CRIME, THREAT, AND SECURITY: IMMIGRANTS AS LABORERS, ENTREPRENEURS, AND GOOD NEIGHBORS

by

Watoii Rabii

June 2018

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University at Buffalo, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my advisor, Robert Adelman, for his unwavering enthusiasm, support, and encouragement throughout my entire time at University at Buffalo. Since the first day I arrived on campus he has always been a source of insight, wisdom, and understanding. He never gave up on me even when I was ready to give up on myself. I would not have been able to achieve this milestone without his dedication. I will always remember the phrases “keep pushing” and “hang in there.”

To my committee member, Mary Nell Trautner, I cannot thank her enough for everything she has done since I arrived at the University at Buffalo. She has been a strong, inspiring, and influential voice in all aspects of my graduate career. Whether it was coursework, teaching, dissertation work, or the job market her door was always open. She never hesitated to provide help and feedback when I needed it.

To my committee member, Christopher Mele, for his thoughtful feedback and critique of my work. For always providing new insights into my work. For his continued support. For all of the time he dedicated to ensuring I completed this project.

To Professor Debra Street, for always being in my corner. Throughout my time at University at Buffalo I always felt as though I could approach her, this meant a lot to me. I would also like to thank her for entrusting me to represent the Sociology Department at University at Buffalo on multiple occasions. I have always been touched by her unwavering faith in me.

To Professors Ashley Barr and Shelley Kimmelberg for their constant support and feedback while I was working on this project and preparing my job market materials. Words cannot express how grateful I am for the time they dedicated to helping me.

To Professor Allen Shelton at State University College at Buffalo, for encouraging me to transition to sociology and pursue graduate work in sociology. I cannot thank him enough for his years of dedication and mentorship.

To my dear friends, Matthew Perry and Kiera Duckworth, for being there with me through all of the ups and downs, through all the adversity, and all of the triumphs. They have been with me every step of the way. I will always remember their generosity, friendship, and love.

To my dear friends Greg Hall, Jared Strohl, and Joanne Tompkins, for their kindness and support throughout my time here at University at Buffalo. For being an unwavering source of emotional support. To Greg for his generosity. Our conversations about Marvel, DC, and Star Wars were among the highlights of my week. To Jared for always being optimistic, encouraging, and supportive. Our conversations about Bourdieu and Foucault will be sorely missed. To Joanne for being a trusted confidant and for enduring my endless Harry Potter and Star Wars references. And for always being someone I could count on. That is amazing.

To my father and best friend, Renis Rabii, for all the wise words, for the protection, road trips, drum playing, and hours of enjoying music together. For doing what was right no matter who disagreed. Thank you for all of your love and support. You are my hero, my mentor, and my very best friend.
To my mother, Poniisa Rabii, for always being my biggest fan. For all of the sacrifices she made so I could be where I am. For her unconditional love and support through all of my struggles and victories. I wouldn’t be where I am without her.

To my uncle and one of my biggest heroes, Robin Rabii, for his irreverent comedy. For buying me some of my first books. For always being someone I could look up to. For always standing up for what is right. For all of the hours of listening to music in his basement. For all of the hours playing drums together. For all of the conversations around his dining room table.

To my aunt Aseda Rabii, for being one of my first teachers. For listening to the nonsense me, my brother, and my cousin would come up with, for supporting me no matter what, and for making her house a second home.

To my brothers Hawon and Tele Rabii for being the best younger brothers anyone could ask for. For all of the years of watching movies, playing video games, and growing up together. Love you both with all of my heart.

To my grandmothers Atubii Rabii and Marcia Roberts. For cheering for me no matter what. For opening their homes to me. For raising my parents, aunts, and uncles. For arranging sleepovers with me and my cousins. For all of the family gatherings. For all of the unwavering support. I love you both immensely.

To my Aunt Afaidii, Uncle Khifidonis, Uncle Estrelinb, Aunt Gertidii, Uncle Kuredin, Aunt Vanessa, Aunt Theresa, Aunt Lynette, Uncle David, Uncle Roger, and Aunt Alicia. To my cousins Jerome, Jason, James, Jessica, Amoroso, Sazz, Keli, Teril, Lilan, Matthew, Keya, and Leah for their constant support through my entire life and academic career. I would not have made it without the knowledge that they were in my corner cheering me on. Love you all immeasurably.

To my cousin and one of my biggest heroes, Elai Tubo, for always being a good role model and giving sound advice. For buying me my first drum. For all of the hours of conversation, cutting grass, and playing drums. For always choosing love and kindness first.

To my original partners in crime, Venis Kevii, Zafatiima Rabii, Makai Takori, and Alona Takori. For being with me since the beginning. Since our first days of they have always been great friends. Thank you for believing in me and for all the years of friendship. I love you all very much.

To my cousins Manolatti, Fidona, Santia, and Karalii for being some of my best friends. Thank you for reminding me to laugh, for all of the funny “impersonations”, and for all of the great memories.

To my good friends Stephen Kosinski, Jennifer Burns, and Shawn McDonell for always being there for me, for always being willing to lend an ear, and for cheering me on. Thanks to Steve for some great memories and good times. Thanks to Shawn for the liver shots and for always being there when I need you.
To my friends Joseph Drobysh and Khwaja Navil for all of the great memories and road trips throughout my high school and college years and for always checking in on me.

To my friends Nathan Caza and Colter Pell for years of great memories.

To my friends Curtis and Dyrell for all of the Marvel and DC conversations, for reminding me to get sleep, and for being great friends.

To my friend James Pilgran, for being supportive of my academic pursuits.

To my friend John Spanos for always checking on me and making sure I was in good spirits.

To Paul Carlucci, Carolann Cook, Tony Carlucci, and Carol Kelly for being supportive of my academic pursuits these last eleven years.

To my friend Kris D’Amuro, for being a great colleague and friend. For covering my classes when I needed him. For helping me talk through my dissertation and always lending an ear.

To my colleagues and friends Kevin McKelvey and Michael Halliday for helping to introduce me to Singapore. For the hours of conversations and for their friendship and generosity.

To my colleagues from the Singapore Institute of Management, Katie Fassbinder, Mark Lempke, Heather Bennett, Paul McAfee, Bob Pecoraro, Joseph Boomer, Joshua Redford, Sean Green, Kenton Anderson, and Kim Omanchinski for being supportive and encouraging during my dissertation writing and job interview process.

To Mark and Mary Kosinski for their continued kindness, generosity, and support. For always encouraging me and for opening up their home to me during my college and graduate school years.

Finally, to the late, Rapto Rabii and David Roberts, my grandfathers. To Rapto Rabii, for buying me my first books. For all of the hours spent doing homework. For teaching me how to drive. For the hours of long conversation at the dinner table and in the living room. For the hours watching Democracy Now. For taking interest in my intellectual and personal development. For marrying my grandmother, and raising my father, Renis, Uncle Robin, Aunt Afaidin, Uncle Estrelbin, and Aunt Gertidi. Love you from the bottom of my heart Z. To, David Roberts, Thank you for your love and support. For marrying my grandmother and raising my mother, Poniisa, my aunt Vanessa, My aunt Theresa, my aunt Lynette, my Uncle David, and my aunt Alicia. For introducing me to the Wizard of Oz. For making your house a second home. “Hot Toe Mighty Toe”. Love you more than words can express Grand Daddy.
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.................................................................................................................. iii

ABSTRACT.................................................................................................................................. vii

CHAPTERS

I. CHAPTER ONE: Introduction: Color Blind Criminalization and Contingent Threat: Comparing Receptions and Perceptions of Immigrants in Urban and Rural Areas................................................................. 1

   Introduction......................................................................................................................... 1

   The History of Nativism and Contingent Threat................................................................. 3

   Theoretical Constructs: Color Blind Criminalization and Contingent Threat................. 12

   Overview of Chapters........................................................................................................ 14

II. CHAPTER TWO: Contingent Threat: The Role of Community Factors in Shaping Perceptions................................................................................................................................. 18

   Introduction......................................................................................................................... 18

   Current Issues of Immigration and Criminalization......................................................... 19

   Sociology of Threat........................................................................................................... 22

   Data and Methods............................................................................................................. 25

   Results ............................................................................................................................... 27

   Laborers, Entrepreneurs, and Good Neighbors................................................................. 29

   Everybody’s Welcome....................................................................................................... 31

   Salience of Criminal and Homeland Security Threat..................................................... 34

   Discussion........................................................................................................................... 38
III. CHAPTER THREE: “Moral Entrepreneurs”: Culture, Crime, and Work on Buffalo’s West Side

Introduction ..................................................................................................................49

Literature Review ...........................................................................................................45

Data and Methods ........................................................................................................51

Results ...........................................................................................................................54

Buffalo’s Model Minority: Crime and Work .................................................................54

Doing Diversity: Multicultural-Diversity Capital in

Buffalo’s West Side ........................................................................................................59

Discussion and Conclusion ..........................................................................................64

IV. CHAPTER FOUR: Social Desirability in the Age of Colorblindness: How Racism Became Deviant and What That Means for Social Science

Introduction ..................................................................................................................68

Literature Review ............................................................................................................70

Interpreting Results: What does this mean for social science ..................................78

How Did Racism Become Deviant? ..............................................................................78

What Does This Mean for Social Science ...................................................................81

Civility, Diversity, and the Post Civil Rights Era ..........................................................84

Conclusions and Implications ......................................................................................87

V. CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion: A Cautionary Tale About Interpreting Social Change

Future Directions .........................................................................................................96

Policy Implications ......................................................................................................97
Abstract

Using in-depth interview data from 48 native-born whites and content analysis data from 170 newspaper articles, I examine how immigrants are perceived and portrayed in two communities in Western New York (one rural, the other urban). I found that comments about immigrants were mostly positive. Along the dimensions of crime, culture, and work, they were seen as contributors rather than as invaders. Responses fell into three categories: (1) immigrants were laborers, entrepreneurs, and good neighbors, (2) immigrants were welcome in the community, and (3) immigrants were not criminal or national security threats. I argue that two community factors play a role in these perceptions: instrumentality and isolation. In short, rural farmers discussed their needs for migrant workers and city dwellers accepted the role migrants play in revitalizing their neighborhood. I explore these themes and discuss how they may influence positive perceptions of immigrants in today’s anti-immigrant climate. The data (including the newspaper data) suggest that threat is less salient when communities depend economically on migrants and when they are isolated; moreover, historical moments, social settings, and circumstances influence sentiment. In both locations, these factors create conditions of zero-sum mobility in which immigrants’ successes are not equated with competition. This study contributes to the literatures on group threat, threat perceptions, and threat narratives by focusing on how community factors shape perceptions of refugees and migrant workers.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

COLOR BLIND CRIMINALIZATION AND CONTINGENT THREAT: COMPARING RECEPTIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF IMMIGRANTS IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS

In this dissertation, I investigate how perceptions and portrayals of immigrants in Western New York diverge from the broader national discourse. This research has demonstrated that criminal and national security threat perceptions and negative portrayals are more or less salient under certain neighborhood and community conditions much like Messner (2000) contended about gender. He states:

The most fruitful approach is not to ask why boys and girls are so different but rather how and under what conditions boys and girls constitute themselves as separate, oppositional groups…The key issue is under what conditions (emphasis added) gender is activated as a salient organizing principle in social life and under what conditions it may be less salient.

This project investigates the conditions under which criminal threat perceptions and negative portrayals are salient. I explore perceptions and portrayals of immigrants in two places: (1) The West Side neighborhood in Buffalo, New York, and (2) the Farm Belt between Buffalo and Rochester, New York. Thus, I ask: (1) What are the narratives and portrayals about immigrants and refugees on the ground in rural and urban areas in Western New York? (2) How do these narratives and portrayals contrast with those in local and national media?

The salience of nativist perceptions and portrayals of immigrants is linked to issues of criminalization. These ideologies and polices have been well documented by sociologists (Chavez 2008; Golash-Boza 2015; Love 2017). These studies focus on the threat narratives, feelings of threat, exclusionary immigration policies, and hardships immigrants’ experience.
Immigrants are scapegoated and experience negative stereotyping. Southern, Central, and Eastern European Immigrants (SCES), Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican immigrants have had a long history of being exploited, vilified, and discriminated against.

It is important to consider the communities and neighborhoods these immigrants have lived and currently live, because, as I argue later in this chapter, this will influence the degree of acceptance or animus they experience. Perceptions of immigrants as hardworking or lazy vary across community. For example, in Buffalo immigrants have been praised and portrayed in a positive light. However, in other locales such as Pennsylvania, Arizona, and California the opposite has happened (Jacobson 2008; Massey and Sanchez 2012; Longazel 2016). These perceptions and portrayals are influenced by a community’s or neighborhood’s need for immigrant labor and entrepreneurialism and the degree to which immigrants remain isolated. It is important to consider the ways neighborhood dynamics influence portrayals and perceptions of immigrants because they are often the incubators of anti-immigrant sentiment, policy and residential preferences, and policies themselves. This chapter begins with a brief summary of classical and contemporary nativism in the United States. I then outline the design and research methods for this project. Finally, I discuss the results of this study.

For this project, I employed a mixed methodology approach combining in-depth interviews with an analysis of local media coverage about immigrants and refugees. Using both types of data, helps unpack the blurring between racial ideology and criminal ideology. This is important to explore because often criminal ideologies are racialized. In other words, beliefs about terrorism, illegal immigration, and crime are equated with specific racial groups. Michelle Alexander (2010) refers to this process as the symbolic production of race.
I conducted 48 in-depth interviews with community members and business owners across two locations: the West Side neighborhood in Buffalo, New York, and the Farm Belt of Western New York between Buffalo and Rochester. I asked respondents about their feelings toward immigrants, how they viewed demographic changes in their community, and what they thought these changes meant for their families and communities. I gained entrée into communities through a combination of personal and institutional contacts (Massey and Sanchez 2010). In the following section, I will outline a brief history of nativism and how that history informs my research.

The History of Nativism and Contingent Threat

Threat is historically and socially contingent (Alba 2009). The reception to -- and source of -- immigration in the United States has changed over time (Alba and Nee 2003). Of course, immigration started with individuals and families from Northern and Western European countries. Later, toward the end of the 19th century, this shifted to Southern and Central European immigration. These immigrants came from Italy, Greece, and Hungary among other nations. Following the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, immigrants began migrating from countries in Latin America, Asia, and, more recently, Africa (Foner 2010; Golash-Boza 2015).

Throughout these waves perceived threat was salient and immigration was portrayed as a social problem (Golash-Boza 2015; Hayes 2001; Massey and Sanchez 2010). These portrayals influence the salience of threat perceptions and the reproduction of threat narratives. Historical events such as the Great Depression, World Wars I and II, and the Civil Rights Movement have activated, exacerbated, and mitigated threat. These feelings of threat combined with portrayals of
immigrants as unassimilable foreigners created moral panics which led to punitive policy preferences. These preferences eventually culminated in punitive policies.

In the United States, nativism has played a pivotal role in the history of immigration and the immigration experience, *writ large* (Golash-Boza 2015; Hayes 2001; Massey and Sanchez 2010; Portes and Rimbaut 2001). Miner license taxes and Alien Land Laws were imposed on Chinese and Japanese immigrants in the early twentieth century (Hing 1993; Bolash-Goza 2014). Mexican immigrants experienced mass deportation and repatriation (Balderama and Rodriguez 2006). All three groups were exploited for their labor then discarded and discriminated against when native-born Americans felt criminal, cultural, and occupational threat (Hing 1993; Massey, Durand, Malone 2002; Balderama and Rodriguez 2006; Golash-Boza 2015).

When Mexican immigrants were imported for cheap labor during World War I and World War II through the El Enganche and Bracero programs, there was relatively less nativism than during the Great Depression when they were heavily discriminated against and deported. In fact, Mexican Americans and Jewish Americans were blamed for the Great Depression which led to anti-Semitic and anti-Mexican sentiment (Dinnerstein 1994; Balderama and Rodriguez 2006). Jewish Americans would also later be blamed for World War II (Dinnerstein 1994).

Southern and Central European immigrants also faced discrimination, nativism, and xenophobia. Immigration from these regions increased between 1880 and 1920. Americans believed that these immigrants were biologically, culturally, and mentally inferior. Based on these beliefs, the U.S. enacted policies with the goal of preserving the “racial stock” and social defense (Brimelow 1996; Hayes 2001; Iceland 2009; Lieberson 1981; Golash Boza 2015; Walsh 2015).
These policies were justified by a legacy of nativist and racist science that began in the 1700s with racial taxonomies and continued into the twentieth century with eugenics and IQ testing (Hayes 2001; Schram and Tibbets 2014; Golash-Boza 2015; Gould 1996; Smedley 2007). A climate of biological positivism advanced by scholars like Lombroso, Morton, Agassiz, Goddard, Galton, Grant, and Ferri influenced how the public and academics thought about human difference (Desmond and Emirbayer 2010; Gould 1996; Smedley 2007; Schramm and Tibbetts 2014; Golash-Boza 2015; Walsh 2015). The sciences of Craniometry, Physiognomy, phrenology, polygeny, IQ testing, and eugenics combined to form an overall climate of scientific racism and nativism (Brimelow 1996; Golash Boza 2015; Hayes 2001; Iceland 2009; Lieberson 1981; Schram and Tibbets 2015).

These scientific racist and nativist claims influenced policy preferences and federal legislation. These preferences resulted in laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Gentleman’s Agreement of 1907, and the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924. In addition, during these times, criminologists argued that these groups were born criminals or feeble minded. For example, in his book *The Kallikak Family: A study in the heredity of feeble-mindedness*, Goddard (1912) argued that feeblemindedness could be passed down intergenerationally by comparing the outcomes of the offspring of two different women. Overall, these claims about inherent criminality and presumed biological inferiority influenced criminal and racial ideology.

In addition to scientific racism and nativism of the early twentieth century, there were also periods of vacillation between open- and closed-door policies. Hayes (2001) notes this era was one of ambivalence where restrictive legislation and legalization of temporary workers were the norm. The United States government continued this cycle of mass deportation and open-door
policies because of the need to placate agricultural farmers who needed the labor but also Americans who were concerned about criminal, cultural, and occupational threat.

