that the known "facts" about crime rates, characteristics of typical offenders, and the risk of individual victimization are not the sole (nor often the primary) determinants of the public's fear of crime and violence. Rather, a variety of moderating and mediating factors and social influences affect the extent to which citizens report themselves as fearful at any given point in time, and also determine the characteristics (age, race, ethnicity, social class) of persons whom they fear. Such studies suggest that white fear of black lethal violence, and changes in such fear over time, are a function of a variety of factors apart from the mere size of the black-white offending gap.<sup>33</sup> These include:

1. the influence of the media;<sup>34</sup>
2. the stability or instability of segregated or integrated work and residential patterns;<sup>35</sup>

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32. For example, see RUSSELL, *supra* note 18, at 69-70, for a discussion of the 1994 South Carolina incident involving Susan Smith's drowning of her children and a 1989 case of domestic homicide in Boston.

33. See KENNETH F. FERRARO, *FEAR OF CRIME: INTERPRETING VICTIMIZATION RISK* (1995); RUSSELL, *supra* note 18; WALKER ET AL., *supra* note 30; Mark Warr, *Fear of Victimization and Sensitivity to Risk*, 3 J. OF QUANTITATIVE CRIMINOLOGY 29-46 (1987); Mark Warr & Mark Stafford, *Fear of Victimization: A Look at the Proximate Causes*, 61 SOC. FORCES 1033-43 (1983).

34. See MARK FISHMAN, *MANUFACTURING THE NEWS* (1980); JUSTICE AND THE MEDIA (Ray Surrlette ed., 1984); Edward Donnerstein & Daniel Linz, *The Media, in CRIME* 237 (James Q. Wilson & Joan Petersilia eds., 1995); Allen E. Liska & William Baccaglioni, *Feeling Safe by Comparison: Crime in the Newspapers*, 37 SOC. PROBS. 360-74 (1990).

35. See Ted Chiricos et al., *Racial Composition of Neighborhood and Fear of*

3. the geographic location, concentration or dispersion of the black population, including the effects of migration from the rural South to the urban North;<sup>36</sup> and
4. the age and gender of potential victims.<sup>37</sup>

When these factors are brought into the equation, the actual level of fear of black violence and criminality may be more a function of one's age and gender, where one lives and works, and how attentive one is to the mass media (particularly local newscasts) than to the actual excess of black criminality in comparison to that of whites or changes in the level of such excess over time. In both their discussion of the fear of violence<sup>38</sup> and their chapter on African Americans,<sup>39</sup> Zimring and Hawkins might have paid more attention to these various "situational" determinants of the fear of violence and the perception that black violence poses a threat to the larger public. Such observations might also have helped counter a sometimes extreme "empiricist" orientation taken by the authors in their discussion of lethal violence throughout the book. That is, they seem to suggest that America's fear of lethal violence (and other non-lethal acts) is largely a result of the high rates of deadly violence in the United States as compared to other nations.<sup>40</sup> This may be partly true. It is also true, as I have argued here, that such comparative rates alone do not explain the precise nature of public perceptions.

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*Crime*, 35 CRIMINOLOGY 107 (1997); Dennis P. Rosenbaum et al., *Neighborhood-Based Crime Prevention: Assessing the Efficacy of Community Organizing in Chicago*, in COMMUNITY CRIME PREVENTION: DOES IT WORK? 109, 109-36 (Dennis P. Rosenbaum ed., 1986); Pamela Wilcox Rountree & Kenneth C. Land, *Perceived Risk Versus Fear of Crime: Empirical Evidence of Conceptually Distinct Reactions in Survey Data*, 74 SOC. FORCES 1353 (1996).

36. See RUSSELL, *supra* note 18; WESLEY G. SKOGAN & MICHAEL G. MAXFIELD, COPING WITH CRIME: INDIVIDUAL AND NEIGHBORHOOD REACTIONS (1981); Allen E. Liska et al., *Race and Violent Crime in the Suburbs*, 63 AM. SOC. REV. 27-38 (1988).

