

IMAGES OF COLOR



IMAGES OF CRIME



READINGS



CORAMAE RICHEY MANN
MARJORIE S. ZATZ

IMAGES of COLOR, IMAGES of CRIME

Readings

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For all my students everywhere

CRM

For Rick, Richie, Patrick, and Cameron

MSZ

And for all oppressed people of color

CRM & MSZ

Foreword

The Perils of Racial Prophecy

Derrick Bell

I envy the Old Testament prophets. Although greatly abused, the prophets were convinced that they held divine credentials, that quite literally they spoke for God. I have received no instructions from on high. Rather, I try to exact some small wisdom from 40 years of experience in every kind of civil rights work. Even so, I continue to learn from those I am trying to teach.

Take, for example, a discussion period following a public lecture when I was trying to respond to a question about the value of racism to this country. Quickly summarizing how beliefs in white superiority enabled the exploitation of blacks and the acceptance by so many whites of their relatively poor economic and social status, I contended that racism was a stabilizing force, the reason so many accepted our economic system despite its enrichment of a few and disadvantaging of so many. Racism, I concluded, was a value on so many levels that if black people had not existed, America would have invented us. In quick response, one old black guy whose wit and insight raised a serious question as to which of us deserved to be behind the podium, quickly responded:

"Professor, they did invent us."

Had Ursula Le Guin, the famous science fiction writer, been in the audience, she might have added: "They had to invent us." Every society has its scapegoat people whose presence provide the majority with a target for their frustrations, insecurities, and hate. Without them, in-

ternecine fighting would be endemic and anarchy an ever-threatening possibility.

Ms. Le Guin made her point in a memorable fable titled "The Ones Who Walked Away from Omelas." In it she portrays Omelas, an idyllic community where the citizens are prosperous and happy and much given to carnivals, parades, and festivals of all kinds. There is neither crime nor want in Omelas. Its leaders are wise and free of corruption. In a word, the people of Omelas live in an idyllic land. There is, though, a problem, one that forces some who learn of it—and some who have known of it for a long time—to conclude that they cannot remain and they leave Omelas. They leave and never look back, never return.

Having set the stage, she then explains that in a cellar of one of the beautiful buildings, a small child is held and forced to live in dank squalor. When visitors come to look at the child, they act cruelly, leave a small portion of bread and water, and then depart, ignoring the child's pathetic cries to be released, its heartfelt promises to be good.

While it is hidden away from public view, all the people of Omelas know the child is there, know that somehow its presence, its suffering, is the necessary ingredient in the success of their land, its prosperity, its peace, its beauty. Most know and accept the situation, but there are some who know and cannot accept. It is these who leave Omelas, never to return.

Omelas' open secret has scary connotations for African Americans and for all

people of color in this country. Whether or not intended as such, the Omelas story is a marvelous metaphor for this country's racism. It suggests that in addition to providing a comforting sop to the poor and a convenient scapegoat for policymakers, racism connects all whites in a knowing but unspoken alliance. The writer bell hooks is right when she says that whites bond on the basis of race, whether that bonding is conscious or not. "And," she adds, "as paradoxical as it seems, viewing racism as an amalgam of guilt, responsibility, and power—all of which are generally known but never acknowledged—may explain why educational programs are destined to fail."

More important, the onus of this open but unmentionable secret about racism marks the critical difference between those able to claim whiteness as an identity and those who cannot. Here is the unbreachable barrier, the essence of why those not deemed white can never be deemed the orthodox, the standard, the conventional. Indeed, the fact that as victims we suffer racism's harm, but as a people, cannot share the responsibility for that harm may be the crucial component in a definition of what it is to be white in America.

This phenomenon is as old as this society. Because race, more specifically "whiteness," continues to serve as a connector spanning the gargantuan gap between those whites at the top of the economic ladder and most of the rest scattered far below, and because politicians and others can so easily deflect attention from what they are not doing for all of us to what whites fear blacks might do to them, I have concluded, sadly but with great certainty, that racism in America is a permanent phenomenon. Nothing in this book of essays does other than strengthen this conclusion.

Many view this prediction as despairing, not defiant. It is rejected out of hand by civil rights professionals, and those who pursue—despite all—the dream that "We Shall Overcome." Oh, I understand the conviction that "we must keep the faith." But just as we learn from the Book of James that faith without works is dead standing alone, just so, faith alone, serving as a sole shield against disaster, is fashionable foolishness.

We might wish it otherwise, but the daily reality will not permit us to deny that racism is alive and flourishing in this transitional period from one century to another. The civil rights gains, so hard won, are being steadily eroded. Despite undeniable progress for many, no persons of color are insulated from incidents of racial discrimination. Our careers, even our lives, are threatened because of our color. And even the most successful of us are haunted by the plight of our less fortunate brethren who struggle for existence in what some social scientists call the "underclass." Burdened with lifelong poverty and soul-devastating despair, they live beyond the pale of the American Dream.