The treatment of immigrants from China and Japan are prime examples of these legislative contradictions. Asian immigrants were initially welcomed as a resource for cheap labor in the 1840s to help build transcontinental railroads and other infrastructure (Hing 1993; Takaki 2003). Nonetheless, once they began to compete with Whites for jobs, Chinese and Japanese immigrants and their descendants were discriminated against and depicted as criminal, cultural, and occupational threats. The criminalization of opium, caricatures of Asian immigrants, and subsequent exclusionary immigration policies provide examples of how whites addressed these feelings of threat. For example, the Burlingame Treaty, which allowed open immigration from China, was soon eclipsed by the passage of laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and Immigration Act of 1917 which created the Asiatic Barred Zone. These laws severely restricted immigration from China (Hing 1993).

Japanese immigration filled the labor deficit brought about by the Chinese Exclusion Act. In addition, Japanese immigrants were treated favorably because they mostly resided in Hawaii and because they were not deemed a threat to domestic workers (Hing 1993). However, once they began migrating to the mainland they experienced the same anti-immigrant sentiment as the Chinese. This eventually resulted in the Gentleman’s Agreement of 1907 in which Japan informally limited the number of travel documents to the U.S. (Hing 1993). We would later see during World War II how the passage of Executive Order 9066 disproportionately affected Japanese Americans, sentencing them to internment.

Mexican immigrants were also recruited for cheap labor. From 1900 to 1968 the United States government established two programs that allowed Mexican immigrants to migrate for
temporary work. They were referred to as El Enganche and the Bracero Program (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2003). During the prominence of El Enganche, “Enganchederos” went to Mexico to recruit cheap farm labor to help deal with the labor shortage created by the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Gentleman’s Agreement (Massey, Durant, and Malone 2003). They promised workers far higher wages than they would actually receive. These immigrants were eventually victims of the mass deportation that took place during the Great Depression (Hayes 2001; Massey et al. 2003).

During the 1940s, due to labor shortages caused by World War II, Congress created the Bracero program (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Massey et al. 2003). This program lasted from 1942-1964. This represented the second arm of temporary labor importation. This program brought thousands of immigrants from Mexico to the U.S. to work (Hayes 2001; Massey et al. 2003). The program ended after the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

This transition from open-door policy to restriction demonstrates that immigrants received favorable treatment or indifference when they were needed, often as workers in the U.S. Immigrants were instrumental in the sense that their labor served the interests of the U.S. Noel (1968) and Myrdal (1944) demonstrated these relations deteriorated once the dominant group felt threatened or saw an opportunity to exploit workers (Myrdal 1944; Noel 1968).

This has been a story about how necessity and isolation influence the treatment of immigrants. When a group is needed (El Enganche, Bracero Program, Transcontinental Railroad) and segregated (Jim Crow), threat is less salient. However, when it appears groups are making advancements, the dominant group will engage in criminalization and turn to discriminatory, punitive legislation to maintain the status quo. This tendency towards criminalization is an example of what Simon (2007) calls “governing through crime.” In each of these cases, the fear
of crime was manipulated to garner support for policies that were discriminatory and punitive.
Simon argues that such an approach has made “American less democratic and more racially
polarized (Simon 2007; 6).

The War on Drugs, War on Immigrants, and Latino Threat Narrative

The Immigration Act of 1965 was passed after a long history of moving back and forth
between open- and closed-door policies. During the height of the civil rights movement, many
Americans began to view restrictive immigration from specific countries as racist (Massey et al.
2003). The 1965 law eliminated the immigration quota system instituted by the Johnson-Reed
Act of 1924 and other laws (Massey 2012). Some of the key provisions of the bill included the
elimination of the quota system, the lifting of restrictions on immigrants from Asia, and the
establishment of preferences for family reunion, skilled workers, and refugees (Kennedy 1966).
The passage of this law accompanied the abolishment of the Bracero Program.

Although there were many gains in terms of civil rights legislation, a period of
conservative backlash emerged that made threat perceptions and new iterations of threat
narratives salient. During this “racial reaction” the gains of the civil rights movement were
framed as the cause of racial inequality experienced by Whites (Omi and Winant 1994). Omi and
Clinton, the state has sought to absorb, to marginalize and to transform (or “rearticulate”) the
meaning of the reforms won in the earlier decade.” In the case of African Americans, Whites
used civil rights rhetoric to make a case for reverse discrimination while the rhetoric about
Mexican immigrants was framed around their invasion. This resulted in an era Tammy Anderson
(2014) refers to as the Punitive Turn. This period began in the 1970s and saw harsh Anti-Drug
and Anti-Immigrant policies that had severe effects on African and Mexican Americans.
At the end of the 1970s there were two ideological wars waged: The War on Drugs and the War on Immigrants (Massey and Sanchez 2012). These wars had disproportionate effects on African Americans and Latino immigrants. The result was a “get tough” on crime and on immigration political and social climate. The signature laws were the Anti-Drug and Abuse Act of 1988 and the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. The Anti-Drug and Abuse Act of 1988 criminalized the possession of crack cocaine with no intent to sell. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 sought to penalize employers who employed undocumented immigrants. This law penalized employers for hiring undocumented immigrants. The goal of this law was to control undocumented immigration. The law’s key provisions did the following: (1) established penalties for employers who knowledgeably hired “illegal aliens,” (2) toughened border security, (3) legalized some agricultural workers, and (4) legalized undocumented immigrants who were unlawfully in the U.S. since 1982 (USCIS 2013).

Both wars were based on the false premise of increasing violent crime and undocumented immigration at times when both were leveling off (Massey, Durand, Manlone 2003; Western 2006). In other words, the increased law and border enforcement came at times when there were paradoxical trends: decreasing undocumented immigration and violent crime paired with increasing incarceration and deportation rates. This led to African Americans and Latinos being constructed as what Stanley Cohen calls folk devils (Cohen 1972). The combined influence of these wars created a climate conducive to the formation of the Latino Threat Narrative.

Proponents of strict immigration laws and the rolling back of affirmative action argued that immigrants, specifically immigrants from Latin and Central American countries, were a criminal, cultural and occupational threat. Immigration was portrayed as an invasion. Chavez (2009) refers to this as the Latino Threat Narrative, a constituent part of what Massey and
Sanchez (2010) refer to as the “War on Immigrants.” The key issues were concerns about language in school curricula, crime, and job opportunities (Garcia and Bass 2007; Hainmuller and Hiscox 2010; Massey and Sanchez 2010; Rumbaut and Massey 2013).

The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 led to the passage of more restrictive immigration laws in the 1990s and 2000s, many of which occurred in specific states such as Arizona and California. Unlike the Immigration Act of 1965 and the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, these policies concentrated on surveillance of immigrants, denial of public benefits, and a more secure U.S.-Mexico border. These laws were effective at creating a legislative and public climate conducive to the passage of S.B. 1070 (Campbell 2010). S.B. 1070 was a law passed in the state of Arizona that authorized law enforcement to use reasonable suspicion when inquiring about an individual’s immigration status. Reasonable suspicion comes from the case, *Terry v. Ohio*, which allows officers to investigate behaviors and individuals they deem suspicious.

One of the first restrictive immigration laws of the 1990s was the “Save Our State Law” or Proposition 187 (Campbell 2010). The goal of the law was to stop undocumented immigrants from receiving public benefits in California (Campbell 2010). However, a few days later an injunction was filed against it in Federal District Court (Selden, Pace, and Gilman 2010). A permanent injunction exists and the law has never been enforced.

These laws have shaped, and are the results of, public sentiments of state and non-state actors. As Ackerman (2014:73) notes, “illegal immigrant,’ as is a term, is the direct result of politicians, activists, and government agents working to shape the debate in this direction.” It is not solely about the legality or number of immigrants entering the country. For example, Proposition 200 in Arizona restricted immigrant access to public benefits and voting rights if
individuals could not provide verification that they were United States citizens. Two years later Proposition 100 in Arizona was passed which made it difficult for immigrants accused of “low-level felonies” to obtain bonds (Campbell 2010:5). An officer’s suspicion was considered suitable evidence. The law was ruled constitutional in appeal cases that were heard after the enactment.

Proposition 300 in Arizona barred undocumented immigrants from receiving financial aid and in-state tuition for college. These laws did the boundary work to answer the question of who belongs and who does not (Campbell 2010). In short, the legislation made it clear that undocumented immigrants do not “belong” by denying them public benefits. These boundaries establish categories such as documented and undocumented which are reified in social arrangements. “Undocumented” is an assumed status that created the climate suitable to the Latino Threat Narrative or the War on Immigrants (Chavez 2008; Massey and Sanchez 2010). The convergence of nativism, policy, and public opinion has been essential in shaping the Latino Threat Narrative around immigration. However, the Latino Threat Narrative, as I discuss later, is salient under certain conditions.

Islamophobia

Islamophobia is important to consider because it is the basis of the criminalization of Syrian Refugees or at the very most framing them as risks. Islamophobia is “unfounded hostility towards Islam . . . [and therefore] fear or dislike of all or most Muslims,” (Rumeyede Trust 1997:1; Ali 2012). The origins of Islamophobia stem from the conflation of regional and religious stereotypes with the Middle East, Islam, and Arabic nations. They are associated with radical Islamic terrorism. This conflation has created what Patricia Hill Collins (1999) calls controlling images.
Ali (2012) argues that Islamophobia occurred in three phases: (1) orientalism, (2) September 11th, and (3) the threat of Sharia Law. In the first phase, Islamophobia was a matter of seeing those who came from a Middle Eastern country as inferior and different. In the second phase, Islamophobia resulted from people disliking those of actual and perceived Muslim descent because of their conflation with the September 11th attacks. In the final phase, there is hysteria about the perceived proliferation of Sharia Law into everyday life. Together, these have led to mass detention, airport abuse, warrantless wiretapping, registration, and racial profiling (Desmond and Emirbayer 2010; Love 2017).

Over the last decade, events such as the September 11th and Paris attacks have exacerbated Islamophobia. The consequences of these attacks are significant because they lead to the idea that “security” – in all of its forms – is more important than civil liberties (Asultany 2008). Many who are Muslim and/or are perceived to be Muslim are victims of hate crimes, what Desmond and Emirbayer (2010) call the Arabization of Terrorism.

**Theoretical Constructs: Color Blind Criminalization and Contingent Threat**

The marriage between nativism, Islamophobia, residential preferences, policy, and public opinion remain prevalent today. Sociologists have used the notion of Color Blindness and post racialism to illustrate subtle, covert forms of contemporary racism (Bonilla-Silva 2018; Brown et al. 2003). In the case of Mexican immigration, many conflate Mexico with illegal immigration and frame their objections in rational, objective ways. For example, illegal immigration, crime, and language barriers are considered pragmatic concerns that are not inherently racial.

Objections are rationalized and framed in rational and neutral terms rather than racial ones. However, these objections are inherently racist (Bonilla-Silva 2018). An illegality frame is used to construct negative responses to immigrants in terms of the law, language, jobs, and the
inherent criminality of immigrants. Individuals use these frames to defend anti-immigration stances from the label of bigotry.

A type of cultural determinism animates views of Whites, model minorities, and non-Whites. Culture is the biology of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. That is, just as Spencer, Galton, Goddard, and Lombroso created an ideology of racial difference based on biology that legitimized discrimination and inequality, cultural arguments have replaced them. Asian and White success are attributed to a morally superior ethic and culture. Non-white disadvantage is attributed to welfare dependence, out of wedlock births, and the cultural exaltation of violence, among others.

As long as the immigrant group is instrumental and not perceived to be socially and spatially encroaching on the dominant group’s resources, threat narratives will not be as severe. For example, farmers who are dependent on immigrant labor may be less likely to oppose their presence in the U.S. than those who have less at stake (this could also occur outside the U.S.). In addition, people in places with vibrant ethnic enclaves that double as economic hubs and tourist capitals are more likely to view immigration and migration as positive.

As discussed above, two threat narratives have emerged more recently: threats posed by Mexican immigrants and those of perceived or actual Muslim descent. Mexican Americans are conflated with illegal immigrants and Muslim Americans are deemed synonymous with terrorism. These associations have produced hysterical reactions to immigration at different points in history (Chavez 2009; Desmond and Emirbayer 2010). In this dissertation, I argue that perceptions and portrayals of immigrants are influenced by their degree of instrumentality and isolation. Immigrants and refugees were perceived and portrayed by whites in their communities as Laborers, Entrepreneurs, and Good Neighbors. Contrary to popular discourse, they were not
seen as criminal or national security threats. Respondents and newspaper coverage depicted both communities as welcoming to immigrants and refugees. The influx of refugee culture and advent of refugee success through institutional means (entrepreneurialism) was perceived and portrayed as a good thing. Using criminological, urban sociology, immigration, and race and racism literature, I will unpack the disjunction between an anti-immigrant national climate and a pro-immigrant local climate and demonstrate the role instrumentality and isolation play in facilitating these perceptions and portrayals.

Overview of Chapters

In this dissertation, I present three empirical chapters. The first chapter highlights how respondents expressed positive sentiments when discussing immigrants. These positive sentiments are due to the social climate of the West Side and farm belt. I argue that these data provide evidence that threat perceptions will be salient at some times and under certain conditions and less salient in others. These positive appraisals suggest that criminalization and legal mobilization will be less salient when immigrant entrepreneurialism and labor are key to revitalization. Previous accounts have shown that criminalization and selective perception are the norm for non-whites in certain circumstances. However, contrary to the nativist tropes that immigrants bring disorder or social disorganization, immigrants on the West Side and in the Farm Belt brought collective efficacy and stability.

The second chapter addresses findings from my content analysis of The Buffalo News, Buffalo Rising, and Buffalo Spree. Immigrants are portrayed in a positive light as entrepreneurs trying to make it in America. Emphasis is on how they are living proof of the American Dream rather than how their success is influenced by the inside edge they receive from resettlement agencies and Westminster Economic Development Initiative (WEDI). Framing this assistance in
terms of entrepreneurialism and the American Dream rather than in terms of “handouts” is among the most striking of my findings. Instead of being framed as invaders as Massey (2010) and Chavez (2008) have found, immigrants are instead portrayed in the media for all of the good they are doing in Buffalo.

The third chapter addresses the challenges of interviewing in a post racial climate. People of color investigating racism and nativism may receive front stage answers rather than true assumptions about a particular group. In other words, White respondents may be less likely to be forthcoming to a person of color than a White interviewer may. Issues of social desirability can influence how honest White respondents are with non-white interviewers, particularly when it comes to issues of racism and nativism. Social desirability stems from an old-fashioned definition of racism that over emphasizes personal attributes and attitudes at the expense of background assumptions. While I do believe that positive perceptions and portrayals and welcoming climate were genuine, the false narratives about mobility are still problematic. This may lead to the idea that immigrants are achieving through their hard work alone, when in fact they might not have attained their success without the help of local organizations.
This page is intentionally left blank
CHAPTER 2

CONTINGENT THREAT: THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY FACTORS IN SHAPING PERCEPTIONS

by

Watoii Rabii

June 2018

A dissertation submitted to the

Faculty of the Graduate School of

the University at Buffalo, State University of New York

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Department of Sociology
CHAPTER 2
CONTINGENT THREAT: THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY FACTORS IN SHAPING PERCEPTIONS

Given this point, it is important to consider how community factors and the economic contributions of immigrants influence how they are perceived. Factors such as immigrant entrepreneurialism, ethnic enclaves and niches, and the necessity and instrumentality of immigrants to a community, can influence the salience of acceptance or animus toward immigrants. That is, the construction of immigrants as hardworking or lazy may vary depending on the location immigrants live in and the local conditions of that particular location. I ask: (1) What are the narratives about immigrants and refugees on the ground in rural and urban areas in Western New York? (2) How do these narratives contrast with those in local and national media?

The history of racism and nativism in the United States has been well documented by social scientists (Foner 2014; Golash Boza 2015; Takaki 2003). Historically there is a relationship between immigrants, perceived threat, policy preferences, and policies themselves. Prejudice, exclusionary immigration policies, and discrimination have been a part of the immigration experience for several generations of immigrants (Chavez 2008; Golash-Boza 2015; Massey, Durand and Malone 2003). This type of treatment is linked to perceptions of threat and criminality associated with immigrant groups. Scholars such as Russell-Brown (2010) and Alexander (2010) have noted how crime and deviance shape the meaning of race for immigrants and other minorities. Perceptions of these groups are closely associated with their assumed criminal propensity. In the post September 11th world, this has been especially pronounced for Latino and Muslim immigrants (Alsultany 2010; Chavez 2008; Love 2017). Undocumented immigration and terrorism are often associated with these groups, similar to the way crime is associated with African Americans.
These associations have implications for how they are perceived and treated. For example, hate crimes and harassment of Muslims increased immediately following the September 11\textsuperscript{th} and Paris attacks (Alsultany 2010). The notions that Mexican Americans are undocumented resulted in a series of laws passed in 1996 that sought to deprive even Mexican citizens of their rights. Criminologists and urban sociologists have documented the relationship between minority presence and policy and residential preferences. Findings indicate that the American public tends to support policies that are discriminatory, exclusionary, punitive, and restrictionist when immigrants and minorities are perceived as threats. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, Patriot Act of 2001, and, more recently, discussions about constructing a wall on the Mexican border are examples of this.

The current political climate has been contentious with regard to immigration. This animus has been directed primarily at Mexicans and Muslims. Policy preferences became more exclusionary and restrictionist as laws directed at Mexicans and Muslims became constructed as necessary to preserve national security (Asultany 2010).

