

Angry Young Men, Veiled Young Women

Constructing a New Population Threat

THE CORNER HOUSE

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Current public and policy debates about "terrorism", particularly in the United States and Britain, often set up a sharp divide between East and West. On the one side lies Islamic "fundamentalism" and a supposed Arab "envy" of US "wealth and freedom", on the other the liberating force of the US and its allies.¹ There is "no neutral ground in the fight between civilization and terror," declared President George W. Bush in a March 2004 White House address, "because there is no neutral ground between good and evil, freedom and slavery, and life and death."² On this view, terrorism emanates from the "Third World", with the history and politics of the West forming no part of the story.³

Increasingly contributing to this tidy divide is a discipline known as "strategic demography", which uses population characteristics such as age, ethnicity, geographic location and numbers to help locate terrorist or criminal threats. Strategic demography's statistics both lend legitimacy to, and derive meaning from, the alarmist images and narratives that are today so often used to describe enemy "others", particularly in the Islamic South.⁴

One example is so-called "youth bulge" theory, which refers to the large proportion of the world's population aged 27 years old and under, the majority of whom live in the South. In the eyes of many Western demographers, military analysts and intellectuals, this "youth bulge" – now 50 per cent of the world's people – has a double aspect. In countries that provide formal education and employment for large proportions of their young people, the youth bulge is a "demographic bonus". In the South, on the other hand, it often spells a "political hazard"⁵ and a threat to social and economic stability and security.

This briefing sets out a short history and critique of youth bulge theory in the context of the attack on New York's World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 and the subsequent growth of US militarism at home and abroad. It aims not only to call attention to how the theory reflects, and is reflected in, racial, gender and age discrimination, but also to suggest how it is being contested.

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Images of angry young men of colour as potential terrorists and veiled young women as mothers of future terrorists bolster the “youth bulge” theory.

The images and theory justify US military intervention and population control efforts in the South.

Violence in Numbers?

Developed in 1985 by geographer Gary Fuller during a stint as visiting scholar in the Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA’s) Office of Global Issues, formal “youth bulge” theory originally aimed to provide US intelligence analysts with a tool to predict unrest and uncover potential national security threats. It claims that a proportion of more than 20 per cent of young people in a population signals the possibility of political rebellion and unrest. It equates large percentages of young men with an increased possibility of violence, particularly in the South, where, analysts argue, governments may not have the capacity to support them.⁶

Putting a new spin on the old adage of “power in numbers”, “youth bulge” theory suggests potential *violence* in numbers. The “power of numbers” it envisages – coloured by racial, cultural and gender stereotypes – is a wholly negative force, devoid of the potential for positive change.

Bolstering the theory is a twinned set of images employed by US government and other Western intellectuals since well before the events of September 11, 2001 — images of angry young men of colour as potential terrorists and veiled young women as victims of repressive regimes who control future population growth rates. The implied dual threat — of both explosive violence and explosive fertility — provides an apparently seamless racially- and gender-based rationale for continued US military intervention and US-promoted population control initiatives in other countries, particularly in the South. It also justifies government surveillance of Muslims and Arabs within US borders, since it pictures young people of colour, wherever they may be, as a threat to security, the environment and democracy.

Media commentators have eagerly embraced all these images. In a special October 2001 report entitled “Why Do They Hate Us?” speculating on the reasons for the 9/11 attacks, *Newsweek* magazine published a picture of a five- or six-year-old Arab boy holding what appeared to be an automatic weapon, together with photos of young Arab men protesting and burning an effigy of President George W. Bush at an anti-US demonstration. The answer to the magazine’s question, it claimed, was in part that:

“Arab societies are going through a massive youth bulge, with more than half of most countries’ populations under the age of 25 . . . A huge influx of restless young men in any country is bad news. When accompanied by even small economic and social change, it usually produces a new politics of protest.”⁷

Some of the same phrases have echoed in punditry and popular journalism ever since. In 2003, *Newsday* saw a “demographic time bomb ticking” behind familiar “images of war, revolution, insurgency and terrorism in the Middle East”:

“Dangerous demographic trends typified by a massive youth ‘bulge’ — an extraordinarily high proportion of young people among the population — all but guarantee increased social instability that few regimes will be able to withstand.”⁸

Indeed, 9/11 proved a watershed for popular and policy acceptance of the “youth bulge” figure of speech. In 2000, a search on the internet

6. Fuller, G. E. and Hoch, R., “Youth Bulges in Asia,” 1998, unpublished paper on file with author.
7. Zakaria, F., “Why Do They Hate Us: The Politics of Rage,” *Newsweek*, October 15, 2001, pp.22-40: 32.
8. Fuller, G. E., “Demographics = Mideast Turmoil,” *Newsday*, 29 September 2003, A21.

yielded few hits for the phrase. Today, the figure can reach 2,000. Critical examination of the theory, however, has been lacking. Most writing and analysis on “youth bulge” theory simply assumes that it is “common sense” without critically exploring its foundations or testing whether it is credible in various cultural or historical contexts.