37. See Alan H. Clarke & Margaret J. Lewis, *Fear of Crime Among the Elderly*, 22 BRIT. J. OF CRIMINOLOGY 49-62 (1982); Suzanne T. Ortega & Jessie L. Myles, *Race and Gender Effects on Fear of Crime: An Interactive Model With Age*, 25 CRIMINOLOGY 133-52 (1987); Rountree & Land, *supra* note 35.

38. See ZIMRING & HAWKINS, *supra* note 1, at 3-20.

39. See *id.* at 73-87.

40. See *id.* at 3-20.

## II. OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND: GEOGRAPHY, RACE-OF-VICTIM EFFECTS, AND THE RACIALIZATION OF AMERICAN LETHAL VIOLENCE

The observations I made above regarding the importance of “contextual” and “situational” factors for understanding the relationship between race and lethal violence point to another area of weakness in Zimring and Hawkins’s analysis. In chapter 5, the authors observe that much of the inappropriateness of black-white crime rate comparisons in the United States stems from major differences between the geographic distributions of the races.<sup>41</sup> African Americans are concentrated largely in the inner cities of the nation’s largest metropolitan areas, while whites are dispersed across a variety of geographic settings from rural to small town to suburban fringes of large cities.<sup>42</sup> The authors cite such differences as important for an appreciation of the ideologic factors that contribute to racial differences in rates of lethal violence.<sup>43</sup> I contend that such differences in geography factor not only into differences in the risk of criminal involvement, but also into the extent to which violence and its link to race are perceived as problematic by the public and become public policy issues.

For example, the Willie Horton vignette used during the Bush-Dukakis presidential campaign derived much of its national public policy and political relevance and salience from the fact that blacks are now heavily concentrated in all of the nation’s urban centers.<sup>44</sup> Because of this residential concentration of blacks in the inner city, African-American criminality can be depicted as a more plausible threat to the nation’s sense of security than would be possible if they were still concentrated largely in the rural South. Although it is true that Willie Horton-like depictions of black criminality and the scare tactics involved in their use have been commonplace in the South since the late 1800s,<sup>45</sup> only with the completion of the massive south-to-north migration by blacks during the 1960s and 1970s have such depictions come to be perceived by politicians and others as

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41. *See id.* at 82-83.

42. *See id.*

43. *See id.*

44. *See id.* at 17-19.

45. *See, e.g.,* KENNEDY, *supra* note 28.

capable of instilling fear of black violence among whites at the *national* level. Beginning with presidential campaigns of the early 1970s, race and crime have been inextricably linked in the nation's political discourse.

In light of our awareness of the widespread use of such depictions of black criminality and the intraracial nature of much American violence, Zimring and Hawkins might have paid more attention to the ways in which public discourse about race and crime in the media, in politics, and in public policy debates frequently serve to distort the public's images of the risk of violent, interracial victimization. Both official Uniform Crime Reports data ("UCR") and National Crime Victimization Survey data ("NCVS") reveal that the typical target of black violent criminal offenders is a fellow African American.<sup>46</sup> Crime analysts have noted that to the extent that homicide is the most feared of all violent offenses, an exaggerated fear of lethal, interracial victimization is largely misplaced.<sup>47</sup> Further, although robbery and nonlethal assaults are offenses which are characterized by a relatively high rate of interracial offending,<sup>48</sup> the offense feared most by the public and often widely covered by the media—interracial assault or robbery involving homicide—likely does not occur at nearly the levels which media coverage would seem to suggest.

These lines of critique also suggest another ideological blinder that is evident in the authors' treatment of the race-violence nexus. There is a tendency in much of their discussion to take a "violence is violence by any other name" approach to the analysis of lethal violence in America. Yet, studies of both the criminal law itself and of public perceptions reveal that not all acts of violence are treated equally. It is well documented that members of the American public (of all races) and the legal system react quite differently to interracial acts of violence than to intraracial ones. And, as we have learned from *McClesky v. Kemp*<sup>49</sup> and similar legal challenges, differential punishment based on the race of the victim of murder is an entrenched part of the American legal landscape. A substantial body of research has

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46. See WALKER ET AL., *supra* note 30, at 24-59.