**Current Issues of Immigration and Criminalization**

*Anti-Mexican Immigrant Sentiment*

This trend of criminalization, moral panics, policy preferences, and policy change would continue into the latter half of the twentieth century. With the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, quotas established by the Johnson Reed Act of 1924 were eliminated. However, the law did establish an upper limit of 20,000 persons per country Golash-Boza 2015; (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2003; Massey and Pren 2012). This law led to an increase in undocumented Mexicans crossing the U.S. border and altered the demographic profile of immigrants.
Today, most immigrants come from Latin American and Asian countries. Immigrants from Mexico, India, China, the Philippines, El Salvador, Vietnam, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, South Korea, and Guatemala make up 58 percent of the U.S. immigrant population (Migration Policy Institute 2018). All together immigrants make up about 13 percent of the U.S. population. Over time, this led to a proliferation of alarmist narratives that immigrants were invading the U.S., bringing with them a wave of crime and swallowing U.S. culture (Chavez 2008; Massey and Sanchez 2012). Public fear around immigration eventually culminated in a series of laws in the 1980s and 1990s. These laws were passed during the same time as drug laws that targeted African Americans. This “get tough” on crime, drugs, and immigration period is referred to as the punitive turn (Anderson 2014). Many states, especially those in the southwest, became increasingly unsettled by the increasing number of Mexicans in their communities (Johnson 2004).

By the 2000s, a considerable anti-immigration response had developed throughout the United States. In 2010, for example, Arizona passed S.B. 1070 (Magana and Lee 2013). Frustrated by perceived inaction and indifference on the part of the federal government, S.B. 1070, formally known as, “The Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act,” was enacted to address the issue of illegal immigration in Arizona. The law was signed by Arizona Governor Jan Brewer in April 2010 and it: (1) allowed police to use “reasonable suspicion” as a rationale for stopping suspected immigrants; (2) enabled police to inquire about the citizenship status of anyone who was stopped; and (3) made it illegal for immigrants to be in public without their formal immigration documents (Archibold 2010).

The goal of S.B. 1070 was to identify, prosecute, and deport undocumented immigrants (Archibold 2010). The New York Times described it as “the nation’s toughest bill on illegal
immigration” (Archibold 2010:1). The law uses “attrition through enforcement” which involves employer sanctions, recordkeeping, and increased coordination between state and federal governments (Campbell 2010:2). In addition to seeking out undocumented immigrants, it penalizes employers for hiring them. The law sparked public indignation and public praise. Supporters argue that it was necessary to curtail illegal immigration. Opponents argue that it criminalizes immigration while legalizing racial profiling.

Islamophobia

Although it would not reach its zenith until after the September 11\textsuperscript{th} attacks, Islamophobia has been a prominent feature of American life for many years. From early stereotypical portrayals as foreign or terrorists such as Melford’s, motion picture, \textit{The Sheikh}, to the “orientalism” of the early twentieth century, Muslims and Arabs have been “othered” and vilified in the media. Love (2017) notes that the tactics of the War on Terror date back to the Counterintelligence Program of the 1950s and 1960s.

Following the September 11\textsuperscript{th} attacks, Muslims were perceived as inherently violent and prone to terrorism. This belief led to an increase in criminalization of and hate crimes against Muslims as well as Sikhs who were perceived as Muslim. Hate crimes against these groups increased by 1,600 percent after the September 11\textsuperscript{th} attacks (Alsultany 2010). The FBI also reported a seventeen-fold increase in attacks against Muslims and those who appeared to be Muslim (Desmond and Emirbayer 2010). Muslim Americans also experienced harassment, excessive screening at airports, and vandalism (Asultany 2010).

Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans as well as Muslims and Muslim Americans have been profiled, criminalized, and discriminated against. These practices are often framed as unfortunate but rational, objective, neutral, and necessary (Desmond and Emirbayer 2010).
Asultany (2010) refers to this as ambivalent racism. This substitutes stereotypes for facts where the worst examples of a racial, ethnic, or religious group are used as proxies for group members creating dominant and controlling images (Collins 1999).

Sociology of Threat

In this chapter, I will explore the narratives about immigrants and refugees on the ground in rural and urban areas in Western New York. I will also ask how they diverge from the broader, national narrative about immigration? Narratives about immigration in general are oftentimes influenced by notions of threat. Dominant groups often feel threatened by minority groups (Allport 1954; Bobo 1983; Golash-Boza 2015). Sociologists have explained how groups respond to demographic change using the concept of group threat. Blumer (1958) contended that prejudice stemmed from dominant groups’ desires to maintain their positions. Bobo (1983) found that perceptions of threat stem from a fear of losing their privileges and lifestyles. Bobo and Hutchings (1996) test four theories of group threat: (1) simple self-interest, (2) racial prejudice, (3) stratification beliefs, and (4) group position. They find the strongest support for racial alienation: if members of a group perceive that their group is receiving unfair treatment, they are more likely to see others as threats.

Esses (1988) introduced an instrumental model of group conflict. In this perspective resource stress and potential threats from another group lead to perceptions of threat followed by attempts to eliminate the perceived threat. Paxton and Mughan (2006) argue that anti-immigrant rhetoric and threat are tied to perceptions that immigrants are unable to assimilate. Kunovich (2013) demonstrates that labor market competition predicts threat perceptions. These perceptions are most salient in occupations that require less formal education and experience.
Group threat not only influences individuals’ perceptions of immigrants and other minorities but also their policy preferences. Individuals that experience group threat tend to favor policies that are punitive toward immigrants and deny them social services. For instance, research shows that feelings of threat are associated with support for increased police size, police brutality, and animus toward Latinos (Eitle and Monahan 2009; Jacobs and O’Brien 1998; Kane et al. 2013; Smith and Holmes 2014; Stults and Baumer 2007).

King and Wheelock (2007) find that respondents who viewed African Americans as criminals who drain resources are more likely to support punitive policies. Berg (2012) argues that symbolic racism influences individuals’ positions on immigration and access to benefits. Wu and D’Angelo (2014) demonstrate that the size of a foreign-born population has positive effects on harsher judicial decisions. In other words, locales with higher immigrant populations tend to impose harsher criminal penalties on the foreign-born.

Chiricos et al. (2014) argue that support for border control is stronger in communities with a higher percentage of Latinos. Picket (2016) finds those who favor anti-immigration laws and a reduction in immigration tend to perceive Latinos as a threat. Andrews and Seguin (2015) contend that threat is spatial; specifically, there is a relationship between the population density of a group that feels threatened and their proximity to other groups perceived as threats. Their results demonstrate that policy change occurs when a group has power and that threat is a significant aspect resulting in policy change.

Nonetheless, there is evidence that increased contact between racial and ethnic groups reduces feelings of threat (Allport 1954). Thus, contact theory posits that increased contact between groups reduces prejudice. Allport argues that increased contact can decrease feelings of prejudice. These results continue to find empirical support. Knowledge, association, and contact
are the linchpins of this theory (Dixon and Rosenbaum 2004; Pettigrew 1988; Powers and Ellison, 1995; Sigelman and Welch, 1993; Welch and Sigelman, 2000:).

Clearly, there has been much research on group threat and contact. However, there is more to know especially during this time of renewed anti-immigration rhetoric. In this research, I examine how community factors influence the salience of threat. Specifically, in this analysis I explore how whites’ perceptions vary depending on how useful and isolated immigrants remain. By focusing on how immigrants are perceived in their communities, this research sheds light on the important role community factors such as immigrant entrepreneurialism, ethnic enclaves and niches, and necessity and instrumentality play in shaping the salience of criminal threat.

The Current Study

In this research, I investigate perceptions of immigrants among native-born whites in rural and urban communities. More specifically, I use interview data from 48 whites to understand the narratives about Mexican and Muslim immigrants in rural and urban communities.

The research contributes to the growing literature on nativism and criminal threat in several ways. First, I add nuance to the understanding of immigrant attitudes among the native born by investigating how community and economic factors such as dependence on immigrants influence perceptions of threat. Second, I complicate the narrative of Color Conscious and Color Blindness by demonstrating how instrumentality and isolation of immigrant communities may play a role in perceptions of immigrants. Third, I demonstrate how notions of revitalization and the American Dream can alter the narrative regarding immigrant criminality. This research is important because negative perceptions of minority groups often translate into policy
preferences, which in turn translate into policies that are discriminatory, exclusionary, punitive, and restrictionist.

Data and Methods

The data for this article come from 48 in-depth interviews I conducted with community members across two locations in Western New York: the West Side neighborhood in Buffalo, New York, and the Farm Belt of Western New York between Buffalo and Rochester, New York. I gained entrée into these communities through a combination of personal and institutional contacts (Massey and Sanchez 2010). I used a snowball sample in both locations to obtain participants. I was able to develop rapport with some of the farmers and factory workers in this community and they introduced me to other respondents. Due to the nature of this sample, I acknowledge that there are issues with selection bias. For example, those with similar perceptions of immigrants may be overrepresented in my sample.

On the West Side of Buffalo, I interviewed twenty white respondents. They ranged in age from 18 to 55; most were middle- or working-class in terms of socioeconomic status. Based on 2010 data, Buffalo has a total population of 261,310 with about half identifying as white; about 37% of the population identifies as African American, almost 11% as Latino or Hispanic, and 4% as Asian. The neighborhood referred to as the West Side was once a burgeoning area but experienced decline in the wake of deindustrialization. This area originally had a large Polish and Italian population. However, immigrants that succeeded these groups came from Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern countries. The lower part of the West Side was predominantly Italian. However, in recent years Puerto Rican and other Latin American immigrants have become the predominant ethnic groups (Chan 2009; American Communities Survey 2010).
In the Farm Belt, I interviewed twenty-eight white respondents. They ranged in age from 18 to 55 and they either worked on farms or formerly worked on farms, or were former factory workers. They identified as working- and middle-class. The Farm Belt of Western New York consists of northern counties stretching from the Buffalo area to the Rochester area. These counties are Niagara and Orleans counties. It is primarily an agricultural area and was once an industrial and agricultural center. However, in the wake of deindustrialization, factories also left which left many original family farms waning (Goldman 1990; Goldman 2006).

Respondents came from the towns of Lockport, Gasport, and Albion. Lockport and Gasport are located in Niagara County and Albion is located Orleans County. Lockport has a total population of 20,304 with about 90% of the population identifying as white and about 5% identifying as African American. About 2% of the population identifies as Asian and almost 4% identifies as Latino or Hispanic. Gasport has a total population of 1,248. 98% identify as white and 1% as African American; about 10.3% identify as Latino or Hispanic. Albion has a total population of 6,056 with around 80% identifying as white, 13% as African American, 1% as Latino or Hispanic, and less than 1% as Asian (American Communities Survey 2010).

These locations were ideal for studying immigration for the following reasons. First, they have long and rich immigration histories. Second, the Farm Belt has become more politically conservative since Barack Obama was re-elected (Donald Trump won by a large majority in both counties). Finally, the West Side has recently seen an influx in refugees during a time of high anti-refugee sentiment.

During interviews, I asked respondents about their feelings toward immigrants, their views on population change, and the meaning of these changes for their families and communities. I collected data in two locations to examine if there were differences in
immigrants’ reception. These data provide an in-depth picture of individuals’ feelings about immigrants and the predominant discourses about immigrants.

The goals of these interviews were twofold: (1) to gain insight into how native-born whites in both communities think about immigrants, and (2) to better understand the complexity of community discourses about immigrants during times of anti-immigrant sentiment. The following section presents results from my interview data. Residents in both communities evaluated immigrants positively as hard workers, entrepreneurs, and good neighbors. Their framing of immigrants in these terms diverges greatly from national discourses about the inherent criminality of immigrants and the need to profile and ban them. I unpack this disjunction in the following section.

My sense is that although there might have been some social desirability in these data, respondents were honest about their feelings. Changes in racial attitudes do not automatically mean that people will manage impressions. However, they may lead to respondents being unaware of their unconscious biases and develop problematic ideas about the social mobility of immigrants and minorities writ large. Being that principled racism is deviant, respondents may have expressed anti-racism to avoid being labeled deviant. However, respondents also may have been hesitant to express reservations about immigrants in front of a non-white interviewee. Research shows that impression management and interviewer effects can influence respondent’s answers to interview questions.

**Results**

The illustrative data presented in this chapter explore urban and rural residents’ perceptions of migrant workers and refugees in their communities. Specifically, I ask whites in the Farm Belt about their perceptions of Mexican migrant workers and whites in the West Side
about their perceptions of Muslim refugees. In lieu of criminal threat perceptions, positive appraisals were common. They also evaluated their own and their community’s perceptions as positive and antiracist. Interviewees also emphasized the importance of immigrants to the region.

Instrumentality and necessity were two frequent themes in interviews. Respondents in the Farm Belt noted they were dependent on immigrants for their labor and, on the West Side, they noted that immigrants were revitalizing the neighborhood through their entrepreneurialism. In the Farm Belt, for instance, farmers are dependent on migrant labor to sustain their livelihood. On the West Side, refugees in Buffalo boosted an economically depressed region through entrepreneurialism; immigrants have slowly been repopulating the region, purchasing homes, and starting businesses. This has helped to revitalize a previously blighted neighborhood. Because both regions relied on immigrants, there were conditions of non-zero sum mobility (Alba 2009). This means that because immigrant entrepreneurialism and labor occur in enclaves they are not competitive with whites. When whites do not perceive a threat to their privilege, they are less likely to see the foreign born and non-whites as threats. It is also possible that there is an implicit comparison being made between the immigrants in their communities and other minority groups.

Most surprising about these positive perceptions is where they emerged. There is a wealth of evidence in the literature on race and immigration demonstrating that there are high incidences of prejudice in declining agricultural and in Rust Belt communities. Researchers find that these negative perceptions are associated with perceptions of economic competition and threat (Fennelly and Federico 2008; Garcia and Davidson 2013). The regions I studied are examples of such regions, yet respondents were primarily positive in their assessments of immigrant
populations. Their responses revolved around three key themes: (1) laborers, entrepreneurs, and good neighbors (2) “everybody’s welcome,” and (3) salience of criminal and homeland security threat. About 60% of quotations referenced immigrants in positive ways, 55% of quotations framed the community as welcoming, and 66% of quotes stated that they did not see immigrants as threats. In this section I attempt to explain how best to make sense of these positive perceptions in a nationally anti-immigrant/anti-Muslim climate. In other words, I unpack the disjunction between a politically anti-immigrant / anti-Muslim climate and a locally pro-immigrant climate.

Laborers, Entrepreneurs, and Good Neighbors

“They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.” - Donald Trump

By Katie Reily, *Time Magazine* 2016

“I think Islam hates us. There’s something there that — there’s a tremendous hatred there. There’s a tremendous hatred. We have to get to the bottom of it. There’s an unbelievable hatred of us.” – Donald Trump

By Jenna Johnson and Abigail Hauslohner, *The Washington Post* 2017

These quotes illustrate anti-immigrant rhetoric. Scholars such as Lee (2002) have noted the similarities between contemporary discourses about immigrants and those used to justify Chinese exclusion and Japanese internment. Like Chinese and Japanese immigrants in the 19th and 20th centuries, Mexican and Muslim immigrants are currently treated like folk devils (Cohen 1972). They are presumed to be undocumented migrants.

In previous and current debates about immigration, profiling and discrimination have been seen as unavoidable and justified by immigrants’ inherent characteristics. However, perceived criminal threats regarding immigration are never justified by data. I expected to find
similar themes in my research; however, respondents in this study praised migrant workers and refugees for their work ethic and entrepreneurialism. For example, Joe, a white farmer in his 30s from the Farm Belt says, “In our situation, great, hard workers all around, never – yeah, I don’t have any complaints about that.”

Joe expresses a common sentiment among respondents in the Farm Belt: immigrants are hardworking. This is in contrast to the trope that Mexican immigrants are lazy, criminals, or undocumented. Immigrants were seen as achieving the American Dream through their labor or entrepreneurialism. For example, Jane, a white woman in her 20s on the West Side states,

I think they’re seen to be as this contributor to the revitalization in particular, because so many of the new businesses are owned by people of the many different places. There’s a general appreciation for the economic revitalization of the area. I think they’re seen to be this contributor to revitalization.

Immigrants are seen as being part of the West Side’s come back. This may play a role in the positive reception even in the midst of an anti-immigrant climate. Historically immigrants have been perceived as economic threats that steal jobs. However, in this context they are seen as contributing economically to the neighborhood.

Another theme that emerged in my interviews was the idea that immigrants were good neighbors. For example, Amy, a white shop owner on the West Side in her 50s says, I mean they’re very respectful, respectable people. I don’t know their cultures directly. But I would imagine its family first.

Margaret, a white estate salesperson and ordained deacon on the West Side in her 50s also told me:
They have always been very courteous, and appreciative. During August, September, and October, the parish has -- a couple of times a month, we open the church so that they can have a dental clinic there. And the people are just -- they’re thankful to have a place to go, and they’re very thankful for the things that we give them. In fact, I think sometimes they feel almost overwhelmed with the help that they receive, and are always courteous, and grateful, and helpful.

Courteous, appreciative, and respectful were prominent themes in other interviews as well. This notion is particularly interesting for the West Side where immigrants have demographically changed the neighborhood. Other places have framed immigration as an invasion (Chavez 2008; Massey 2003). There may be an implicit comparison to other minority groups in the area. In other words, their positive appraisals of immigrants in both locales may be reflections of anti-African American and Latino sentiment. In other words, refugees and immigrants might be associated with collective efficacy, while African Americans and Latinos are associated with social disorganization. However, here emphasis is not placed on invasion but on how immigration is a force of revitalization. It is also possible that there were implicit comparisons to African Americans and Latinos.

Everybody’s Welcome

In addition to positive comments about immigrants, participants also expressed the sentiment that their communities were welcoming to immigrants. They claimed that there was little or no prejudice where they lived. Despite national discourses about the criminal threat and national security risks immigrants and refugees pose, respondents described their communities as accepting of immigrants. Allen, for example, a white man in his 30s who lives on the West Side
says, “From what I’ve seen, it’s just been total embrace, everyone is very happy with immigrants and recognize the benefits that they’ve had. There are of course a few ignorant apples around.”

Respondents claimed that acceptance and tolerance are the norm in their communities and if nativism is expressed, it is by a small number of people. They attributed prejudice and criminal threat perceptions to “those racists” (DiTomaso 2011). That is, objections to the presence of immigrants came from bigots. However, they suggested that these types of people did not live in their communities. For example, Paul, a young white man in his 20s from the West Side says:

I think everyone perceives them pretty well. It’s funny cause there’s a lot of people with a lot of political persuasions on the West Side. The older Italian group tends to skew Republican, tend to be Donald Trump supporters but even they will be supportive of refugees on the West Side because they’re their neighbors, they actually know them.

