Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010. Pp. vii + 380 $35.00 (ISBN 978-0-674-03597-3).
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When I was a high school student in Maryland during the 1980s, I remember my social studies teacher's lecture on the aftermath of the United States Civil War. According to her, blacks were actually worse off following the end of slavery because they had few resources to draw on and their former white masters were only concerned about them as a threat and a social irritant. Because blacks were no longer enslaved, they wandered aimlessly over the southern landscape and committed petty crimes in order to survive. I do not remember any mention by her of the black legislators, businessmen, ministers, and teachers who attempted to build a new life for themselves and the region. My teacher's portrayal of the South during Reconstruction as a chaotic place filled with formerly enslaved blacks rambling about clearly implied the need for law and order.

Khalil Gibran Muhammad's bold new study of the links between race and criminalization helps to explain why high school teachers like mine believed that blacks (and the country as a whole) were much better off having slavery. Studies of race and the criminal justice system in the postbellum South have appeared most prominently in the past two decades, such as David M. Oshinsky's *Worse Than Slavery*, Alex Lichtenstein's *Twice the Work of Free Labor*, Martha A. Myers' *Race, Labor, and Punishment in the New South*, and Mary Ellen Curtin's *Black Prisoners and Their World*.[1] Muhammad's work also adds to a growing literature that situates the nineteenth century as the starting point for the link between race and crime, such as Roger Lane's *Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia*, Marilyn S. Johnson's *Street Justice*, Jeffrey S. Adler's *First in Violence, Deepest in Dirt*, and Kali N. Gross's *Colored Amazons*.[2] What makes Muhammad's study so significant and important is its focus on the role the social sciences played in literally "creating" the modern black criminal.

1. David M. Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery, Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor, The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (New York: Verso, 1996); Martha A. Myers, *Race, Labor, and Punishment in the New South* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998); Mary Ellen Curtin, *Black Prisoners and Their World: Alabama, 1865–1900* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

2. Roger Lane, *Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia, 1860–1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986); Marilyn S. Johnson, *Street Justice, A History of Police Violence in New York City* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003); Jeffrey S. Adler, *First in Violence, Deepest in Dirt, Homicide in Chicago, 1875–1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Kali N. Gross, *Colored Amazons, Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880–1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

The book's strength is its focus on the intellectual trends influencing late nineteenth and early twentieth century ideas about race. Harvard scientist Nathaniel Shaler, for example, rejected the romantic portrayal of slavery ascendant among some writers, but argued that white southerners were correct in seeking harsh new ways of subjugating emancipated blacks. The central problem, according to Shaler, was the inferior nature of blacks that demanded this response, not the desire by whites for power and control. Demographers such as Frederick Hoffman provided additional ammunition using the new field of statistics, and showed that the increase in black crime rates was clear evidence of the impossibility of blacks ever becoming a part of the body politic. Celebrated racial liberals such as Jane Addams and Mary White Ovington, Muhammad continues, interpreted black crime rates as evidence of their cultural inferiority. High crime rates among European immigrants, on the other hand, were attributed to the dehumanizing effects of poverty caused by rapid industrialization. Muhammad shows how racial liberals consciously or unwittingly failed to see blacks as one more struggling group, like European immigrants, and, ironically, used blacks' supposed natural inferiority to show how the Irish, Poles, and Italians could become assimilated Americans through progressive social policies. In other words, blacks were used as markers against which national unification and progress was defined.

To be sure, not all reformers and social scientists thought the same way. Black intellectuals such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells, and Kelly Miller emerge as heroes fighting to decouple analyses of crime from culture and instead pushed for recognition of environmental causes. Later, national figures such as sociologist Charles S. Johnson and local researchers such as Philadelphia's Anna J. Thompson emphasized the structural causes of black violence during the 1920s. Yet black reformers and social scientists' efforts failed to curb increasing segregation and isolation in northern cities during and after the migrations of black southerners between 1900 and 1960. In showing us how the ideology of black criminality led to the withholding of liberal social policies and to crime prevention efforts due to blacks' natural "inferiority," Muhammad convincingly argues it is simply wrong to believe that white fear of and obsession with black crime began only with the riots and increasing ghettoization of the 1960s and 1970s. His book is therefore absolutely essential reading for researchers and students who are interested in historically contextualizing the idea of the black criminal.

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