47. See ALBERT J. REISS & JEFFERY A. ROTH, UNDERSTANDING AND PREVENTING VIOLENCE 76-78 (1993).

48. See WALKER ET AL., *supra* note 30, at 49.

49. 481 U.S. 279 (1987).

shown that homicides involving white victims are much more likely to result in death sentences for offenders than those involving black victims.<sup>50</sup>

I propose that through greater attention to these more "ideological" dimensions of the race-crime-violence nexus, the authors might have contributed to the reader's understanding of why "new perspectives on African-American violence" are needed. This discussion might also have given the reader a much better understanding of the reasoning underlying the authors' attempt to provide a more rational and research-based approach to public policies aimed at the control of violence.

As an illustration of this line of discourse, let us consider the possibility that much of the concern for violence prevention and control which has been evident in the United States during the last decade and more has resulted primarily from a major *increase* in rates of violent offending and victimization. Further, let us assume that the apparently heightened interest in black violence results from a similar increase in their rates. Table 1 provides data to help examine the accuracy of these propositions. It shows changes in race-specific rates of homicide victimization during the last several decades.

This table serves several purposes. First, it lends support to Zimring and Hawkins's observation that patterns of change over time in the magnitude of homicide and violence among blacks argues against the idea that a "fixed" level of violence marks the life experience of African Americans.<sup>51</sup> Second, it provides evidence in support of arguments made in my own work and in my comments here which suggest that public concern for the homicide problem and its link to race do not correspond necessarily to rates of offending and victimization found among African Americans.<sup>52</sup>

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50. See DAVID C. BALDUS ET AL., *EQUAL JUSTICE AND THE DEATH PENALTY* (1990); SAMUEL R. GROSS & ROBERT MAURO, *DEATH AND DISCRIMINATION: RACIAL DISPARITIES IN CAPITAL SENTENCING* (1989); Harold Garfinkel, *Research Note on Inter- and Intra-Racial Homicides*, 27 *SOC. FORCES* 369 (1949); Raymond Paternoster, *Race of Victim and Location of Crime: The Decision to Seek the Death Penalty in South Carolina*, 74 *J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY* 754 (1983); Michael L. Radelet, *Racial Characteristics and the Imposition of the Death Penalty*, 46 *AM. SOC. REV.* 918 (1981); Marvin E. Wolfgang & Marc Reidel, *Race, Judicial Discretion, and the Death Penalty*, 407 *ANNALS AM. ACAD. POL. & SOC. SCI.* 119 (1973).

51. See ZIMRING & HAWKINS, *supra* note 1, at 87.

52. See Hawkins, *supra* note 22.

**Table 1: Trends in Homicide Victimization by Race,  
Selected Years, 1910-1995**  
(Rates per 100,000 Citizens)

Year	Whites			Blacks <sup>53</sup>			Ratio B/W <sup>54</sup>
	All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	
1910 <sup>55</sup>	4.0	n.a.	n.a.	22.0	n.a.	n.a.	5.5
1923	5.0	n.a.	n.a.	39.1	n.a.	n.a.	7.8
1924	5.3	n.a.	n.a.	39.8	n.a.	n.a.	7.5
1925	4.5	n.a.	n.a.	43.0	n.a.	n.a.	9.5
1918-27 <sup>56</sup>	5.3	n.a.	n.a.	36.9	n.a.	n.a.	7.0
1940	n.a.	5.0	1.3	26.0	57.1	12.6	5.2
1945	n.a.	5.1	1.3	n.a.	52.7	10.6	n.a.
1950	n.a.	3.9	1.4	n.a.	49.1	11.5	n.a.
1955	n.a.	3.5	1.3	n.a.	42.6	10.3	n.a.
1960	n.a.	3.9	1.4	n.a.	41.9	11.2	n.a.
1965 <sup>57</sup>	n.a.	4.8	1.7	n.a.	50.7	11.3	n.a.
1970	4.6	7.3	2.2	44.0	72.8	13.7	9.6
1971	4.9	7.9	2.3	48.1	81.6	16.0	9.8
1972	5.1	8.2	2.4	48.9	83.1	14.8	9.6
1973	5.5	8.7	2.8	46.8	77.1	16.0	8.5
1974 <sup>58</sup>	5.8	9.3	2.9	46.8	77.9	15.5	8.1
1975	5.9	n.a.	n.a.	43.8	n.a.	n.a.	7.4
1976	5.3	n.a.	n.a.	36.8	n.a.	n.a.	6.8
1977	5.6	n.a.	n.a.	36.8	n.a.	n.a.	6.6
1978	5.8	n.a.	n.a.	35.6	n.a.	n.a.	6.1
1979	6.4	9.9	3.0	37.6	64.5	13.6	5.9

