

Sydney Terris

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Criminalizing Non-White Bodies

The United States' political climate of the 1980s engendered the exponential, catastrophic increase in racial disparities concerning mass incarceration while inciting the widespread use of racially charged, derogatory terms including "the welfare queen". Decimating the autonomy and agency of non-white communities, the development of political discourse that unapologetically vilified racial minorities reinvigorated white male dominance in the patriarchal political paradigms pervading Western culture. To this point, Richard Banks' *Beyond Profiling: Race, Policing, and the Drug War* and Julilly Kohler-Hausmann's *The Crime of Survival: Fraud Prosecutions, Community Surveillance and the Original "Welfare Queen"* illustrate mass incarceration and welfare stereotypes as criminalizing racially marginalized individuals to ultimately suppress the agency non-white communities.

To begin, mass incarceration targeted at non-white bodies disrupts community legitimacy and, consequently, inhibits the agency of racially marginalized groups. Essentially, "because imprisonment often results in loss of the right to vote even after release, a high rate of imprisonment will substantially diminish a group's political power, including its ability to influence the laws that disenfranchise" non-white bodies from predominantly white society (Banks 596). That is to say, criminalization through mass incarceration disproportionately affects black individuals, tangibly inhibiting the socio-political representation of black communities. Most importantly, the permanent elimination of voting rights due to characterizations of previously incarcerated citizens as inherently deviant criminals disrupts the voice and visibility of communities enduring inordinately high rates of imprisonment. Overall, by criminalizing

racially marginalized communities through mass incarceration, patriarchal societal structures hinder the expression of agency by racial minorities in the socio-political sphere.

Continuing, social stereotypes concerning racially non-white welfare recipients undermine narratives of oppression among marginalized communities to further inhibit the expression of agency by racial minorities. Centrally, “connecting ‘queen’ to popular images of welfare recipients symbolically transmit[s] multiple messages with derogatory racial, gender and class subtexts” that, when linked to images to welfare recipients, “discredit poor women's voices and insinuate that their claims of material hardship [are] disingenuous and malicious” threats to dominant, Western patriarchal culture (Kohler-Hausmann 335). In other words, depicting racially non-white women as criminals of the welfare system intrinsically parallels racial minorities with deviant behavior that threatens white male dominance over socio-political paradigms governing patriarchal society. Fundamentally, eroding racially marginalized women’s agency through stereotypes portraying non-white communities as felonious in nature devalues narratives of racial oppression rooted in structural hindrance of non-white visibility. Moreover, subversive public sphere discourse on the criminal nature of non-white welfare recipients stemming from racially-charged stereotypes including the “welfare queen” innately discredit narratives of racial oppression to suppress the agency of non-white communities and maintain the socio-political dominance of patriarchal societal paradigms.

In conclusion, both Richard Banks’ *Beyond Profiling: Race, Policing, and the Drug War* and Julilly Kohler-Hausmann’s *The Crime of Survival: Fraud Prosecutions, Community Surveillance and the Original “Welfare Queen”* delve into the purposeful suppression of racial minority agency through mass incarceration and welfare stereotypes. Most notably, the criminalization of non-white communities vilifies racially marginalized individuals as inherently

deviant in order to inhibit the voice and visibility of non-white socio-political groups. At the crux, illustrating non-white communities as inherently felonious undermines and silences narratives of racially based oppression, ultimately perpetuating white male dominance within Western patriarchal discourse.