James, a white man in his late 30s from the Farm Belt also suggests that residents do not have any problem with immigrants. He states, “I mean my perception as far as what I've seen, we've been around them and you know, we live out this way, really not a bad thing. You know, I can't speak outside of my small [little sect].”

Nativist discourses regarding immigration involve the attribution of negative characteristics and labels to immigrant groups. Some of these labels include “lazy,” “freeloading,” “job stealing,” and “radical.” However, respondents in this study addressed how immigrants were received well. Michael, a white social work assistant from the Farm Belt in his 50s notes,
I believe there’s more awareness of that, and more people putting out effort to contribute to, or be a part of helping those in need including the migrant workers, as opposed to “Yes, get them out of here,” around here, it’s we need them, and they’re -- we'll do what we can to help them.

In addition to positive appraisals, participants also acknowledged the existence of racism, nativism, xenophobia, and perceptions of criminal threat. Rather than deny their existence, respondents acknowledged the existence of these attitudes but claimed that within their communities such perspectives do not exist. Respondents claimed that generally, people are not like that anymore, but people who may view immigrants unfavorably are not in their community. For example, Lisa, a white woman in her early 30s who lives on the West Side told me:

You know, I think that there’s, I don’t really hear anything negative, now that I’m reflecting. Yeah I think that anything negative I’ve heard about the West Side, I’ve never heard about the immigrant population.

Luke, a 40 year old white man from the Farm Belt told me:

And I think that's where I learned to accept everyone, because my dad never had a problem with anybody. We had -- on one side we had Spanish people, and on the other side, we had African Americans. So, there was never -- no signs from my dad that anything was wrong with that, so -- and it was kind of passed onto me, you know, they're just people living over there, they're no different than the other trying to work and make a living and doing the best they can.

An “us versus them” dichotomy was used by respondents to distance themselves from anti-immigrant rhetoric and prejudice. A prominent theme was that they did not consider themselves
racist but they did consider others racist and anti-immigrant. In the cases where they did admit there was nativism, they were sure to be critical of it as well. This suggests that perceptions of criminal threat are not always salient aspects of communities with immigrant populations.

Salience of Criminal and Homeland Security Threat

Respondents did not see immigrants as national security threats and did not prescribe to punitive policies toward immigrants. Some were even critical of anti-immigrant rhetoric. In addition to stating that there was no racism in their communities, some were also critical of the existence of racism. Respondents acknowledged the presence of anti-immigrant sentiment and racism but it was usually attributed to other regions and other people. For example, Kevin, a white man in his 50s who lives in the Farm Belt, notes:

We’re idiots -- because that's what we would be. Immigration -- you look at the history of this country, and the history of the immigration; every people that came here have been abused, have been labeled, but every time we've always done better. It’s always worked out to our advantage. That's why Toronto, in Canada, has become -- because they’re open to immigration, it’s a more diverse city, it makes them better, it actually makes -- they get more -- people don’t come here because it's a wonderful, wonderful world. They come here because where they’re at sucks. This is a little bit better and they can make it, at least make something, and send it. They can provide.

In other locations, the anti-immigrant sentiment Kevin is critical of may be framed as rational, justified, and in the interest of national security. For example, in Arizona and Alabama laws were passed that discriminated against immigrants of Latino and Muslim descent. These immigrants were seen as occupational, cultural, and criminal threats, but not in the communities I studied.
Charles, a 42 year old white man from the Farm Belt also says:

And I have not seen that. I am not naïve to say that it couldn't exist, but I would tend to believe that would be rare, and hardly ever seen, rare at best. Because I have been -- I don't know, like I said, they are right by my house, they will have yard sales, and will sometimes have a whole busload come up, 15, 20, or more people come up. I never had any problems, not looking to. As a matter of fact, it’s the opposite. My wife fully understands, and realizes the nature of, you know, what their situations are. And we often times, you know, will have a little pile of things that are free gifts for little kids, toys to play with, and we'll end up giving them.”

In addition to stating that there was no racism in their communities, some were also critical of the existence of racism. Respondents acknowledged the presence of anti-immigrant sentiment and racism but it was usually attributed to other regions and other people. In other locations, it may be framed as rational, justified, and in the interest of national security.

Martin, for example, a white bookshop owner in his 40s who lives on the West Side states:

I think anyone who’s moving into this neighborhood or living here long term has bought into the idea that refugees are good for the neighborhood and I’d imagine if you didn’t feel that way you’d choose somewhere else.

Nick, a white former dairy farmer in his 40s who lives in the Farm Belt told me:

I don't see too much -- I mean everyone pretty much just accepts them from what I see. I'm sure there are some people sputtering in the background. But from my view, I'm not seeing too much concern or anything.
Later in the interview, he told me:

On occasion, I hear folks not feeling so kindly toward them, because they are maybe transient in nature, or they do not feel they may need the help that they’re given. But, for me, the majority of the people that I have contact with, seem to find that they are very hard-working people. And it’s necessary for them to do what they do, and it’s helpful for us because of the kind of work they do.

Although these respondents perceived immigrants in a positive light and did not seem threatened, the data do not suggest that the U.S. is post-racial or that racism, nativism, and xenophobia are myths from the past. The data demonstrate that under certain conditions, in certain communities, criminal threat perceptions and narratives may be less salient. In the cases of the West Side and Farm Belt, perceptions revolved around immigrants’ contributions to communities rather than to economic and criminal threats or they posed or an inordinate amount of public assistance. This framing diverges from national debates about national security and criminal threat.

Researchers have found that symbolic racism, labor market competition, high levels of foreign-born population, and population density all influence the salience of threat (Andrews and Seguin 2015; Berg 2012; Kunovich 2013; Wu and D’Angelo 2014). Increases in perceived threat and threat narratives are followed by support for more punitive policies against immigrants (King and Wheelock 2007; Pickett 2016; Stewart et al. 2015; Wu and D’Angelo 2014).

However, among my respondents, they expressed positive sentiments about immigrants. Why is it that there is a lack of “moral panic” among my respondents? Why is it that in regions where immigrant threat is expected we find an embrace of these migrants? In addition to the positive perceptions of immigrants, there were also themes of isolation and instrumentality.
Joe, a white male from the Farm Belt in his 40s states:

I mean where I live, it's a pretty good mix. I mean a lot of people are very welcoming, because it is a very rural community. So, a lot of people are farmers, and they employ migrant workers. So, they're very welcoming. I mean they're a big part of the employment. So, I think it's pretty mixed. I mean I think there are some people that are sometimes pretty ignorant. But, for the most part, I think that -- like especially in my community, they're pretty much accepted.

Joe is critical of anti-immigrant sentiment. However, this quote also points to the very important theme of instrumentality. The region is dependent on migrant labor. Jim, a farmer in the Farm Belt in his 30s similarly states, “Oh, we couldn’t operate without them.”

This notion was expressed by several other respondents. In addition to instrumentality, the theme of isolation was also prominent. That is, immigrants kept to themselves or were transient. For example, Joe, a maintenance worker in his 50s stated:

I don't think there's so much a concern with the migrant workers, because they know they're coming and they're leaving......They're doing what man's done forever, provide for the family. That's all they're doing.

Mark, a former factory worker in his 40s states, “You might see them at [the local grocery store] on weekends cashing checks and stuff, but overall you don't see them much out in public.”

In sum, the reason immigrants are not perceived as criminal and national security threats is their labor and entrepreneurialism makes them useful. They also remain isolated in both communities. This creates conditions of non-zero sum mobility where their success does not come at the expense of whites.
Discussion

There is a voluminous literature on the relationship between anti-immigrant sentiment and moral panics. There have been several anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim campaigns because immigrants have been perceived as threats. Such moral panics have resurged since Donald Trump’s campaign and presidency. However, in the locales I studied, rhetoric was positive. In this chapter, I suggest that the positive comments my respondents expressed were the result of instrumentality and isolation, which created conditions of non-zero sum mobility.

Migrant workers and refugees are essential to economic stability and improvement in the two communities in which I conducted research. In the Farm Belt of Western New York, agriculture is important to the region. Migrant workers are instrumental because farms are dependent on their labor. In the case of migrant workers, the need for pickers may mitigate the threat narrative that is otherwise present when referencing immigrant workers. In the case of Buffalo’s West Side, the predominantly Islamophobic threat narrative was less salient because refugees are instrumental in the neighborhood’s revival. The refugee population has been credited with the revitalization of the West Side. The executive director of an organization that assists refugees in Buffalo said, “If it weren’t for refugees, Buffalo would be shrinking even faster. This is the incoming population” (Warner 2009:1).

Even without referencing typical anti-immigrant rhetoric, my respondents told me quite a bit about criminalization and racial ideology in an era of professed Color Blindness. These findings suggest that positive appraisals expressed in interviews cannot be equated with the absence of criminal threat. However, feelings about – and expressions of – criminal threat can become less salient when economic factors create conditions of zero sum mobility and the immigrant population remains relatively isolated. This research has demonstrated that certain
community conditions may mitigate perceptions of immigrants as criminals and national security threats.

This research has attempted to reconcile the overwhelmingly positive appraisals of immigrants by whites in their communities with the larger national discourse of immigrants as criminal threats. Why is it that whites’ perceptions diverged so far from narratives that favor building a wall and having an immigration ban? The disjuncture between the perceptions expressed in the interviews in this paper and the larger national sentiment can be explained by factors that create the perfect storm of conditions that lead to non zero sum mobility. When there is non zero sum mobility, criminal threat is less salient. He contends that over time immigrant mobility will not interfere with white privilege. This will result in whites not perceiving minorities and immigrants as threats. This research may have implications for other Rustbelt and rural communities in which there is a heavy immigrant presence that is associated with revitalization and labor.

The two social settings my respondents live in are akin to what Anderson (2011) calls “cosmopolitan canopies.” These are ethnically heterogeneous spaces where civil and ethnic barriers are less salient. When immigrants are closed off to niches and jobs that serve and employ members of the dominant group, criminal threat narratives are mitigated and less salient. Niches act as another form of what Wacquant (2008; 2012) calls “ethnoracial closure,” where minority groups are bounded and excluded from dominant groups. As long as migrants and refugees are not seen as competitors – and as long as they keep they social distance – threat is mitigated and not as salient.

In this research, I show that when immigrants are seen as contributing, and not as economic competitors, they are less likely to be seen as threats more generally. In other words,
they are not encroaching on white privilege. Thus, threat is not salient in these contexts. My research does not deny nativism and Islamophobia as issues, but the data contribute complexity to the discussions about them. Perhaps Alba (2009) is correct: He predicts that when minority groups are not seen as threats – and when there is an atmosphere of non-zero sum mobility – there may be broad, long-term assimilation and adaptation in the United States. The occupational and entrepreneurial niches occupied by immigrants in both of my settings in this research are essential for the survival of both locales. The white residents I interviewed seem to have figured that out.
CHAPTER 3
“MORAL ENTREPRENEURS”: CULTURE, CRIME, AND WORK
ON BUFFALO’S WEST SIDE

by

Watoii Rabii

June 2018

A dissertation submitted to the

Faculty of the Graduate School of

the University at Buffalo, State University of New York

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Department of Sociology
CHAPTER 3:
“MORAL ENTREPRENEURS”: CULTURE, CRIME, AND WORK ON BUFFALO’S WEST SIDE

Culture, crime, and work have often been the fault lines along which ethnoracial difference is constructed (Chavez 2008; Golash-Boza 2015; Paxton and Mughan 2006; Takaki 2008). Fear that immigrants and minorities would change the cultural landscape, commit crimes, and steal jobs have created moral panics (Foner 2014; Golash-Boza 2015; Schramm and Tibbetts 2014; Takaki 2008). The consequences of these moral panics have been devastating for migrants and all people of color (Golash-Boza 2015; Healey and O’Brien 2015; Lee 2002; Lindsay 1998; Spiro 2009). Deportation, Jim Crow, repatriation, mass incarceration, internment, sterilization, exclusionary immigration policies, scapegoating, and genocide are a few examples of how whites have responded to perceptions of cultural, criminal, and occupational threat (Brodkin 1998; Franklin and Moss 2000; Hing 1993; Ngai 2004 Pfeiffer 2006).

In addition, to being perceived as threats, immigrants and minorities have also been portrayed negatively in media. Both visual and print media have made caricatures of these groups and discussed their potential threats at length. Books such as Passing of the Great Race, Criminal Man, and In Our Country: Its Possible Future and Present Crisis all sounded the alarm of racial threat, while movies like The Sheikh, Birth of a Nation, and Broncho Billy and the Greaser presented these groups in stereotypical fashions.

Today, refugees and immigrants, in particular, are depicted as national security concerns and social problems with headlines such as:

“Arrests of immigrants without criminal records triple in New England under Trump” (Bleiberg 2017).
“Government says Mexico border wall prototypes complete” (Guild 2017).

“Trump alarms lawmakers with disparaging words for Haiti and Africa” (Davis, Stolberg and Kaplan 2018).

These headlines are evidence of a “gatekeeping ideology” (Lee 2002). Lee argues that this ideology was created prior to and during Chinese exclusion by whites who believed that Chinese immigrants would steal their jobs. She states:

“... it is my argument, however, that Chinese exclusion also introduced a ‘gatekeeping’ ideology, politics, law, and culture that transformed the ways in which Americans viewed and thought about race, immigration, and the United States’ identity as a nation of immigration” (Lee 2002: 37).

Whites compared Chinese immigrants to Mexicans, Native Americans, and African Americans and stated they were a threat to the racial stock (Hing 1993; Lee 2002; Takaki 2008). These examples set a precedent for immigrant desirability and exclusion that was used against Asian immigrants, Southern and Central European immigrants, and Mexican immigrants from the late 19th century to present day. In the contemporary period, anti-Latino sentiment is known as the “Latino threat narrative” (Chavez 2008).

In spite of these negative portrayals at the national level – and in particular localities such as Arizona and California (Jacobson 2004) – there are also positive discourses about refugees and immigrants. In Buffalo, New York, refugees are often constructed as entrepreneurs and good neighbors accomplishing the “American Dream.” Coverage about them include headlines such as:

“Burmese find home in Buffalo: Refugees chase American dream on city’s West Side” (Warner 2009).
“Immigrants fuel growth in county’s population; Large refugee influx leads to first increase since 1960s” (Zremski 2015).

“Immigrant homeowners key to revival” (Esmonde 2011).

Refugees are also credited with bringing cultural diversity into the city, especially on Buffalo’s West Side. This more positive framing diverges greatly from the typical alarmist portrayals. This peculiar disjuncture between national and local coverage led me to investigate why they diverge so greatly.

The rhetoric about meritocracy, individualism, and work ethic have combined to create an ideology in the Buffalo community where (1) culture and entrepreneurialism are not framed as invasions and (2) refugees and other migrants are viewed as conformist entrepreneurs achieving success through legitimate means. The portrayals of refugees in these media resonate with the cultural goals of aspiration, success, and value foundations of the American Dream. The foundations of the American Dream have been identified by criminologists and other social scientists (Merton 1938; Messner and Rosenfield 2007) as including the ideals of achievement, individualism, universalism, and the fetishism of money. Typically, these foundations are used to explain an anomic cultural environment conducive to crime. However, in this analysis I use them to understand how refugee entrepreneurialism and cultural diversity are framed in positive ways. Talking about refugees and immigrants in this fashion has led to model minority framing around these groups.

The articles I reviewed in the Buffalo News, Buffalo Spree, and Buffalo Rising discuss the proliferation of immigrant entrepreneurship, homeownership, and repopulation. Immigrants and refugees are seen as people accomplishing the American Dream, rather than as criminal threats. The framing of traditionally stigmatized immigrants as “model minorities” can be used to
support the notion that structural disadvantage does not exist (Chou and Feagin 2008). Moreover, framing assistance from community aid groups as entrepreneurialistic and aiding in the American Dream rather than as handouts and job stealing is among the most striking of my findings. Instead of being framed as invaders as Massey (2010) and Chavez (2008) have found, the immigrants and refugees in Buffalo are portrayed as “doing their part” to save the community. Thus, in this chapter, I ask (1) How are refugees portrayed in the local media? and (2) Why do these portrayals diverge from other national discourses about refugees and migrants? I find that refugees are becoming Buffalo’s new model minority whose cultural diversity and economic activity are seen as contributions not attacks. In the following literature review I will explore how racial stereotypes are perpetuated in the media, the model minority myth, color blind racism, and anomie strain theory. I use these four literatures to understand how the portrayal of immigrants as model minorities and conformist entrepreneurs diverges from historical and contemporary criminal portrayals.

**Literature Review**

*Racial Stereotypes in the Media*

From newspapers’ coverage of non-whites in the early 20th century to today, there is a long history of negative portrayals of minority groups in the United States. Moreover, today, minority groups are underrepresented in a variety of media types and are often misrepresented (Golash-Boza 2015). Although there are some positive portrayals, especially of celebrities such as Michael Jordan and Oprah Winfrey, these are exceptions to the rule (Golash-Boza 2015).

Minstrelsy is one of the earliest negative portrayals of non-whites. Celebrities like Eddie Cantor and Al Jolson would paint their faces black in order to portray African Americans in a negative light (Mancuso 1996). The “Amos ‘n’ Andy” Show was another well-known example.
In this show, African Americans were portrayed as being lazy and unintelligent (Golash-Boza 2015).

Since the Civil Rights Movement, there have been more positive portrayals of non-whites. One frequently used example is the Cosby Show. However, scholars argue that positive portrayals such as the “Cosby Show” have led to “Enlightened Racism” (Jhally and Lewis 1992). The Cosby Show and others like it have enabled whites to reject contemporary racism and claim that racial inequalities are due to individual weaknesses; if someone does not succeed then it is simply due to his or her lack of effort and hard work. In other words, racism and structural inequality no longer exist and everyone has the same life chances regardless of race (DiTomaso 2011; Feagin and O’Brien 2011).