53. Rates for years 1910, 1923, 1924, and 1925 contrast whites and coloreds (all nonwhites). The average rate for 1918-1927 also contrasts whites and coloreds.

54. Ratio is a comparison of rates for whites and blacks of both sexes.

55. For the year 1910, see Yongsock Shin et al., *Homicide Among Blacks*, 38 *PHYLON* 398, 400 tbl.1 (1977).

56. This is the average rate for the decade. For the years 1918-1927, see HARRINGTON C. BREARLEY, *HOMICIDE IN THE UNITED STATES 19-20* tbl.1 (1932).

57. For the years 1940-1965, see Shin et al., *supra* note 55.

58. For the years 1970-1974, see *id.*; CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL, *HOMICIDE SURVEILLANCE: HIGH-RISK RACIAL AND ETHNIC GROUPS-BLACK AND HISPANICS, 1970-1983*, at 19-21 (1986) [hereinafter *HOMICIDE SURVEILLANCE 1970-1983*].

Year	Whites			Blacks			Ratio B/W
	All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	
1980	7.0	10.9	3.2	38.4	66.2	13.4	5.5
1981	6.6	10.4	3.1	37.3	64.6	12.7	5.6
1982	6.3	9.6	3.1	34.3	59.1	12.0	5.4
1983 <sup>59</sup>	5.6	8.6	2.8	30.3	51.4	11.3	5.4
1984	5.5	8.3	2.9	29.0	48.7	11.2	5.3
1985	5.5	8.2	2.9	28.7	48.4	11.0	5.2
1986	5.7	8.6	3.0	32.4	55.0	12.1	5.7
1987	5.4	7.9	3.0	31.9	53.3	12.6	5.9
1988 <sup>60</sup>	5.3	7.9	2.9	34.4	58.1	13.2	6.5
1989	5.4	7.9	2.8	35.6	61.0	12.6	6.6
1990	5.8	8.7	2.8	39.1	68.0	13.0	6.7
1991	6.1	9.2	3.0	41.5	71.8	13.9	6.8
1992	5.9	9.0	2.8	39.0	67.4	12.9	6.6
1993	5.9	8.7	3.0	40.5	69.8	13.4	6.9
1994	5.7	8.6	2.7	37.9	65.5	12.3	6.6
1995 <sup>61</sup>	5.4	8.0	2.8	33.3	57.3	11.0	6.2

Although the table does not provide data for the last two years, it does provide useful insights.<sup>62</sup> Among other things, Table 1 reveals that (1) overall homicide victimization rates for both whites and blacks have *not* increased dramatically since 1910, and (2) to the extent that the size of population-based rates alone affect the public's fear of violence, 1923 through 1925 and the early 1970s should have seen public alarm equal to or exceeding that of the late 1980s.

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59. For the years 1974-1983, see HOMICIDE SURVEILLANCE 1970-1983, *supra* note 58; Centers for Disease Control, *Homicide Surveillance, 1979-1988*, in CDC SURVEILLANCE SUMMARIES 7-14 (MMWR No. SS-3, May 29, 1997).

60. For the years 1983-1988, see Centers for Disease Control, *supra* note 59, at 7-14.

61. For the years 1985-1995, see Search of the National Vital Statistics System, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, *Homicide Deaths and Rates Per 100,000, United States, 1989-1995*, E960-E969 (Apr. 1998).

62. National homicide rates have declined since 1995, but such change likely does not affect the racial differences observed in Table 1, *supra* pp. 916-17, nor the conclusions drawn from them here.