This briefing aims to help fill this gap by linking the theory to negative images of young people promulgated in the US and the punitive policy measures that aim to control them, as well as to patterns of global US military and economic aggression.

Superpredators and Teen Welfare Queens

A good place to begin assessing the dangers of policy responses to the “youth bulge” theory is with the “superpredator” theory that originated in the US in the mid-1990s.

The “superpredator” theory equated a rise in the proportion of young men in a given population with a rise in the numbers of criminal young men. It institutionalised the view that there is violence in numbers — specifically numbers of young men of colour in the US. In the words of the Princeton professor who first thought it up, John DiIulio (who has since served as the first Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives under George W. Bush), “more boys begets more bad boys.”⁹ DeIulio’s influential article, “The Coming of the Super-Predators,” predicted that with the strength of numbers behind them, young male criminals, or “superpredators,” would tend to commit ever more serious crimes. DiIulio saw young black and Latino men in the inner city as the instigators of this wave of super-crime, with criminal activity only later spreading among young white men in suburbs and rural areas.

DiIulio’s assertion that “Americans are sitting atop a demographic crime bomb”¹⁰ resonated with policy-makers and politicians alike. The theory had a tremendous impact on the way the US government dealt with young people, particularly young men of colour, and contributed to the rise of a lethal image of a ruthless young male criminal that caught and held public attention. Former Congressional Representative Bill McCollum, a Florida Republican, declared that “today’s superpredators are feral, presocial beings with no sense of right and wrong.”¹¹

The “superpredator” image corresponds with another gendered, racialised and age-based image, that of the teen mother “welfare queen,” which resembles in some ways the “veiled young woman” image of the “youth bulge” trope. If the “superpredator” image pictures young men of colour in the inner city as potential criminals, the “teen welfare queen” image suggests that unmarried teenage mothers produce *subsequent* generations of menacing males.

In the pro-marriage US environment, single mothers, particularly black mothers, have long been accused of raising their children inadequately and perpetuating generational cycles of poverty, addiction and crime.¹² As mothers of potential “superpredators,” they become even more of a problem. This could well be one reason why there were renewed government efforts in the 1990s to reduce teen birth rates through “family cap” measures that deny welfare recipients additional cash benefits for children born while their mothers were on

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9. DiIulio, J. J., “The Coming of the Super-Predators,” *The Weekly Standard*, 27 November 1995, 1, 11, p.23.

10. Ibid.

11. Ayers, W., “The Criminalization of Youth: Politicians Promote Lock-‘Em Up Mentality,” *Rethinking Schools* 12, 2, Winter 1997/98.

12. See, for instance, United States Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,” (The Moynihan Report), US Government Print Office, Washington, 1965.

welfare; through abstinence and contraception education initiatives; and through welfare-to-work measures (*see* Box below).¹³ While the connection between the “superpredator” and the “teen welfare queen” was never made explicit in these initiatives, concern about teen motherhood accelerating US population growth was obvious, with the President’s Council on Sustainable Development expressing alarm about “another Connecticut” being added in population each year and “another California each decade”.¹⁴

13. President’s Council on Sustainable Development, *Population and Consumption*, Washington, DC, 1996, http://www.whitehouse.gov/PSCD/Publications/TF_Reports/pop-chap-1.html, accessed 27 October 2000.

14. *Ibid.*

From the beginning, anti-prison and youth liberation activists, among others, organised to dispel the “superpredator” myth, linking it to increased domestic police militarisation, the so-called war on drugs,

“Welfare Deform” as a Tool of Population Control

In the 1990s, the government of US President Bill Clinton undertook sweeping “welfare reform”. The reform significantly worsened the plight of many families, particularly those headed by single mothers, and was quickly dubbed “welfare deform” by critics.