The trend of misrepresentation is also prominent in the representation of Latin Americans and Arab Americans in the media. Latino men are often portrayed as gangsters, drug traffickers, and janitors while Arab Americans are portrayed as foreigners and terrorists (Golash-Boza 2015). Alsultaney (2010) showed that the media portrays Arab men in stereotypical ways and that some believed profiling and discrimination against Arabs and Arab Americans is unavoidable. Native Americans are also portrayed narrowly either as savages who rape white women or as wise men (Bird 1999; Kopacz and Lawton 2011; White 2012).

Wise (2011) argues that non-whites experience the burden of representation. He means that the negative attributes of an individual will be attributed to his or her race as inherent and essential. Wise contends that part of white privilege is that whites experience a variety of portrayals in the media. Because of this, they do not have to worry that negative acts and representations of a few will be attributed to their race as a whole. In sum, diverse representation is an important part of white privilege.
These misrepresentations not only perpetuate racism and nativism, but colorism as well; dark skin has been portrayed as undesirable. Glenn (2009) discusses the mass marketing of lightness as desirable and darkness as undesirable through the proliferation of skin lighteners. Some advertisements show dark-skinned individuals washing away their darkness. Even within racial groups, those with lighter skin are also portrayed as being more beautiful (Hunter 2005). These campaigns that implicitly portray light skin as good and dark skin as undesirable are also prevalent in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Golash-Boza 2015; Nakano Glenn 2009; Rondilla and Spickard 2007; Sarswati 2012; Stephens and Fernandez 2010). These scholars demonstrate that how racial groups are portrayed in the media is a key method for spreading racial ideology (Golash-Boza 2015).

**Model Minority Myth**

The model minority myth became prominent during the 1960s as a result of the educational and occupational attainment of Asian Americans (Chou and Feagin 2008; Golash-Boza 2015). Commentators used Asian immigrants’ success to argue that racial inequality was ending and that any failures on the part of individuals could be explained by cultural and individual deficits. Many scholars, however, have shown that contrary to the model minority – particularly as it relates to Asian immigrants – there is great heterogeneity and inequality even among Asians (Carter 2003; Ferguson 2001; Pager, Bonikowski, and Western 2009; Wilson 1996).

The model minority myth hinges on cultural explanations for the attainment of cultural and economic goals. This has led to the false assumption that Asian Americans do not experience educational and labor market discrimination. The myth suggests that Asian Americans have made it and other minority groups have not (Chou and Feagin 2008; Wing 2007). Scholars have argued, though, that this oversimplifies Asian American success and minimizes their struggles.
(Museus and Kiang 2009; Ngo and Lee 2007). For example, on average, Hmong, Laotian, and Cambodian adults do not have as high educational or occupational attainment as their other East Asian counterparts (Museus and Kiang 2009).

Similar to research on education, occupational data by national origin show more complexity across Asian groups. Kim and Sakamoto (2010) found, for instance, that Asian American men have an 8 percent earning disadvantage compared to white men. Higher educational levels explain these disparities (Wang 2008). The myth illustrates how educational and occupational gains of Asian Americans have been misinterpreted and used to buttress meritocratic arguments.

Similar processes may be taking place with regard to refugees and immigrants on Buffalo’s West Side. In this case, as I present below, refugees and immigrants are portrayed as achieving success through hard work. This is not to say that the immigrants and refugees on the West Side are doing anything wrong collectively. Rather, the coverage misses the point that without the assistance they receive, their hard work alone may not have been enough in the context of structural inequality. This overshadows the real complexity among refugees and immigrants themselves and the experiences of long-time residents – many of whom are African American and Latino – who have had to persevere through structural disadvantage.

Anomie-Strain Theory

Anomie Strain Theory places emphasis on the use of institutional means to attain cultural goals. The immigrants in this study are credited for using institutional means (entrepreneurialism) to achieve the American Dream. Robert Merton (1938) pioneered “Anomie-Strain Theory.” Merton argues that a disjuncture between cultural goals of material success and the distribution of legal means cause crime. Because society is stratified, there will be differential
access to social capital, financial capital, and opportunities. Those who do not have access to legal means may innovate or find criminal, deviant ways to attain the goal of material success. In addition to innovation, Merton lists four other adaptations: conformity, ritualism, rebellion, and retreatism.

Merton’s work has been extended and reformulated (Agnew 1992; Cloward and Ohlin 1966; Cohen 1955). One of the most significant examples is Messner and Rosenfield’s (2007) “Institutional Anomie Theory.” According to Messner and Rosenfield (2007), the value foundations of the American dream include achievement orientation, individualism, universalism, and the fetishism of money. Messner and Rosenfield argue that these value foundations combine with an institutional imbalance of power to create an environment suitable to crime. This imbalance of power occurs because of the dominance of the economy over other institutions such as marriage, education, politics, and family. These institutions are forced to accommodate the needs and drives of the economy (Messner and Rosenfield 2007).

Large-scale inequality makes U.S. cities good examples of institutional anomie theory; they are ripe with inequity. Like other Rustbelt cities, Buffalo experienced severe economic decline in the wake of deindustrialization (Goldman 1990; Wilson 1987; Wilson 1996). The exodus of Bethlehem Steel and other factories left Buffalo economically deprived. Hyper-segregation and social disorganization were exacerbated by the disappearance of work (Wilson 1996). The loss of employment caused a mass exodus of people from Buffalo. This led to massive depopulation of some of its neighborhoods. The West Side in particular fell prey to social disorganization and was synonymous with slumlords, tenements, vacant lots, and crime prior to the arrival of refugees (Shaw and McKay 1942). What had been a prosperous Italian neighborhood became poor and black. Those who could not leave the city were forced to live in
these blighted neighborhoods. Some innovated and turned to crime as means of subsistence. However, as immigrants began setting up businesses and repopulating the region they began to contribute to the collective efficacy of the West Side (Sampson and Raudenbasch 1999). Immigration is usually associated with innovation and social disorganization, despite evidence that their presence is negatively correlated with crime (Adelman et. al 2017). However, in the media I analyzed, they were portrayed as contributors to collective efficacy and conformist entrepreneurs.

Rather than use anomie-strain theory to explain crime and deviance, I use it in this chapter to explain conformity and how local media frames it. The concepts of cultural goals and value foundations are helpful for understanding the context in which these positive portrayals occur. Refugees are seen as attaining cultural goals through legitimate means, rather than innovating through drugs, terrorism, or crime.

*Colorblind Racism and Racial Inequality without Racists*

During the 1980s, Omi and Winant (1994) used the concept of rearticulation to talk about how civil rights rhetoric was used to undermine civil rights. It was through arguing “reverse racism,” violation of equal protection, and violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that a number of anti-immigrant and anti-black legislation measures were passed. The idea of state and federal mandates of affirmative action and desegregation was seen as an encroachment on states’ rights. The legalistic fallacy argues that Civil Rights anti-discrimination legislation eradicated racism (Desmond and Emirbayer 2010). This idea began to rage against state aid and welfare was cast in a negative light.

Although attitudes changed significantly since the civil rights movement, attitudes about inequality remain. Instead of talking in terms of inherent deficiencies, individuals were now seen
as the cause of their own plights. This led to individuals denying racism in principle but still having problematic ideas about mobility. Bonilla-Silva (2018) calls this new perspective “color blind racism.” He argues that while statements and preferences may seem neutral on their face, they are actually very race conscious. He finds that although whites reject prejudice in principle, they are opposed to measures that aggressively combat racism. Similarly, DiTomaso (2011) notes that her white working class respondents believed their success was due to their own merit, work, and individual effort when, in fact, “opportunity hoarding” is what made it possible. That is, they received help from their social networks to gain an inside edge. These respondents derided programs like affirmative action and argued that the most qualified should be hired or promoted. However, they themselves were not hired because they were most qualified. They were hired because they were able to leverage their social capital. Scholars such as Desmond and Emirbayer (2010) and Wise (2011) argue that whites often oppose measures like affirmative action but are unaware how they benefit from other types of preferential treatment such as legacy programs at universities.

Thus, in this chapter, I ask (1) How are refugees portrayed in the local media? and (2) Why do these portrayals diverge from other national discourses about refugees and migrants? I argue that refugees are becoming Buffalo’s new model minority whose cultural diversity and economic activity are seen as contributions not attacks.

Data and Methods

Content analysis refers to “a research methodology that utilizes sets of procedures to make valid inferences from text” (Weber 1985:9). Content analysis can involve qualitative and quantitative data (Weber 1985; Krippendorf 2013). Holsti (1969) outlines debates for those who use content analysis including “quality vs. quantity” and “latent vs. manifest.” Holsti (1969)
argues that a holistic approach is best. Qualitative methods can include discourse analysis, social constructivist analysis, rhetorical analysis, conversation analysis, or ethnographic content analysis (Krippendorf 2013). Neuedorf (2002) argues that content analysis is mostly a numerical process that qualitative analyses are “not feasible.” In either form, it is an iterative process that involves sequences of steps and a scheme for analyzing and managing data. There is often debate as to whether these distinctions are arbitrary or necessary. The manifest/latent debate revolves around whether and when inferring meaning to text is appropriate at the coding and interpretation stages. Analyses that are overly descriptive have also been criticized. Pool (1959) emphasizes the importance of inference and the pitfalls of only focusing on description. However, both qualitative and quantitative researchers have criticized content analysis as a viable research method (Morgan 1993).

In the fall of 2015 and spring of 2016 I conducted a content analysis of Buffalo media to investigate how refugees were represented as part of a larger project. The focus of this article is Buffalo’s West Side. The West Side is a neighborhood in the City of Buffalo with a vibrant, multiethnic, and immigrant population. It was originally a predominantly Irish, Italian, and Polish neighborhood (Goldman 2000). However, the immigrant population currently derives from the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Most of the refugees who live in Buffalo and many other immigrants live on the West Side (Ali 2016; Karibu News 2017).

Based on 2010 data, Buffalo has a total population of 261,310 with about half identifying as white; about 37% of the population identifies as African American, almost 11% as Latino or Hispanic, and 4% as Asian. The neighborhood referred to as the West Side was once a burgeoning area but experienced decline in the wake of deindustrialization. The lower part of the West Side was predominantly Italian. However, in recent years Puerto Rican and other Latin
American immigrants have become the predominant ethnic groups (American Communities Survey 2010; Chan 2009).

I analyzed articles from the Buffalo News, Buffalo Spree, and Buffalo Rising. The Buffalo News is the primary news source in Buffalo, New York. Buffalo Spree is a magazine that has information about the arts, food and drink, and local news. Buffalo Rising is a magazine that provides information on real estate, sports, food, culture, and local news. As I read each article, I assessed appraisals and portrayals of refugees on the West Side. The dominant narratives about immigrants and refugees are framed by community leaders and the authors of these articles.

I decided to use these three outlets because they each play a key role in shaping the narrative about immigration in Buffalo. All three sources feature business advertisements, notices for cultural events, and stories about immigrant success. These outlets also featured stories about how refugee culture and entrepreneurialism was revitalizing the West Side.

This content analysis includes an in-depth analysis of 170 articles. I used search terms such as “immigration,” “west side,” “revitalization,” “refugee,” “immigrant,” “business,” “demographic change,” “homeownership,” “rustbelt,” “national security,” “culture,” and “population change” to search the databases of the outlets from 2010 – 2016. My goal was to determine whether or not the dominant narrative was alarmist or accepting of immigrants.

Newspaper articles were compiled into Atlas.ti software and analyzed based on the codes and themes listed below. I went through each newspaper article several times. As I read through each article, I highlighted text and developed initial codes. There were originally 19 themes found in the data. These themes revolved around immigrants’ contributions to the neighborhood and whether there was support or opposition to their presence. After reviewing the articles a second time, I refined the codes down to nine.
The most predominant theme was that refugees and immigrants were “good for the neighborhood.” Authors generally stated that they were improving the neighborhood through their entrepreneurial activity, home purchases, and population growth. These other themes were also developed from the data: “entrepreneurialism,” “housing and development,” multiculturalism,” “resettlement and integration,” “revitalization,” s“Stability,” “pro-refugee,” and “anti-refugee.” The following section will summarize my findings from my analysis of these three newspapers.

In this section, I will discuss the coverage of Buffalo’s refugees and immigrants in these three news outlets. Then I will explore the positive portrayals of refugees and migrants in Buffalo’s media and why it diverges from the national media. Refugees are seen as contributors to Buffalo and to the West Side through their cultural diversity and entrepreneurialism. In short, cultural festivals have added positive diversity to the West Side and entrepreneurialism is seen as a legitimate, legal means, to achieve success. This chapter explores how to make sense of these positive portrayals in light of a predominantly anti-immigrant social climate. About 77% of quotations referenced immigrants as entrepreneurs pursuing the American Dream. About 68% referenced culture and diversity as good.

Results

Buffalo’s Model Minority: Crime and Work

Portrayals of refugees on the West Side are mostly positive. A particular ideology is used to explain refugee success that combines elements of the model minority myth and the value foundations of the American Dream. Refugees are portrayed as achieving the American Dream (achievement and financial success) through culturally prescribed means (entrepreneurialism, homeownership, and repopulation), making them a model minority. Eva Hasset, Executive
Director of the International Institute is quoted in *The Buffalo News* as saying, “I think it is going to be increasingly common that immigrants and refugees start businesses” (Grandoni 2010:A1).

Similarly, in the *Buffalo Spree* Ali (2016:14) states:

This influx has brought with it new ethnic restaurants and food markets, bakeries, and boutiques. Refugees contribute to Buffalo’s economic growth by starting new businesses, providing jobs, and consuming goods and services. Buffalo’s immigrants have generated a summer full of cultural parades, including the annual Burmese Water Festival, or the Puerto Rican and Hispanic Day Parades.

The transformation of the West Side has been economic, cultural, and demographic. As refugees revitalized the West Side, they have been a stable force in establishing community. They have done so by establishing businesses, repopulating the neighborhoods, and purchasing homes. An area that was once associated with classic signs of social disorganization has become more stable since immigrant groups have arrived and established communities. For example, Evan Thompson is quoted in *Buffalo Rising*:

A neighborhood that was once beat-down and drug-ridden is now colorful with international markets and ethnic clothing shops. I walk through the West Side and feel like every corner of the world has somehow found its way to us. It’s truly amazing (Thompson 2015:2)

A number of articles in *The Buffalo News, Buffalo Spree, Buffalo Rising* note that immigrants are setting up businesses, enrolling in schools, buying homes, and repopulating the region. Rather than being portrayed as criminals, illegals, and terrorists, refugees on the West Side are seen as Buffalo’s model minority. One of the reasons this is the case is their entrepreneurialism and homeownership have brought collective efficacy to a region that was
once characterized by absentee landlords, vacant lots, and tenement houses. For example, an article in *The Buffalo News* quotes the Executive Director of HEAL International Inc. stating, “The refugee people have good intentions to come and build something in the land of opportunity” (Kwiatkowski & Christmann 2013:1).

Many other professionals echoed the sentiments that a major thoroughfare on the West Side has been an example of revitalization by the immigrant community. For example, Eva Hasset, the Executive Director for the International Institute of Buffalo states in *The Buffalo News*, Five years ago, Grant Street was empty. But Grant is now a draw, people see Grant as good investment. There's a power of attraction; there's a market there (Sapong 2015:4).

In another article in *Buffalo Rising*, the author states:

> Once a forgotten part of the city, the new Grant Street is booming with businesses owned and operated by immigrants and refugees including a laundromat, food markets, and numerous restaurants . . . Of particular note is the West Side Bazaar – a cultural hotspot where adventurous eaters can try affordable cuisine and purchase beautiful goods from around the world (Patten 2015:1).

Themes such as revitalization and culture can clearly be seen as interviewees and reporters articulate that a once abandoned area is now vibrant again thanks in part to immigration and the embrace of its multicultural identity. The West Sided Bazaar has become a key symbol in the revitalization of the West Side and a key part of the immigrant success story.

A key player in this process has been the Westminster Economic Development Initiative (WEDI). WEDI provides micro loans to immigrant entrepreneurs. WEDI acts as an institutional agent and important source of social capital for refugees (Dorbusch and Dorbusch 1995). This
organization provides counseling and financial support as immigrants start their own businesses. Journalist Emma Sapong of *The Buffalo News* notes:

In its seven years, WEDI has helped bring more than 30 business ideas to fruition and given micro-loans to 16 of those startups. In the process it contributed to the revitalization of a part of the West Side (Sapong 2014:1).

The organizational facilitation of refugee success is a key aspect of revitalization on the West Side. Their support has helped to spur a flood of immigrant entrepreneurialism on the West Side. Many of the refugees arrived to Buffalo with little or no business experience. However, WEDI assisted many of these aspiring entrepreneurs achieve loans and learn the logistics of managing a business. Restaurants and shops run by immigrants are highlights of the West Side and are seen to be contributing to its revitalization. In *The Buffalo News*, Erie County Executive, Mark Poloncarz also commented on the role immigrants have played in revitalizing the West Side:

This is really great news for the community . . . I'm very pleased that this is happening. The people are bringing a whole new level of investment and opportunity into an area that hadn’t had any for a long time (Zremski 2015:2).

The cultural and economic revitalization of the West Side via immigration is a key part of the narrative on the West Side. It has also been important for branding the West Side as a space that is known for diversity and cultural inclusion.

In addition to setting up businesses, immigrants have been credited with purchasing homes and moving into neighborhoods. Molly Short, the director of Journey’s End, states in *The Buffalo News*:
Homeownership is inexpensive here. It's not uncommon for our refugees to [eventually] buy a home. Some buy a double, and get the rental income. They want to accomplish that American Dream (Esmonde 2011).

Refugees purchasing homes is another way they are revitalizing the West Side. Refugees are settling in these neighborhoods, which is contributing to greater collective efficacy. However, it also points to the important theme of the American Dream. Instead of being associated with innovation, they are portrayed as conformists attaining the American Dream the right way, through legitimate means (entrepreneurialism) (Merton 1938). In other words, as Denise Beehag, director of refugee resettlement at the International Institute, says, “People know they can come here and buy a home . . . It's the American dream” (Zremski 2015:C1). In this quote, home ownership is again associated with the American Dream and this comes up in many of the articles about home ownership. Refugees are not only seen as agents of revitalization but also as examples of the American Dream. This, combined with the emphasis on entrepreneurialism, helps to perpetuate the model minority myth.