Crime is that conduct a society finds threatening, and when that conduct is that of persons of color, it is—as the essays in this book make painfully clear—particularly threatening, the actor becoming a greater danger than the deed. The authors here, like a bevy of prophets, seek to provide details about aspects of life in America that, at some level, everyone already knows. In one way or another, the writers call for acknowledgment that might be the foundation of repentance. They do so with full knowledge of the usual fate of prophets. About the least dire fate for a prophet is that they preach, and no one listens; that they risk all to speak the truth, and nobody cares. ♦

Acknowledgments

We wish first to thank our students, who inspired this book. As professors teaching race and crime courses, we were frustrated by the lack of a book such as this one. We decided to undertake this project largely because of our sense that our students, and students elsewhere, needed to better understand the relationship between stereotypic images of color and images and realities of crime and punishment.

Many friends and colleagues encouraged us and provided valuable suggestions throughout the project. In particular, we thank Susan Caringella-MacDonald, Julius Debro, Drew Humphries, Nancy Jurik, and Dorothy Taylor. We also thank one another, as this was a truly collaborative effort and we both contributed equally. We extend our thanks to the Department of Criminal Justice at Indiana University and the School of Justice Studies at Arizona State University, as well as to our colleagues and students for their support and for providing an atmosphere conducive to this type of interdisciplinary, multiethnic project.

We thank Shelby Lunning, Cheryl Hanley-Muñoz, and Eduardo Portillos, all of Arizona State University, for their excellent research assistance in preparing the book. We also thank Mary Fran Draisker and Janet Soper of the College of Public Programs, Arizona State University, for their willingness to revise the manuscript continually as we wrestled with changes in terminology and layout. Mary Fran's

valuable suggestions and skills in formatting and copy editing the manuscript were a tremendous help. Somehow, she remained cheerful throughout the project. We are grateful to Claude Teweles of Roxbury Publishing Company for inviting us to edit this book, for his patience with unexpected delays, and for his helpful suggestions throughout the process of developing and completing this project. We thank our copy editors at Roxbury for their capable assistance. We also gratefully acknowledge the constructive and insightful suggestions offered by the anonymous reviewers who commented on the manuscript.

We want to applaud publicly the scholars and activists who wrote chapters for us. All of the chapters are original contributions written specifically for this book. Unlike most readers, the way that we organized this book required the authors to adhere to strict guidelines about content so that it could come together as a seamless whole, and without undue repetition.

Finally, for their continuing support and encouragement, and for the love they have given us and the extra chores they have done while we worked, we thank our families and friends. It saddens us that Coramae's father, Edward Richey, is no longer with us to share her pride in this effort. But Rick, Richie, Patrick, and Cameron, you won't have to wait "just another moment" any longer—the book is done. ♦

About the Editors

Coramae Richey Mann, Professor Emerita at the Indiana University Department of Criminal of Justice and Professor Emerita at the Florida State University School of Criminology, received undergraduate and graduate degrees in clinical psychology from Roosevelt University in Chicago and her Ph.D. in sociology (criminology) from the University of Illinois, Chicago Circle. She received an American Sociological Association fellowship for graduate study and was also later awarded a postdoctoral Ford Research Fellowship.

Professor Mann's research has been directed toward those oppressed by the juvenile and criminal justice systems: youths, women, and racial/ethnic minorities. She is the author of over 30 scholarly articles and chapters on these topics and three books: *Female Crime and Delinquency* (University of Alabama Press, 1984), *Unequal Justice: A Question of Color* (Indiana University Press, 1993), and *When Women Kill* (SUNY Press, 1996).

In 1994 Professor Mann was appointed to the National Criminal Justice Commission with the goal of producing an independent critical assessment of the U.S. justice system that will lead to performance and equity improvements in that system. The final report of the Commission, *The Real War on Crime*, was released in February 1996 (HarperCollins). As a member of the American Society of Criminology Policy Task Force, Professor Mann recently advised U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno on drugs and the community.

Dr. Mann was the recipient of both the Bruce Smith, Sr., Award of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences and the Dis-

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* * *

Marjorie S. Zatz is Professor of Justice Studies at Arizona State University. She received her B.A. in sociology with a minor in Latin American studies from the University of Massachusetts and her M.A. and Ph.D. in sociology with a minor in Latin American studies from Indiana University.

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Professor Zatz served as a member of the National Criminal Justice Commission from 1994 to 1996, when the Commission's final report, *The Real War on Crime*, was released by HarperCollins. In 1997, she received the Herbert Block Award of the American Society of Criminology. ♦

About the Contributors

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A Point of Departure

In any anthology such as this, authors, editors, and readers must wrestle with the question of how best to refer to members of different racial and ethnic groups. Any selection of terms is a political decision, and preferences change over time and from one region of the country to another. While some of our contributors demonstrate such variation in their chapters, we have chosen to follow the terminology preferred by most of our authors as they write about themselves and other members of their racial/ethnic group in our initial and concluding chapters, and

in the introductions to the five major parts. These terms are "American Indian," "African American," "Latino and Latina," "Asian American," and "Euro-American." Please note further that hyphens are not used in this book, with the exception of Euro-Americans.

Throughout this book, we suggest a series of discussion questions. We ask that you begin by addressing the question: *What do you think each group should be called, and why?*

—The Editors

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