The findings above do not address many of the concerns raised by Zimring and Hawkins who are less concerned with temporal changes in the American violence rate than the extent to which our rate exceeds that of other nations with comparable rates of nonviolent crime.<sup>63</sup> The findings seen in Table 1 also fail to address the question of whether the violence seen in recent decades is different in some respects from earlier patterns of violence, for example, whether there are more stranger killings and "random" acts of violent crime, and greater use of firearms today than in the past. On the other hand, the findings do alert us to the need to separate public perceptions of crime, and the public policies they spawn, from what we learn through the examination of homicide statistics over time.

### III. THE MANY NATIONS WITHIN: WHAT ABOUT ASIANS, LATINOS, NATIVE AMERICANS, AND BLACK AND WHITE RURAL SOUTHERNERS?

Although it is understandable on some grounds that Zimring and Hawkins chose to center their discussion of racial issues largely around the traditional black-white contrast, I believe that by doing so they failed to probe a variety of issues and sources of data that may have proved very useful in framing their response to the public policy debates laid out in their book. In particular, I think that by avoiding a full discussion of what I have labeled "the nations within"—racial and ethnic groups other than African Americans and regional subgroups—the authors are less than convincing in their argument that lethal violence is not a black problem. In my own work, I have shown that attentiveness to the crime patterns of America's white ethnics of the past and contemporary non-black racial minorities helps to improve our understanding of the causes of high rates of criminal involvement among African Americans.<sup>64</sup>

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63. See ZIMRING & HAWKINS, *supra* note 1, at 51-72.

64. See Hawkins, *supra* note 22; Darnell F. Hawkins, *Crime and Ethnicity, in THE SOCIO-ECONOMICS OF CRIME AND JUSTICE* 89 (Brian Forst ed., 1993); Darnell F. Hawkins, *Ethnicity: The Forgotten Dimension of American Social Control, in INEQUALITY, CRIME, AND SOCIAL CONTROL* 99 (George S. Bridges & Martha A. Myers eds., 1994); Darnell F. Hawkins et al., *Race, Ethnicity, and Serious Juvenile Offending, in SERIOUS AND VIOLENT JUVENILE OFFENDERS: RISK FACTORS AND SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTIONS* 30 (R. Loeber and D. P. Farrington eds., 1998).

The authors' approach to America's demographic and cultural diversity is somewhat puzzling. In contradistinction to a view which highlights America's diversity, Zimring and Hawkins (relying largely on official crime offense data which compare blacks and whites) provide a more limited view of the American racial and ethnic landscape. As noted earlier, the authors tend to engage in a form of double-speak at various points in their attempts to prove that "race is not the problem." On one hand they devote a full chapter to exploring the unavoidable problem of comparatively high rates of crime and violence among African Americans.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, they express their dissatisfaction with any effort to engage in a race-specific (or other sub-group) disaggregation of the nation's violence data.<sup>66</sup> Zimring and Hawkins say in this regard:

The truncation of one group in a national population in an international comparison produces a mythical part-country that cannot meaningfully be compared with real groups and nations. There is no more sense in removing an integrated group from a population in this way than one could amputate a person's leg and then compare that mutilated organism with another whole person.<sup>67</sup>

As a matter of public policy, their objections make some sense, since most public policies and laws in principle are seldom aimed at subpopulations of the general public. Such comparisons also avoid the kind of "so what?" implications for policy that have emerged from some public health studies of homicide which compare black youth in the United States to youth in other nations.<sup>68</sup> Their approach also implicitly renounces the conclusions reached by those researchers who link cross-national differences in homicide rates to a nation's racial composition and innate race differences.<sup>69</sup> However, as an exercise in social research which has the potential to broaden our knowledge of the

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65. See ZIMRING & HAWKINS, *supra* note 1, at 73-87.

66. See *id.* at 81.

67. *Id.*

68. See Lois A. Fingerhut & Joel C. Kleinman, *International and Interstate Comparisons of Homicide Among Young Males*, 263 JAMA 3292 (1990).