In addition to bringing business and homeownership to the West Side, refugees have also been credited with repopulating neighborhoods and schools in Buffalo. Jerry Zremski, one of the major writers about immigrants from The Buffalo News wrote,

The 2000 census showed metro Buffalo ranking last among the nation's 48 largest metropolitan areas in gaining immigrants. That trend began to reverse itself in the 2000s, as local agencies bolstered their refugee resettlement efforts. And now, refugee resettlement appears to be the major reason for the region's population gain . . . What's more, Erie County was the only county in Western New York to witness a population
increase in the first four years of the decade. And it never would have happened without a huge influx of refugees and other immigrants (Zremski 2015:1).

Overall, migrants on the West Side were portrayed in a positive light. Newspapers also portrayed them as people working hard for their piece of the American Dream and achieving it through legitimate means. Numerous articles were written about the revival of the West Side being driven by refugees. The language used to frame them is that of meritocracy, liberalism, and individualism. In a similar fashion, obtaining help from resettlement agencies such as People United For Sustainable Housing (PUSH) and Westminster Economic Development Initiative (WEDI) has helped refugees in Buffalo. In the case of African Americans, Latinos, and poor whites this type of aid is severely stigmatized but in the context of the West Side it is not seen as problematic.

Why is it that there is such a divergence between discourses that argue that refugees are national security threats and drains on the economy and these positive portrayals? Why is it that their success is framed primarily in terms of hard work and individual effort, rather than resettlement agency assistance? The answer is a particular racial ideology that combines the model minority myth with value foundations of the American dream, where refugees are framed as model minorities attaining the American Dream through institutional means. This framing of immigrants as industrious, hardworking entrepreneurs may represent an implicit comparison to African Americans and Latinos in the area.

Doing Diversity: Multicultural-Diversity Capital in Buffalo’s West Side

Building on that observation, Safe Roots addresses personal health and nutrition, environmental justice, civic empowerment and cultural identity in one program. Furthermore, in a time where the benefit of refugee and immigrant populations is being
called into question by some, gardens provide a mechanism through which cross-cultural knowledge-sharing and relationship building can take place in a shared public space (Nussbaumer 2016:3).

This quotation illustrates how West Side’s migrants are credited with bringing culture and multiculturalism to the region. Culture has been important for the branding of this neighborhood and adding life to it (Benz 2016; Hyra 2017). Multiculturalism is another feature of revitalization on Buffalo’s West Side. It is part of the lure and appeal of the West Side. Similar to the model minority framing in the previous section, there is also a divergence in terms of how culture is represented. Perceptions of cultural invasion are usually used to frame opposition and express support for punitive immigration policy. However, here it is seen as a benefit rather than a cultural invasion. Culture is put on display as the West Side has been colloquially renamed “little Burma.” (Zremski 2016) For example, Nussbaumer (2013:1) writes in *Buffalo Rising*:

> A trip to the city’s West Side is a real eye opener these days. As immigrants and refugees come to Buffalo in search of new opportunities, the West Side is quickly becoming a diverse cultural feast for a city that has been stagnant in this department for quite some time.

The idea that this diversity is positive is in sharp contrast to previous responses to rapid demographic change (Jacobson 2004; Longazel 2016; Ngai 2004). For example, in states such as Arizona and California – and at the federal level – the response to cultural and demographic change was to pass restrictive immigration laws and ballot initiatives to control and deny benefits to immigrants. Laws such as “Proposition 100,” “Proposition 200,” “Proposition 187,” “The Illegal Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996”, “Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act
of 1996”, and the “Personal Work and Responsibility Act of 1996” represented negative responses to immigrant presence. In addition to policy preferences, residential preferences also shift in accordance with demographic change. Quilian (2001) finds that neighborhoods are perceived as less safe by their residents when it becomes increasingly non-white.

On the West Side of Buffalo, though, multiculturalism and diversity are lauded and the community sees itself as welcoming. For example, in his article in *Buffalo Rising* Nussbaumer (2013) writes,

One of the things that I most liked about the Circus of Life Parade (learn more) was the reaction that it got from West Side residents and businesses owners. The general warm, welcoming atmosphere of the event was a reminder of the acceptance of different cultures and attitudes that now permeate the neighborhoods surrounding Grant Street (Nussbaumer 2013:1).

Since the influx of refugees, cultural diversity has become one of the defining characteristics of the West Side. One of the key themes in each of the newspapers was that culture was a good thing and should be celebrated. In addition, many articles referenced those in the communities coming together from different backgrounds. The notion expressed by this author is that the West Side is not a place where prejudice is harbored. In *Buffalo Rising* he writes,

Seeing that this was the inaugural year that the parade commenced, I was extremely happy to be a part of the procession that led the troupe from Grant Street to Massachusetts Avenue. What a fantastic way to celebrate the diversity and grassroots ingenuity of the city’s West Side (Nussbaumer 2013:2).

Thus, another theme in these media accounts was the idea of experiencing culture. People come to the West Side to become immersed in its diverse cultures or to have cultural
experiences. Many residents come to the West Side to “do culture”. In this respect, culture is instrumental yet remains confined to enclaves on the West Side.

For example, in an interview, Katie Couric was quoted in The Buffalo News as saying the following during her visit to the West Side Bazaar:

> I have to say it was a very moving experience for me to see so much multiculturalism in Buffalo, and to see that so many refugees and immigrants have been embraced and are finding a lot of solidarity and comfort and are able to share their cultures with longtime Buffalo residents, and how it is really transforming the West Side in a way that is extremely positive (Watson and Summer 2016:2).

Similarly, Bonnie Smith, the Executive Director of Westminster Economic Development Initiative, is quoted in The Buffalo News stating:

> Walking the blocks has become an international experience, seeing people in their colorful, traditional garb (Sapong 2012:D1).

The two quotes above illustrate how culture, particularly multiculturalism is seen as a positive thing. It also points to how these portrayals diverge from other portrayals of immigrants. Historically, the introduction of different cultures has been framed as an invasion. However, in this context it is appreciated. Other examples discussed in these media are cultural parades, such as the Diwali Festivals, Burmese Water Festival, or the Puerto Rican and Hispanic Day Parades (Ali 2016). For example, in Buffalo Rising Nussbaumer (2014:2) states:

> The city-wide celebration of diversity will be in full swing throughout the day, not only joining together to form the human chain, but also to offer “human links” a chance to embrace the different cultures that will be coming together on that day.

Miller (2011:1) also states in Buffalo Rising:
The city benefits because it increases our population, but it also gives us the benefits of bringing in a diverse population which then expands what we are as a community.

Dining and shopping are not banal acts of consumerism but a practice of cultural immersion that is desirable for the clientele in the large Buffalo area. In various parades, festivals, and holidays culture is put on display. In this light individuals are able to come to the West Side “to do” diversity. The rhetoric used to argue for diversity on the West Side is the same used in many affirmative action programs, that diversity benefits all. For example, Newman (2011:1) argues in *Buffalo Spree*:

The flavors of the world can be accessed in a quaint but lively building at 242 Grant Street. The West Side Bazaar is home to merchants from all corners of the earth. You can get textiles from Rwanda or spices from India, clothing from Indonesia or jewelry from Peru.

Culture is also instrumental. That is, because culture is (for the time being) part of the lure of the West Side, it may limit perceptions of invasion that have plagued other locales. For example, in the suburbs surrounding Detroit (e.g., Hamtramck and Dearborn), immigrants have strong ties in the legislature and hold prayer notices, which have become frequent parts of daily life for a population that was once predominantly Polish. The response to these cultural and demographic changes have framed as an immigrant invasion (Bailey 2015). Similarly, Longazel (2016) finds that the dual processes of Latina/o degradation and white affirmation characterize anti-immigrant sentiment in Hazelton, Pennsylvania. The difference between these locales and the one I studied may be one of instrumentality whose future and longevity remain uncertain.
Discussion and Conclusion

The United States has had a long and troubled history when it comes to portrayals of religious, ethnic, and racial minorities. In these cases, minorities have either been caricatures or threats. While they may be on opposite sides of the spectrum, these portrayals were harmful to groups that were targeted. In legislative, judicial, political, and media circles, they were represented as social problems. In the entertainment world, immigrants were portrayed as buffoons, criminals, evil, and savages. The threats portrayed were intellectual, genetic, criminal, and cultural. As sociologist Evelyn Asultany (2010) and Leo Chavez (2008) have shown, these portrayals have consequences for those targeted.

Immigrant threat is usually articulated in terms of work, culture, and crime. This chapter explores how in each of these dimensions, immigrants are portrayed positively by local Buffalo media. Most sociological literature demonstrates the ways in which immigrants are seen to steal jobs, commit crimes, and change U.S. demography. These perceptions and portrayals lead to exclusionary immigration policies and in worst cases hate crimes against religious, ethnic, and racial minorities. For example, group threat theory and the defended communities’ model demonstrate that when groups perceive minorities and immigrants as threats they will take measures to address the threat (Blumer 1958; Green, Strolovitch, & Wong 1998; Green, McFalls, & Smith 2001; Green & Spry 2014).

Since Donald Trump’s presidential campaign, the resurgence of hate groups and hate crimes have created an anti-Mexican and anti-Muslim environment (FBI 2017; Williams 2018). The alarmist narratives resembling the 1980s and post-September 11th America have become more prominent. Calls for border walls and Muslim bans are presented as logical responses to
terrorism. Similar to Evelyn Asultany (2010), I expected to find that at the very least, the question about the viability of accepting immigrants to be posed.

However, my research reveals that Buffalo’s local media do not define refugees and immigrants as folk devils. Culture and immigrant entrepreneurialism are reported as positives for Buffalo generally and the West Side in particular. They are portrayed as entrepreneurs accomplishing the American Dream through institutionalized means who have also brought with them important cultural diversity. The framing of culture and entrepreneurialism as a contribution rather than an invasion demonstrates that under certain conditions immigrants will be portrayed positively. It also demonstrates how instrumentality affects these narratives. My findings suggest that the disjuncture between national hostility and a local welcoming community can be explained by immigrant instrumentality. That is, when immigrant cultural diversity and entrepreneurialism have been helpful to the local community; economic revitalization becomes part of the positive narrative.

Thus, while sociologists have demonstrated that racial ideology is spread through the media (Golash-Boza 2015), this research shows that the model minority myth is also spread via local print media such as The Buffalo News, Buffalo Spree, and Buffalo Rising. In these platforms, coverage of refugees was mostly positive with emphasis on how they are achieving the American Dream through legitimate channels. The idea that they are succeeding at the American Dream the right way, though, is a key aspect of this racial ideology. There may be implicit comparisons to other groups in the region who are often stigmatized for not “pulling themselves up by their bootstraps.”

As DiTomaso (2011) has demonstrated, though, little attention is paid to the inside edge that facilitates this success. I am not suggesting that there is not coverage of the role of
organizations in Buffalo. Rather, their roles are downplayed especially given how essential they are in immigrant success; this leads to an Ellis Island-romanticism that depicts immigrants as pulling themselves up by their bootstraps. Rather than constructing immigrants as invaders and their assistance as handouts, refugees are seen to be making the best of their situation. These refugees receive assistance from resettlement agencies that help them integrate and start businesses. By no means does this dismiss Buffalo’s migrants’ hard work and perseverance, but it must be placed in context, a context of long-term racial inequality in the United States.
CHAPTER 4

SOCIAL DESIRABILITY IN THE AGE OF COLORBLINDNESS: HOW RACISM BECAME DEVIAN AND WHAT THAT MEANS FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE

by

Watoii Rabii

June 2018

A dissertation submitted to the

Faculty of the Graduate School of

the University at Buffalo, State University of New York

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Department of Sociology
CHAPTER 4
SOCIAL DESIRABILITY IN THE AGE OF COLORBLINDNESS: HOW RACISM BECAME DEVIANT AND WHAT THAT MEANS FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE

Attitudes toward immigrants and their representation in print and visual media have been a significant topic of interest for sociologists (Alsultany 2010; Chavez 2008; Jaret 1999). The depiction of immigrants has had significant consequences for their treatment (Alsultany 2010; Chavez 2008). Specifically, attitudes and representations of immigrants and refugees often legitimize exclusionary policies, hate crimes, and harassment (Golash-Boza 2015; Takaki 2003). While research has demonstrated that attitudes have changed since the 1960s, scholars have also provided evidence of durable inequality (Massey 2007; Tilly 1999). In fact, Douglas Massey (2007) ends the third chapter of his book, Categorically Unequal, with the grim suggestion that the civil rights era may have given birth to a new but pernicious form of racism. He contends that racism after the civil rights movement is more subtle and covert, making it harder to identify.

Due to these phenomena, egalitarianism and meritocracy influences the way most Americans think about race, crime, and opportunity (Bonilla-Silva 2018; DiTomaso 2011; Feagin and O’Brien 2011). In other research, I explored how problematic model minority myths are perpetuated in interviews and content analysis. In this project, surprisingly whites in rural and urban communities perceived immigrants and refugees positively on the whole. They were praised for their hard work and were not seen as criminal and national security threats. In another paper, I explored how immigrants are portrayed in the local media. Here too I found that they were portrayed positively in terms of crime, culture, and work. This is significant because immigrants and refugees are often thought to be criminal, cultural, and economic threats (Golash-Boza 2015; Ngai 2004).
I explore these findings in an age of professed colorblindness. I use theories of colorblind racism (specifically the frame of Abstract Liberalism), the model minority myth and the concepts of non-zero sum mobility, cosmopolitan canopies, and ethnoracial closure to make sense of these findings and explain the disjuncture between local and national attitudes and representations of immigrants and refugees (Alba 2009; Anderson 2011; Wacquant 2012). I ask: (1) To what extent does racism -- being labeled as deviant -- contribute to the positive perceptions and portrayals I found in my larger research project? and (2) How does social desirability influence responses and portrayals? My interpretation is that the responses and representations I found were genuine but are also disconnected from the reality of structural (im)mobility and inequality. I argue that the respondents I interviewed -- and newspaper articles I studied -- were honest about their feelings and depictions of immigrants and refugees. However, despite this, racism and inequality are evaluated based on old-fashioned definitions. This perpetuates the false narrative of the model minority myth in which inequality and achievement can be explained in terms of individual characteristic, ignoring structural aspects that facilitate and hinder non-white and immigrant attainment.

These fallacies derive from a definition of racism that was created during the Civil Rights Movement. Since then emphasis has been placed on individual racism as opposed to social structure and the role it plays in maintaining inequality. The Civil Rights Movement created a very narrow definition of racism based on epithets, slurs, and blatant discrimination. This individualistic tendency presents particular methodological problems when studying race, racism, and inequality today. Social desirability stems from an old definition of racism that over emphasizes personal attributes and attitudes at the expense of background assumptions and societal influences.
In this chapter, I have three goals. First, I challenge the assumptions that social desirability is a question of lying, self-monitoring, or some modification of the presentation of self. Second, I discuss how definitions of racism since the civil rights movement have ignored the realities of social structure and social mobility. Third, I explain how this definition of racism can be used to understand my larger results and social change more generally. Thus, my analyses address the ways in which racism became a form of deviance, the meaning of this for social science research, and the roles instrumentality and isolation play in contributing to the civility and positive framing. I seek to provide a broader way to think about social change, how it is interpreted, how it is leveraged, and how racialized criminalization may be yet again changing.

**Literature Review**

The literature on interviewer effects finds that whites may be less honest about their feelings to a non-white interviewer (Finkel et. al 1989). This research suggests that participants will be more likely to give front stage responses or lie to avoid appearing racist. However, as I discuss below, it is also possible that my respondents were honest about their feelings regarding immigrants and the portrayals I studied were genuine. In fact, the narratives in interviews and print media were consistent. Immigrants were laborers, entrepreneurs, and good neighbors whose entrepreneurialism and cultural diversity contributed to the collective efficacy and revitalization of their respective communities (Sampson and Raudenbasch 1999). In previous chapters, immigrants and refugees were perceived and portrayed as model minorities who were accomplishing the American Dream through institutional means (Chou and Feagin 2008; Merton 1938). In fact, the data from this earlier research suggest that perceptions and portrayals will be positive when immigrants are useful and maintain a degree of separation and isolation.
Racism and Racial Inequality without Racists

Bonilla-Silva (2018) advances a theory of colorblind racism by which whites in the contemporary United States believe inequality is the result of non-racial dynamics. Discourses, explanations, and rhetorical strategies place the culpability of inequality solely on the backs of minorities, citing individual choice as the chief determinant of outcomes. The theory of colorblind racism suggests that whites will use non-racial language to imply inherently racial things.

Bonilla-Silva (2018:26) argues that there are four frames of colorblind racism: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. Abstract liberalism uses the language of equal opportunity to oppose aggressive means of combating racial inequality while naturalization involves explaining racial inequality in terms of natural “deficiencies” of non-whites. However, material conditions do not really change. Cultural racism is used to explain racial inequality in terms of the supposed cultural deficits of non-whites. Finally, minimization involves downplaying the role that racial stratification plays in the disparate outcomes of non-whites and whites. Abstract liberalism will be the frame I focus on for this article.

DiTomaso (2011) finds that the whites she interviewed tended to see their own success in terms of hard work and personal merit. However, they attributed non-white success to handouts and affirmative action. Differences in social capital and the ability to opportunity hoard were the primary reasons for their success. In other words, whites’ ability to hoard opportunity led to homosocial reproduction thus perpetuating categorical inequality (Moore 1962; Kanter 1977; Tilly 1999; Massey 2008). These mechanisms not only lead to racial inequality but perpetuate gender inequality as well by forming pink collar ghettos, glass ceilings, and old boys’ networks.
DiTomaso’s primary critique is that racial inequality is perpetuated through opportunity hoarding but whites do not consider this an inside edge. Rather they blame racial inequality on old-fashioned racism, which supports their view that hard work and effort are the ways to achieve success. However, the last hired is often the first fired (DiTomaso 2011).

Respondents for Bonilla-Silva (2018) and DiTomaso (2011) strongly endorsed meritocracy. For DiTomaso’s (2011) participants, fairness was described as being able to provide for one’s family and pay the bills. Bonilla-Silva’s respondents constructed progressive social policy as preferential treatment. They said whoever was “most qualified” should receive the job and race should not be considered. DiTomaso’s respondents similarly argued that the “best person for the job” should be considered for a position.

Liberalism, meritocracy, and Alger mythology are used to frame attainment of cultural goals without attention to structural privileges and disadvantages. Liberalist explanations focus on equality. Meritocratic explanations emphasize that a person’s innate abilities are key to his or her success. Alger explanations embrace a “rags to riches” idealism that places emphasis on hard work. These explanations were associated with Asian Americans. Their success was seen as evidence that the opportunities of minorities were no longer limited. Those limitations were believed to die with Jim Crow and the abolition of slavery.

Labeling Theory

Following a turn in criminology that was primarily positivist, sociologists and criminologists began to question many of their assumptions. They questioned the idea that there were differences between criminals and non-criminals, the idea that criminals can be studied scientifically, and that criminals’ free will explained their behavior. This gave birth to the criminological perspective known as constructionism. The key assumptions of this perspective
were that individuals had free will, deviance was a relative term, and emphasis should be placed on subjective meanings rather than scientific objectification.

One of the first theories to emerge from this perspective was “labeling theory.” Scholars such as Becker (1966) and Lemert (1951) explained criminal behavior in terms of labeling. Both argued that the actions of others defined and escalated crime. Becker (1966) critiqued previous criminological theories for not being more critical of current definitions of deviance. He argued that analytically, empirically, and theoretically, such theories are limited. He also contended that no act is inherently criminal but is labeled so by those in power. He refers to these individuals as moral entrepreneurs. He also states that those deemed criminals, delinquents, and deviants were framed as outsiders. For Becker (1966) the key is societal reaction. He argues the only reason that criminals are considered criminals is society reacts to their behavior by labeling it deviant.

Lemert (1951) argued that crime could be classified as primary or secondary deviance. Acts not detected by agents of social control were immune to the labeling process and termed primary deviance. Those detected and successfully labeled and stigmatized were called secondary deviance. Once caught and labeled, perceptions about these individuals change and they are seen as deviant, which leads to a process of continuous labeling. This successive labeling escalated the criminal activity. During this stage, a deviant’s self-concept is modified.

More recently, ethnographies have explored the negative effects of labelling for the working class, immigrants, and minorities. One of the earliest examples of this was Chambliss’ (1977), “The Saints and the Roughnecks.” Chambliss conducted research at Hannibal High School and investigates the disproportionate labelling of white middle- and working-class students. He refers to the middle-class students as Saints and the working -class students as Roughnecks. Both groups committed equal amounts of deviance yet the Roughnecks were more
likely to be punished for their actions. The Saints’ deviance was perceived to be more innocent by teachers, law enforcement, and community members. In other words, they were seen as “boys being boys.” However, the Roughneck’s deviance was more likely to be perceived as serious and in need of punishment. This led to the Saints being weeded out (Reiman 1979).

In her book *Bad Boys*, Ferguson (2001) studies the punishment of black and white boys in a high school in California. She finds that black boys were more likely to be sent out of class or suspended for acting out than their white counterparts. She also argues that black boys were seen as being “willfully bad” while their white counterparts were seen as being “naturally naughty” (Ferguson 2001: 86). She calls this process of differential labeling “adultification.” She argues that black boys were seen as being more adult and more responsible for their actions than their white counterparts. More recently Goff et al. (2014) conducted an experiment where they asked their participants to evaluate the innocence of white and black children. They found that respondents tended to rate black children as less childlike, less innocent, and more responsible for their actions.

In *Punished*, Rios (2011) finds that Black and Latino boys are hypercriminalized. He argues this is the result of “labeling hype.” Those who do the labeling are what he calls the Youth Control Complex, which refers to community members, corrections officials, law enforcement, and parents who continuously label and treat black and Latino men as deviant. He found that many of the young men he studied were often criminalized prior to coming into contact with the criminal justice system.

Just as Lemert (1951) and Becker (1963) argue that crimes and deviance are created through the labeling process, the same can be said for traditional racism. Principled or traditional racism has been labeled as deviant and, thus, people seek to avoid this label along with its
stigma. Because racism is deviant, individuals will seek to distance themselves from it and the label and feel good about labeling others deviant. The labeling perspective helps to see that part of social desirability in the age of Color Blindness is not to sound racist according to an antiquated definition of racism; moreover, complicit, covert, and colorblind forms are often ignored.

**Future Predictions**

There have been many predictions made about the future of America’s racial order. Some have been pessimistic (Dietrich and Bonilla-Silva 2009; Yancey 2003) while others have been more optimistic (Alba 2009; Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch 2012). For example, according to Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch (2012) a racial order “consists of beliefs, laws, and practices that are generally accepted by racial groups in a political system.” They contend that there have been two racial orders. The first encompasses the time period before 1910. This included slavery, annexation, removal, Chinese Exclusion, Southern Central, and Eastern European quotas, anti-Semitism, and Jim Crow. The second spans from 1910 to the 1960s which included mass deportation, continued Jim Crow segregation and anti-Semitism, and Japanese Internment. However, since the civil rights movement, the authors make the case that a new racial order is beginning that is more heterogeneous than its predecessors are. They center their analysis on four “transformative forces”: (1) immigration, (2) multiracialism, (3) genomics, and (4) cohort change.

Hochschild et al. (2012) claim that the combination of these transformative forces will lead to a decrease in racism and discrimination. They note how the mass influx of immigration changed the racial order of the United States. This was largely due to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 which lifted the quotas imposed by the Johnson Reed Act of 1924. Due
to increased immigration, there are more mixed-race and mixed-ethnicity families. In addition, individuals are classifying themselves in ways that are not consistent with the U.S. Census. The authors refer to this as a “disruptive heterogeneity.”

They also contend that cohort change will alter the American racial order in a positive way. It will do so because the collective racial memory of a younger cohort will be different from those who grew up during a time when racial tensions were high. Alba (2009) shares a similarly optimistic view of the future of the racial order. He makes the case that the positions of non-white groups may improve over time. This improvement will be facilitated by an increase in non-zero sum mobility, which refers to groups making gains without hurting another group’s upward mobility. He contends that boundaries of citizenship will cease to be bright and instead blur. Alba and Barbosa (2016) finds that although whites retain certain advantages in earnings, for example, their dominance in upper-tier occupations is beginning to decline.

In contrast to these perspectives, scholars have predicted that there will be changes but the racial order will remain dominated by whites (Bonilla-Silva 2018; Gallagher 2004; Portes, Fernandez-Kelly, and Haller 2005; Warren and Twine 1997; Yancey 2003). Portes et al. (2015) contend that although Latin American and Asian immigration is increasing, their distinct physical appearance will prevent them from being seen as white. Yancey (2003) predicts that rather than persisting, the white/non-white divide will transform into a black/non-black divide. He argues that the category of white will expand to include everyone except African Americans. Gallagher (2004) anticipates that racial redistricting will occur that will exclude African Americans from the white category. Dietrich and Bonilla-Silva (2009) speculate that the racial order will transform from a biracial one to a triracial one with categories for honorary whites,
whites, and a collective black category. In this racial order, skin color will be more pronounced and become the determinant of racial hierarchy.

*Interviewer Bias and Social Desirability*

This issue of “truthfulness” is central to all social research, no less so in in-depth interviewing (Lavrakas 2008). Data collection is complicated generally and becomes even more so when studying issues like race and ethnicity. Respondents may not want to be honest with a non-white interviewer. This is an important consideration when designing a study because the structure of one’s questions determines how to deal with racial issues and how to establish rapport. Some may that my respondents may not have been completely honest about their feelings because they were afraid of appearing racist.

The desire to not appear racist or bigoted is a central issue of social science research. The notion of social desirability suggests that respondents want to tell their researchers what they want to hear. Research on social desirability places emphasis on respondents’ tendencies to self-monitor (Snyder 1987). In other words, individuals will alter their self-presentation to fit the definition of the situation. If individuals perceive that it is inappropriate to express racism, they will mute their racial antagonistic attitudes (Eliasoph 2012; Krysan and Couper 2002; Weber, Lavine, Huddy & Federico 2013).

Social desirability shows strong effects among more educated interviewees (Ann 2015; Krysan 1998). For example, An (2015) found that those with higher educations tended to oppose restrictive immigration policies more often than their counterparts with lower educational attainment. However, when self-monitoring was taken into account the percentage of those opposed to exclusionary immigration laws decreased dramatically.
Another study found that the race of the interviewer influenced respondents’ answers (Finkel, Guterbock, and Borg 1989). In one case, whites were less likely to express support for a non-white candidate in front of a white audience. Weber et al. (2007) investigate the relationship between stereotypes, self-monitoring, and policy preferences. High self-monitors (those who alter their behavior based on the situation) were less likely to rely on stereotypes to shape their policy preferences. However, low self-monitors were more likely to let stereotypes influence their preferences.

Eliasoph’s (2009) work also emphasizes the situational context of racial discourse. For example, in situations where a company was predominantly white, expressing racism was deemed appropriate. In one of the groups she studied, she found front stage racism and backstage anti-racism. Her study demonstrates that racial discourse requires savoir faire (know when and when not to talk about race or racism) (Morning 2009). In certain situations, political correctness says that one should not say openly racist things. This meant that some respondents waited until they were in private to voice their opposition to racist statements.

**Interpreting Results: What does this mean for social science?**

*How Did Racism Become Deviant?*

Due to the inherent contradiction of World War II’s campaign against Germany’s Nazism and America’s persistent racial apartheid, the civil rights movement slowly picked up pace. A series of laws and legal decisions such as *Brown vs. Board of Education* and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 were passed at the height of the civil rights era. These laws banned discrimination in public accommodations and institutions. In essence, these laws criminalized a particular form of racism. Along with these legal changes came attitudinal shifts regarding
segregation and schools. For example, by the 1960s 62 percent of whites approved of fair employment practices law (Massey 2008).

Many have claimed that the Civil Rights Movement ended racism, nativism, and discrimination. However, others contend that it made traditional or principled racism, epithets, and explicit discrimination a form of deviance. Labeling theorists such as Howard Becker (1963) have noted society’s ability to create new forms of deviance and new types of outsiders. He argues that there is nothing intrinsically deviant or criminal about any act. This is what happened following the Civil Rights Movement. When my respondents spoke in terms of “those racists” they were referring to outsiders because they adhered to the definition of racism as a form of deviance that were constructed after the Civil Rights Movement. For example, Henry, a white man in his 40s on the Farm Belt states:

Now, I am not somebody who sits back and lets discrimination take place in any way, shape, or form. And so, they found out respectfully, but assertively, that that was exactly why they needed somebody like me on there. Because they needed to understand that their survival out here is dependent on being a little more open, and welcoming to people, feeling like they are not only able to come, but fit in. And fitting in doesn't mean that you got five generations back of family, it means that you can be a new generation of a new family, but you are a welcome community member.

Similarly Elaine, a white woman in her 30s from the Farm Belt states:

And I think people that aren't receptive, I think it's maybe just a lack of education, or just ignorance, I'm not really sure…… I think people who aren't very educated, I think it does. I think that they assume that everybody is an illegal immigrant. And they don't really
have the knowledge, or the desire to even understand that not everybody -- not all immigrants are here illegally.

Both Henry and Elaine identify those who are prejudiced as outsiders and deviant. They both evaluate the people they reference based on a definition of racism that focuses on slurs and overt discrimination.

Racism became a negative label and those individuals or groups who propagate it were labeled as outsiders. They were seen as being separate and different from a society that had moved past such things after the civil rights movement. However, as most sociological criminology has demonstrated, behaviors deemed criminal and delinquent cannot be disentangled from the societies in which they emerge.

The focus on traditional racism as a form of deviance has inadvertently led to the more covert and subtle forms of racism that linger and often justify inequality. This meant that racism was only explicit hate and bigotry was confined to certain individuals such as hate groups. The increases in hate crimes, the Charlottesville incident, and the recent anti-Semitic fraternity oath in Syracuse, New York meet these criteria. These acts are broadly condemned and attributed to a few. Racism is seen to be a relic of the past.

This assumption is linked to the belief that criminalization of explicit discrimination occurred during the Civil Rights Movement. Desmond and Emirbayer (2010) refer to these errors in thinking as legalistic and individualistic fallacies. Society and social structure fell out of favor as explanations for inequality at a time when both would transform in ways that would dramatically alter the fortunes of minorities. African Americans and Latinos remain victims of the drug war, deindustrialization, and restrictive immigrant legislation. Persistent residential
segregation, the negative impacts of gentrification for those who are displaced, and hiring discrimination are often underemphasized.

The absence of Jim Crow and explicit racism were seen as the criteria of social change and evidence of “mission accomplished” was declared on a number of fronts. Many books, such as Wilson’s (1979) *The Declining Significance of Race*, were misconstrued as evidence of this change. None have been used more as the criterion than the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States. This was seen as the definitive statement of post-racialism. His election and reelection were seen as evidence that America was a land of meritocracy and opportunity. Once this notion was ingrained in the national conscience, certain individuals and organizations could be labeled as outsiders and deviants if they met these criteria.

Since the 1960s, people have learned that overt racism is a form of deviance. Like other acts of deviance, racism elicits sanctions. Due to the stigma attached to being labeled a racist everyone avoids it. Because it is a form of deviance it is seen as wrong. Therefore, people express legitimate objections to principled racism on these grounds. However, people are less aware of how false narratives of mobility perpetuate more covert forms of racism. This means that respondents may be truthful about their objection to racism but at the same time endorse the model minority myth.

*What does this mean for social science?*

There are at least two implications of racism as a form of deviance in an age of colorblindness. First, people strive to conform to this definition of racism, and, second, people ignore social structure and adopt ideas about social mobility that that emphasize individualism, meritocracy, and hard work. This tendency was reflected in the findings from my interviews and content analysis. For example, in one of the articles from *the Buffalo News* the author states:
Success stories of refugees and the entire immigrant body are well documented, from earlier generations to today. The common theme is hard work and achievement, the American dream. (Tribune Content Agency 2015)

It is easy to interpret the disjuncture between discourses that emphasize national security and the ones in Buffalo as evidence that racism is no longer an issue. In fact, my findings can be seen as evidence of post-racialism, impression management, and social desirability. However, the way my respondents talked about immigrants, and racism in general, is based on a definition of racism and inequality that only consider individual pathologies. Under this definition, hate groups or racist individuals are considered outsiders but false narratives and structural inequality are not policed the same way.

In this study, the perceptions and portrayals of immigrants and minorities revolved around three themes: crime, culture, and work. My respondents clearly show evidence of an advancement on the front of attitudes and traditional racism, but their ideas about mobility tell quite a different story. There is an inconsistency between the positive portrayals of immigrants and minorities and narratives of meritocratic mobility.

Therefore, while responses and portrayals indicate that both regions were welcoming to immigrants, the framing of their success in terms of the American Dream is problematic. Despite the best of intentions, framing immigrant success in terms of the American Dream perpetuates a false narrative that immigrants can make it with hard work alone. color blind racism (specifically the frame of abstract liberalism) and the myth of the model minority together can help make sense of these perceptions, portrayals and the false narrative about success and mobility.

Bonilla-Silva (2018) argues that the frame abstract liberalism uses notions of equal opportunity and individualism to explain race. He contends that using this frame whites can in
principle be for equal opportunity but oppose measures used to address institutional problems. He states:

Another example is regarding each person as an “individual” with “choices” and using this liberal principle as a justification for whites having the right of choosing to live in segregated neighborhoods or sending their children to segregated schools. This claim requires ignoring the multiple institutional and state-sponsored practices behind segregation and being unconcerned about these practices’ negative consequences for minorities. (Bonilla-Silva 2018; 28)

The respondents in Bonilla-Silva’s study were in principle against racism but simultaneously against policies in which the state prevented institutional discrimination. Framing immigrants as conformists (crime) and model minorities (work) ignores the fact that these immigrant success stories are facilitated by assistance. For example, in The Buffalo News Zremski (2015) states, Eventually, many refugees thrive in America, and economists say it is because they work so hard. Many refugees interviewed for this series said they worked not one job, but two, and several employers praised the refugees’ work ethic.

This false narrative about mobility is at the heart of my findings. For example, the enclaves on the West Side act seen as both agents of revitalization as containment. At the current moment, refugees and immigrants in both locations are useful. However, they are instrumental and succeeding while not competing with whites for resources. This success without competition creates what Alba (2009) calls non-zero sum mobility. However, it remains to be seen if this will stay consistent should immigrants move beyond their enclaves.

The methodological implications of this turn is that respondents may honestly denounce principled racism while propagating myths of meritocracy. This is due to a definition of racism
that emphasizes “bad” people rather than limited opportunities. In other words, social desirability in the age of color blindness means people thinking they are doing the right thing will follow the appropriate normative scripts while perpetuating false narratives.

The important point is not whether immigrants are genuinely perceived and portrayed in positive ways, but how these positive sentiments are expressed and the types of positive sentiments that are expressed. For example, the newspaper articles I analyzed did not frame immigrants as lazy or free loading or invading or as criminals, but as hardworking and achieving. Based on my data, the false narrative of model minority mobility is the new frontier of racism in the twenty first century.

*Civility, Diversity, and the Post Civil Rights Era*

My data show that the transformation of the West Side into a “little Burma” was heralded as good rather than as an invasion (Zremski 2016). Immigrant entrepreneurialism was declared an agent of revitalization, rather than as a force of white displacement. Immigrants are praised as conformists rather than innovators. However, these positive portrayals and perceptions must be considered based on two factors: (1) the economic role that immigrants play in revitalizing and stabilizing a region economically and (2) the degree of immigrant isolation.