69. See J. PHILIPPE RUSHTON, RACE EVOLUTION, AND BEHAVIOR: A LIFE HISTORY PERSPECTIVE (1995); J. Philippe Rushton, *Race and Crime: An International Dilemma*, 32 Soc'Y 37 (1995); J. Philippe Rushton, *Race and Crime: International Data for 1989-1990*, 76 PSYCHOL. REP. 307 (1995).

causes of high rates of violence both between and within nations, such "separation from the whole" fears may be partly unwarranted. Further, the authors' own data analyses demonstrate that careful, theory-informed disaggregation of data can prove to be very informative for the purpose of both social research and the making of public policy.

Having seemingly dismissed the utility of black versus non-black comparisons for cross-national purposes, the authors nevertheless use data derived from this comparison to bolster their argument that violence rates are much higher for all Americans than for populations found in other comparable nations.<sup>70</sup> As one who sees the utility in this form of demographic disaggregation, I only wish that the authors had gone further to provide other informative comparisons involving other racial and ethnic, regional, and class groupings within the American context. The authors note the lack of data to support comparisons in rates of violence across social classes—for example, to compare black middle and lower income groups.<sup>71</sup> However, they fail to include a discussion in this chapter of other useful comparisons that might shed light on subgroup differences in rates of serious violence.

For example, data collected near the start of the twentieth century by Brearley<sup>72</sup> and recent data collected by the Centers for Disease Control<sup>73</sup> both reveal major differences in rates of homicide across the states of the United States. Table 2 summarizes some of these findings, highlighting the persistence of comparatively high rates of violence in the southern and western United States.

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70. See ZIMRING & HAWKINS *supra* note 1, at 80-81.

71. See *id.* at 85.

72. BREARLEY, *supra* note 56.

73. CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL, INJURY MORTALITY ATLAS OF THE UNITED STATES 1979-1987 (1991).

**Table 2: Homicide Victimization Rates per 100,000,  
States of the United States, 1918-1927 and 1979-1987**

State	1918-1927 <sup>74</sup>			1979-1987 <sup>75</sup>
	Whites	Colored	All	All
Alabama	8.5	38.8	19.3	12.6
Alaska	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	10.0
Arizona	n.a.	n.a.	12.3	9.0
Arkansas	8.7	38.2	16.4	10.1
California	n.a.	n.a.	9.2	11.3
Colorado	n.a.	n.a.	9.0	6.1
Connecticut	n.a.	n.a.	3.3	4.7
Delaware	n.a.	n.a.	6.8	5.5
D.C.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	26.7
Florida	12.7	64.5	29.6	13.9
Georgia	8.0	32.9	18.1	13.1
Hawaii	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	4.6
Idaho	n.a.	n.a.	3.5	3.6
Illinois	n.a.	n.a.	9.3	10.7
Indiana	n.a.	n.a.	5.8	6.2
Iowa	n.a.	n.a.	2.5	2.4
Kansas	n.a.	n.a.	6.0	5.5
Kentucky	9.0	53.1	13.0	7.8
Louisiana	9.3	35.1	19.0	14.8
Maine	n.a.	n.a.	1.7	2.4
Maryland	3.7	22.1	6.8	9.2
Massachusetts	n.a.	n.a.	2.5	3.7
Michigan	n.a.	n.a.	6.2	10.9
Minnesota	n.a.	n.a.	3.1	2.4
Mississippi	9.0	31.2	20.6	13.5
Missouri	n.a.	n.a.	10.9	10.1
Montana	n.a.	n.a.	7.1	5.0

74. Data presented are the average for 1918 through 1927, except for: Alabama, which is the average for 1925-1927; Arizona, 1926-1927; Arkansas, 1927; Georgia, 1922-1924; Idaho, 1922-1927; Iowa, 1923-1927; Mississippi, 1919-1927; Nebraska, 1920-1927; North Dakota, 1924-1927; West Virginia, 1925-1927; Wyoming, 1922-1927. See BREARLEY, *supra* note 56.

75. Data presented are age-adjusted mortality rates per 100,000 citizens. Adjusted to United States' population of 1940. See CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL, *supra* note 73.