These immigrants and refugees that I asked whites about are isolated but in different ways; in the Farm Belt, most respondents reported that immigrants kept to themselves or minded their own business. Ron, a white man in 30s from the Farm Belt also says:

“You really see them sporadically. They tend to not have as much of their own individualized transportation. And due to the nature of where they're working, and residing out in the farms, and in small communities in and around the farm properties, they tend to do travel by either bus, or at least in large family.”
On the West Side, immigrants and refugees are concentrated in a particular neighborhood, occupying a specific occupational niche that is instrumental but most importantly not competitive to whites. For example, one of the articles in *Buffalo Rising* states,

“On Grant Street, a down-and-out stretch a decade ago, refugee businesses like Aung Kaung Myat’s iT Garden have filled long-vacant storefronts. On the far West Side and in Black Rock/Riverside – the main refugee neighborhoods – job creation and the rate of business starts exceed the county average (Nussbaumer 2016:1).

Similarly, Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz states that:

“The long-term gain is so great that it justifies the short-term expense.”

Here, immigrant entrepreneurialism is framed as an investment. The West Side is an example of what Anderson (2011) calls a cosmopolitan canopy. These are diverse urban spaces where different groups of people come together and act amiably. At the center of this canopy is a sense of civility that influences social interactions. Anderson (2011:28) states:

The existence of the canopy allows such people, whose reference point often remains their own social class or ethnic group, a chance to encounter others and so work toward a more cosmopolitan appreciation of difference. As canopies, the Reading Terminal, Rittenhouse Square, Thirtieth Street Station, the Whole Foods Market, and sporting events certainly do not provide identical social experience. But they do all provide an opportunity for diverse strangers to come together and be exposed to one another. In these circumstances, they have a chance to mix, observe one another, and become better acquainted with people they otherwise seldom observe up close.

The West Side is similar to the areas in Philadelphia Anderson describes where civility and diversity are seen as positive. In the cosmopolitan canopy of Buffalo’s West Side, there are for
the time being conditions of zero sum mobility (Alba 2009; Anderson 2011). In other words, whites do not see these immigrants and refugees as threats.

Because immigrant entrepreneurialism is confined to a niche and it does not compete with whites, it creates conditions of non-zero sum mobility. However, this neighborhood still acts as a “A Janus-Faced Institution of Ethnoracial Closure” (Wacquant 2012). This means that the niches also act as a places where immigrants can live and work that maintain a degree of isolation. Thus, the West Side acts as a location for immigrant usefulness and as a place to keep them isolated.

Wacquant (2012) makes a similar argument about ghettoes. He makes the cases that ghettoes serve two functions: economic exploitation and limitation of interethnic contact. However, they eventually serve as a location of segregation if minorities are no longer seen as useful. He goes on to argue that certain populations may be expelled from cities if they did not serve an essential and non-competitive function. He states:

In situations in which residents cease to be of economic value to the controlling group extraction evaporates and no longer balances out ostracization. Ethnoracial encapsulation can then escalate to the point where the ghetto morphs into an apparatus merely to warehouse the spoiled and supernumerary population, as a staging ground for its exploitation, or as a springboard for the ultimate form of ostracization, namely, physical annihilation” (Wacquant 2012:6).

At the current moment, refugees on the West Side and immigrants in the Farm Belt are of economic value. Refugees are of economic value because of their entrepreneurialism. Migrant workers are of economic value because of their labor. The ethnic and entrepreneurial enclaves on the West Side act as both a cosmopolitan canopy and institution of ethnoracial closure where
immigrants are useful and not always in the face of native-born residents (Wacquant 2008; Alba 2009). This creates conditions of non-zero sum mobility. However, it remains to be seen what will happen should gentrification eventually lead to displacement or if entrepreneurialism allows these groups mobility out of the West Side.

Conclusions and Implications

Since the Civil Rights movement racism has become a form of deviance which led to an overemphasis on individualism. This brand of individualism contributes to modern ideas about racism and immigrant success. This overemphasis made possible the inherent contradiction of being antiracist and anti-affirmative action at the same time. It also makes possible the inherent contradiction of being pro-immigrant/minority and pro-gentrification. In this climate, the false narratives of the American Dream and Model Minority became more prevalent. This explains the positive perceptions and portrayals in the previous work.

This chapter was a theoretical and methodological reflection on my findings from the previous two chapters. In Chapter 1, based on in-depth interview data, I found that immigrants were not viewed as national security threats by their neighbors. Instead, they were perceived as laborers, entrepreneurs, and good neighbors. In Chapter 2, based on a content analysis of local newspaper data, I show how refugees were portrayed as Buffalo’s model minority achieving success through institutional means. The addition of cultural diversity was also seen as a benefit.

This project has attempted to investigate the peculiar disjunction between the perceptions and portrayals in Western New York and the larger national discourse. I contend that this disjunction is a reflection of instrumentality and isolation and old fashioned definitions of racism. That is, because immigrants are economically useful and remain relatively isolated in their respective locales, criminal and national security threat is less salient.
The immediate question is what role did social desirability play in producing this disjunction? The notion of social desirability suggests that respondents want to tell researchers what they think the researchers want to hear. Social desirability is inextricably linked to the social construction of racism and deviance. Racism became a form of deviance in the 1960s. This is the story of how KKK and Nazis became what Becker (1963) calls outsiders. It is also a story of how social structural explanations fell out of favor for individualism, meritocracy, and the American Dream. While, the civil rights laws and changing attitudes of actors are evidence that people began to see the hypocrisy of World War II Nazism, domestic racism, and other forms of inequality. However, as Massey (2008) notes, eventually there was declining support for aggressively combating racism and nativism.

This chapter suggests that social desirability is less about respondents saying what their interviewers want to hear and more about old-fashioned notions of racism. Old-fashioned racism allows the supposed “non-racist” people to pigeonhole and set certain criteria as racist and others non-racist. However, the role of social structure and its influence on mobility is absent. Whether my respondents lied or were self-monitoring is not the focus. Rather, I focus on the social construction of racism as a form of deviance and how it perpetuates the false narrative of the model minority while excluding structural inequality from its criteria. This is the cautious guise under which perceptions, portrayals, and social change must be looked at in the 21st century. Resistance can be seen in the actions of individuals associated with the “#MeToo” movement, student victims at Parkland High School, and Black Lives Matter. However, will the United States see yet another attitudinal and legislative shift that fails to produce social change? Should gentrification happen, will refugees and immigrants be protected? And if they resist will they still be seen as model immigrants? Similar to Stanley Lieberson’s (1981) argument made almost
forty years ago, immigrant success framed in terms of the model minority myth and the success of the American Dream, are the great non-sequiturs of our time.
CHAPTER 5:
A CAUTIONARY TALE ABOUT INTERPRETING SOCIAL CHANGE

When I started this project, I wanted to understand how ordinary, everyday people rationalize their support for discriminatory, exclusionary, and punitive perspectives and policies. Although much has been written and said about White Supremacists and Neo-Nazis, since the Civil Rights Movement these groups have been redefined as outsiders, folk devils, and deviants (Becker 1963; Cohen 1972). Thus, I was less interested in these types of groups and more concerned with (1) how and why everyday, ordinary people support polices that are discriminatory, exclusionary, punitive, and restrictionist, (2) how they frame their support for these polices as logical, neutral, objective, and rational, and (3) how the native-born framed their racism and nativism as logical in a climate that asks them to choose between their bias and their security.

There is a voluminous literature on the relationship between anti-immigrant sentiment and moral panics. Such moral panics have resurfaced since Donald Trump’s campaign and presidency. When this project was being designed, and during much of the data collection process, Trump was gaining popularity. His “America First” message that emphasized protectionism and decried political correctness resonated with many Americans. As Hochschild (2016:15) notes, “When we listen to a political leader, we don’t simply hear words: we listen predisposed to want to feel certain things.” This is a very important point given the role that affective dimensions of prejudice play in shaping policy preferences and the policies themselves. In her “journey to the heartland of the right,” (Hochschild 2016) she found good, ordinary people advocating for policies against their self-interests. It is these people I wanted to understand.
The most famous of Donald Trump’s campaign themes were policy suggestions for a Mexican Border Wall and a Muslim Ban. Those campaign promises and policy preferences have resulted in the approval of a border wall and a ban on Muslims from seven countries set to be debated in the supreme court. In December, the latest version of this law was allowed to go into effect (Liptak 2018). These ideas, themes, and legislation were not only reminiscent of the post-September 11th era, but of anti-immigrant and anti-minority sentiment from earlier days. Japanese interment, the Red Scare, Chinese exclusion, Mexican deportation, and Jim Crow are all examples of this type of necessary evil for the supposed greater, public good.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the “greater good” was social defense and the protection of the racial stock (Ferri 1906; Grant 1916). During the 1980s and 1990s the “greater good” was African American crime and Mexican illegal immigration. Since 2001 the “greater good” has been national security. In each of these cases, the ends justified the discriminatory and punitive means. This framing is similar to arguments made by neo-classicists (benefits outweigh the costs legitimizing criminal behavior) and anomie-strain criminologists (the ends justify the means legitimizing criminal behavior). Despite the consequences for their victims, ordinary, everyday people’s policy preferences and perspectives aligned with all of these measures. (Henslin 2014; Weitz 2003).

I studied peoples’ perceptions of immigrants in Western New York in and around Buffalo. I conducted the research in two regions, one rural and one urban. This region was in the middle of a debate about the viability of accepting refugees. I expected, at the very least, to find concern about accepting refugees and immigrants. Instead, what I found was rejection of restrictive measures in principle and criticism of those who espoused them. Along the dimensions of crime, culture and work, refugees were perceived positively. However, the false
narrative of the model minority myth was also prevalent, particularly in portrayal of immigrants and refugees.

In my analysis of The Buffalo News, Buffalo Rising, and Buffalo Spree immigrants were represented as entrepreneurs and good neighbors. Overall, I found that immigrants’ cultural and financial contributions to the West Side were appreciated and seen as positive. They were portrayed as model minorities who were contributing to the collective efficacy and revitalization of the West Side. Although perceptions and portrayals were positive, this idea is problematic because it ignores two aspects of community: one that facilitates immigrant success (organizations and resettlement agencies) and the other that maintains their place in the hierarchy (entrepreneurialism enclosed in ethnic niches).

The findings from these two chapters were consistent. My respondents’ perceptions and media portrayals both constructed immigrants and refugees as laborers, entrepreneurs, and good neighbors. However, both perpetuate the Model Minority myth by valorizing immigrant attainment through institutional means. Research has demonstrated the damage this myth has done due to its ability to overshadow persistent interpersonal, institutional, and structural racism.

There is a peculiar disjunction between this Model Minority framing of immigrants in these communities and the larger national discourse. Whereas national rhetoric became more anti-Mexican and anti-Muslim, in the locales I studied, the rhetoric was positive. This project investigated this disjunction. Thus, I asked: (1) What are the narratives and portrayals about immigrants and refugees on the ground in rural and urban areas in Western New York? (2) How do these narratives and portrayals contrast with those in local and national media? I argue that these positive portrayals and perceptions are reflections of two factors: (1) immigrants’ degree of
isolation and economic contributions to their communities and (2) the social construction of principled racism as a form of deviance.

Instrumentality and necessity were two frequent themes in interviews. Respondents in the Farm Belt noted they were dependent on immigrants for their labor to sustain their livelihood. On the West Side respondents said that immigrants were revitalizing the neighborhood through their entrepreneurialism. Refugees in Buffalo boosted an economically depressed region through entrepreneurialism; immigrants have slowly been repopulating the region, purchasing homes, and starting businesses. This has helped to revitalize a previously blighted neighborhood.

The classification of racism as a form of deviance partly explains the positive sentiments in Chapter 2, the Model Minority framing in Chapter 3, and the potential social desirability discussed in Chapter 4. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum. There were many advancements for immigrants and minorities during this time. Most of these advancements were legislative and judicial. Brown vs. Board of Education outlawed the Jim Crow regime in southern states. Several months earlier, Mendez vs. Westminster ended segregation of Mexican Americans in the Southwest. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned discrimination in public accommodations. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 eliminated the quotas put in place by the Johnson Reed Act of 1924. The Community and Reinvestment Act of 1977 outlawed redlining. These laws were perceived to put an end to racism. Desmond and Emirbayer (2010) refer to this as the legalistic fallacy.

Although there have been changes in attitudes since the 1950s and the perceptions and portrayals I found were positive, the findings of this research beg the question: How much has changed since the 17th century? Scholars have taken different positions regarding this question. The majority of the answers fall into two camps: mission accomplished and mission incomplete.
For example, Rosenberg (1990) argues that not much has changed and that courts have been limited in their effects on social change. On the other hand, McCann (1990) contends that there have been incremental changes over time, most notably the increase in rights consciousness. Some scholars have argued that things will improve (Alba 2009; Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch 2012) while others have more pessimistic evaluations (Dietrich and Bonilla-Silva 2009; Yancey 2003).

While racial attitudes have changed since the civil rights movement, research on social desirability and covert forms of racism and discrimination challenge the notion that America has fully turned the corner. The civil rights movement established principled and overt racism as deviant behaviors. Although they were the norm and accepted prior to the 1960s, such behavior and attitudes were not only legally prohibited but those who continued to express these antiquated forms of vitriol were scapegoated and stigmatized drawing further attention away from the institutional racism, invisible knapsacks, coded language, and microaggressions that persist today.

Some might argue that the data presented in this research project provide further evidence that the United States has turned the racial corner. Certainly some would interpret my findings as evidence that nativism, racism, and xenophobia are over or, at the very least, they are not as serious as before. However, these findings must be viewed with caution. They do not mean the end of racism but they do mean that when changing attitudes about racism in principle combine with community factors such as instrumentality, ethnic niches, and organizational intervention, threat maybe less salient. These factors create conditions of non-zero sum mobility that do not eliminate threat, but make it less salient. In sum, this research is a cautionary tale of how to think about and interpret social and neighborhood change.
While my findings indicate that perceptions and portrayals of immigrants in the Farm Belt and on the West Side were positive, this positivity was also accompanied by the perpetuation of the Model Minority myth. Therefore, although there were many positive sentiments shared about immigrants and their contributions, the more serious problem was lack of attention to social structure in interview and media data. Racism, nativism, and Islamophobia are still only understood as individual characteristics and attributes of a few bad people.

Discussions of race and its relationship to the achievement of cultural goals still maintain some of the Horatio Alger mythology of the past. This can lead to appraising immigrants’ hard work and success as evidence that racism is over. However, what is important is not the perceptions and portrayals themselves but how people are talking about the immigrants’ success in terms of the value foundations of the American Dream without attention to persistent inequality. Conditions of non-zero sum mobility facilitated by enclosure in enclaves and niches may explain why portrayals and perceptions are not negative as I expected. In sum, it is important to acknowledge the strides that have been made without ignoring the persistent effects of racial inequality.

This project has attempted to think about social change using criminology, urban sociology, and literature on race and racism. While more entrepreneurialism and positive reception are good and evidence of change, there are still persistent inequalities. Although there are positive perceptions and portrayals – and we have come a long way since Amos N’ Andy and Minstrelsy – the way these groups are talked about still has problematic assumptions. This research has provided a way to think about racial perceptions and portrayals in the twenty first century.
**Future Directions**

I plan to extend this research further by investigating how Latinos, African Americans, and Muslims in other contexts (e.g., the criminal justice system) become proxies for stereotypes and therefore view criminalization through the lens of Tilly’s durable inequalities. I am curious, for example, about how the criminalization of groups and associated practices contribute to the reproduction, perpetuation, and maintenance of inequality over time.

These groups are often labeled terrorists, illegal immigrants, and criminals, which are part and parcel of Islamophobia, nativism, and racism. I also plan to study perceptions and portrayals of racial groups writ large in other areas like Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, New York City, Chicago, and Philadelphia. It will be interesting to see if these findings hold up in border cities and other Rustbelt locations.

I would also like to study these dynamics in other Rustbelt cities such as Detroit, Milwaukee, and Pittsburgh. I would like to explore the relationship between local economies, crime, illegal immigration, and terrorism. I am also interested in “American Dream” framing and Model Minority myth, revitalization, and deindustrialization in other Rustbelt and agricultural areas. In addition, research on Muslim and non-Muslim Arab Americans, their experiences, and how they are perceived by others may shed light on unspoken comparisons between them and other minority groups. Finally, I would like to compare results in the Detroit area and Western New York area to examine if the Model Minority myth is prevalent in other Rustbelt cities or that immigrants are perceived as cultural, criminal, and occupational invaders. It will be interesting to see if these instrumental narratives about immigration are persistent across locales.
Policy Implications

As mentioned earlier, the two social settings my respondents live in are akin to what Elijah Anderson (2011) calls “cosmopolitan canopies.” These are ethnically heterogeneous spaces where civil and ethnic barriers are less salient. When immigrants are closed off to niches and jobs that serve and employ members of the dominant group, criminal threat narratives are mitigated and less salient. Niches act as another form of what Loic Wacquant (2008; 2012) calls “ethnoracial closure,” where minority groups are bounded and excluded from dominant groups.

As long as migrants and refugees are not seen as competitors – and as long as they keep their social distance – threat is mitigated and not as salient. The reason why the West Side, in particular, is simultaneously a cosmopolitan canopy and a system of ethnoracial closure is the diversity of these canopies is only tolerated due to immigrant instrumentality and isolation. This fact leaves unanswered: What about the structural problems immigrants face? For example, the story of gentrification on the West Side is still an unfinished one. If the West Side gentrifies, will immigrants be displaced? If immigrants move out of their current enclaves, will they be met with the same acceptance? The city of Buffalo is at a crossroads and must remain vigilant regarding the threat of gentrification. It can be a model for other Rustbelt cities. This research shows that organizational facilitation is key to this process. I hope that organizations like WEDI can help other, non-immigrant groups as well.

Immigration and criminal justice policy have been historical points of contention as they relate to race. During times of uncertainty, groups are targeted. This research is another example of how immigrants improve neighborhoods. Immigration policy in the United States needs to become more welcoming and less antagonistic. At the neighborhood level, policies need to continue to be inclusive and help facilitate the integration rather than displacement of
immigrants. In addition, policies need to better target the systems of oppression themselves rather than their symptoms and effects.
REFERENCES


Schmidt, Silke. 2014. *(Re-) framing the Arab/Muslim : mediating orientalism in contemporary Arab American life writing*. Verlag: Deutsche Nationalbibliothek.