State	1918-1927			1979-1987
	Whites	Colored	All	All
Nebraska	n.a.	n.a.	4.0	3.4
Nevada	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	11.6
New Hampshire	n.a.	n.a.	1.5	1.9
New Jersey	n.a.	n.a.	5.0	6.1
New Mexico	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	11.1
New York	n.a.	n.a.	5.0	11.4
North Carolina	4.7	20.2	9.3	9.7
North Dakota	n.a.	n.a.	2.0	2.0
Ohio	n.a.	n.a.	7.7	6.1
Oklahoma	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	9.2
Oregon	n.a.	n.a.	4.6	5.0
Pennsylvania	n.a.	n.a.	6.1	5.9
Rhode Island	n.a.	n.a.	2.6	4.4
South Carolina	7.3	18.5	12.9	10.6
South Dakota	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	4.0
Tennessee	9.1	47.9	16.3	10.1
Texas	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	14.7
Utah	n.a.	n.a.	4.6	3.7
Vermont	n.a.	n.a.	1.5	2.5
Virginia	6.5	20.6	10.6	8.0
Washington	n.a.	n.a.	5.2	5.1
West Virginia	n.a.	n.a.	12.6	6.4
Wisconsin	n.a.	n.a.	2.1	3.3
Wyoming	n.a.	n.a.	12.8	5.0

I can see why the authors might choose to avoid revisiting the sometimes stereotypical and often unsubstantiated explanations that have emerged among researchers in response to regional and ethnic differences in rates of violence.<sup>76</sup> Yet, attention to the nature of such group and regional differences and the causal forces that may help to generate them would seem a fitting topic for further exploration by Zimring and Hawkins given the focus of their volume. Despite academic inattention during recent years to geographical factors, Table 2 shows that interpersonal

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76. See Raymond D. Gastil, *Homicide and a Regional Culture of Violence*, 36 AM. SOC. REV. 412 (1971); Sheldon Hackney, *Southern Violence*, 74 AM. HIST. REV. 906 (1969); Colin Loftin & Robert H. Hill, *Regional Subculture and Homicide: An Examination of the Gastil-Hackney Thesis*, 39 AM. SOC. REV. 714 (1974).

violence among southern whites remains at levels above those of whites in other regions of the nation—a fact worth considering when efforts are made to find solutions to the problem of violence.

Similarly, Zimring and Hawkins's account ignores the mounting evidence that criminal violence is a substantial problem among Latinos, Native Americans, and some subgroups of Asian Americans.<sup>77</sup> There is a brief mention of these groups in chapter 4, but like most studies of criminal violence that depend on national data sets, little detail regarding these groups is provided.<sup>78</sup> Apart from the problems of data availability, the lack of attention to violence among Native Americans (and perhaps rural Latinos and non-Latino whites as well) is largely a function of the "out of sight, out of mind" mentality that appears to drive media accounts of violence. Their violence, confined largely to reservations and rural enclaves, is much like that of black rural violence during the early part of this century. It is ignored by the media largely because it is seen as less of a threat to the larger (white) public. Academic researchers and policy makers, taking their cues from the media, often ignore rural and small town violence in their search for policy responses and solutions.

Consequently, I take issue somewhat with the authors' rather surprising depiction of homicide as largely a problem of the big cities. It is true that homicide rates in the nation's largest cities far exceed the national average,<sup>79</sup> but these statistics can be misleading. When discussing other areas of the nations the authors say:

Together, the twenty largest cities in the United States with 11.5 percent of the total population of the country had 34 percent of the criminal homicide reported to the police. As this concentration in the big cities implies, rates in the suburbs, towns, and rural areas are all lower than the aggregate national homicide rate—in many cases very much lower.<sup>80</sup>

There is both truth and falsity in this assertion, particularly if one is discussing homicide patterns found among African Americans. As early as the decades following the turn of the century,

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77. See HOMICIDE SURVEILLANCE 1970-1983, *supra* note 58; Hawkins et al., *supra* note 64, at 30-46.

78. See ZIMRING & HAWKINS *supra* note 1, at 51-72.

79. See *id.* at 65.

80. *Id.*

Brearley found homicide to be a significant source of mortality among both black and white rural populations.<sup>81</sup>

Data I have collected from the Centers for Disease Control suggest that homicide among rural blacks remains a major cause of death even into the late 1980s. For example, if homicide rates per 100,000 are calculated at the county level for the nation's black population during 1979 to 1987, as expected, the largest cities are well represented among the counties with the highest rates.<sup>82</sup> However, so too are a number of smaller counties located primarily in the southern United States.<sup>83</sup> And, as recent cause-of-death reports published by the National Center for Health Statistics and the Centers for Disease Control have shown, homicide represents a major source of excess deaths among Native Americans and Hispanic populations in many areas of the Midwest and West.<sup>84</sup> These racial disparities are also noted by the authors.<sup>85</sup> Of course, given the relative rarity of homicide, population-based rates for units with small populations are inherently unreliable and unstable in comparison to larger units. Even a modest increase in the number of homicide incidents in small counties or towns may cause a sharp rise in a population-based homicide statistic from one year to another. For most statisticians of violence, this leads to a tendency to focus analytic software on the larger counties and cities.

Such evidence suggests that while researchers and policy makers have ample reason to target large cities for violence prevention, such an orientation may blind them to the truly national scope of the homicide problem. Even while purportedly trying to show that violence is truly an American problem, Zimring and Hawkins tend to ignore other "pockets" of violence outside of the cities. Instead, they describe homicide as primarily an urban problem, and further note its concentration in some areas within cities as compared to other areas.<sup>86</sup> By doing so, their description of the nation's homicide problem at times does not stray very far from John DiIulio's assertion that "America does not have a crime problem; inner city America

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81. See BREARLEY, *supra* note 56.

82. See CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL, *supra* note 73.

83. See *id.*

84. See HOMICIDE SURVEILLANCE 1970-1983, *supra* note 58.

85. See ZIMRING & HAWKINS *supra* note 1, at 65.

86. See *id.* at 65-66.

does."<sup>87</sup> I think that by broadening the scope of the nation's violence problem to include rural and small town populations of diverse racial and ethnic heritages, the authors might have better illustrated the basis of their stated opposition to DiIulio's assertion.

Further, by broadening the analytic and public policy focus to include ethnically and racially diverse subgroups, I think that the authors also might have advanced their stated effort to identify the actual causes of America's high rate of lethal violence in comparison to other nations and to devise policies to help reduce the problem. Despite much academic and public resistance to the idea, I strongly believe that social, legal, and economic inequality lies at the heart of America's violence problem, and its minimization must take center place in any violence reduction strategy. By examining and exposing all of America's "hot spots" of violence, the authors might have helped test the accuracy of this proposition. I believe that this might have revealed to policy makers the extent to which these seemingly distinct populations are linked by a common thread of economic and social displacement and dispossession as well as an American marketplace in which guns are easily obtained.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Having offered these criticisms of the work of Zimring and Hawkins, let me end with my own set of caveats. It is often said that one of the dangers inherent in any critical analysis of a completed book is that many critics may have preferred to see a book other than that which the authors have written. Some of that revisionist sentiment is evident in the comments I have made here. Despite that inclination, I fully respect the objectives and goals which are at the core of the authors' work. Zimring and Hawkins's work has clearly pushed forward the perennial debate regarding what should and can be done to reduce the unacceptable levels of lethal violence found in American society.

In their attempt to achieve the goals outlined in their book, I understand why the authors may have knowingly decided to avoid some of the "thorny" issues of race, ethnicity, class, and

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87. JOHN D. DI IULIO, U.S. BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS, *RETHINKING THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM* (1994).

violence which I have outlined. I am convinced, however, that public policies and crime control efforts that completely ignore these issues will fail in the long run. As a contribution to the furtherance of the public and legal policy debate that the authors have skillfully encouraged, my observations suggest that successful implementation of the policy changes they advocate will require not only widespread acceptance by policy makers and the public of the idea that lethal violence is indeed *the* problem. It will also require that we accept the idea that social inequality in the United States is also *the* problem. The racial, ethnic, and class divides that characterize American society generate differential rates of lethal violence among "the nations within" but also shape both our individual and collective responses to group differences and what we perceive to be the best solutions to the problem of lethal aggression.