Clinton’s programme dramatically cut available funding, preached “personal responsibility” over government support, and privatised welfare services.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, which Clinton signed on 22 August 1996, required welfare recipients to be working within two years of receiving benefits (even when there were not enough jobs available). It set a five-year lifetime limit on receiving welfare payments and allowed states to lower this limit if they wanted to (almost half have done so). It introduced “family cap” measures, which denied benefits for children born while their mother was receiving welfare. In 2004, the US Congress reauthorised all these “reforms”.

By 1999, the number of welfare recipients had dropped to about half its 1994 peak, although only about one in five of those leaving welfare went on to a job. But the average earnings of many people who no longer received welfare remained below poverty levels. Many studies report increased hunger and homelessness among families with children since 1996.

In 1996, the majority of welfare recipients were white, although welfare and poverty were associated in the public eye with people of colour, especially African-Americans. Welfare

reform, however, has intensified racial and gender discrimination for women of colour trying to get a job to such an extent that, as a result, there *are* now more black than white people receiving welfare benefits.

In addition, Clinton’s reforms enabled individual states to curb welfare recipients’ civil liberties by, for example, authorising them to impose mandatory narcotic drug testing on those enrolled on welfare as a prerequisite for receiving benefits. To date, however, only Michigan has tried to do so, and its attempt was blocked as unconstitutional.

Curbing Reproduction

The goal of Clinton’s welfare reform, as Rutgers University law professor Dorothy Roberts writes, was not in fact to reduce government handouts or the numbers of those dependent on them.

In some states of the US, after all, benefits paid to working parents in the form of income tax credits, tax exemptions and subsidised child care are three times those given to a single mother on welfare. Other government subsidies – including farm support and tax benefits for corporations and for holders of mortgages, pensions or health insurance – continue to outstrip spending on the jobless poor.

The point of welfare reform, rather, was to single out unmarried black mothers and the poor as pathological beings and to moralise about their supposed “inappropriate reproductive behaviour” while on welfare. The legislation implicitly

endorses questionable Malthusian claims that the promise of benefits, no matter how meagre, encourages women to have children; that being dependent on welfare causes poverty; and that marriage can solve the resulting problems.

As Roberts notes, welfare reform sees curbing reproduction – particularly of black women – as “a solution to social injustice” and as “a way of ridding America of poor people”. Its “family cap” measures (in effect, “child exclusion” rules) and policies promoting marriage and welfare-to-work are in keeping with other US efforts to control poor people’s reproductive behaviour that disproportionately affect women of colour.

Crime and Punishment

One particular target of these other efforts are users of crack cocaine. Erroneous media portrayals of infants irreparably damaged by their mothers’ use of crack during pregnancy and destined to become criminals have encouraged public support for official measures to stop addicts having babies.

Although US states tend to use existing legislation prohibiting child abuse or neglect of children to prosecute women for exposing their babies to narcotic drugs in the womb, the “primary concern”, as Roberts points out, is “typically the huge costs these children [allegedly] impose on taxpayers, rather than the children’s welfare”.

Rather than promoting treatment for pregnant women or mothers with substance abuse problems, many prosecutors and courts jail them, take custody of

and the rise of the prison-industrial complex (see Box, p.7).

The public fear resulting from promotion of the “superpredator” threat led to increased public support for punishing juvenile justice policies and encouraged alarmist news headlines such as “Superpredators Arrive” on the 22 January 1996 cover of *Newsweek*. These fears proved so exaggerated that the government was ultimately forced to backtrack. In February 2000, the US Department of Justice published a debunking report revealing that “levels of predatory crimes such as rape, robbery, and murder committed by juveniles have dropped significantly over the past several years, with robbery at its lowest level in a generation.”¹⁵

15. US Department of Justice, “Challenging the Myths,” *1999 National Report Series: Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Washington, 2000.

their babies at birth (although it is hard to find foster homes for them) and prosecute them for drug use. Some judges have imposed long-term birth control on women offenders as a condition of probation.

Although pregnant women of all socio-economic, racial and ethnic backgrounds use drugs, those punished have consistently been inner-city black users of relatively cheap crack, rather than richer users of powdered cocaine, which costs ten times as much. According to reproductive policy attorney Lynn Paltrow of the group National Advocates for Pregnant Women:

“the majority of women prosecuted have been low income women of color, despite the fact that most women who use illicit drugs while pregnant are white.”

One study found that black women were 10 times more likely than white women to be reported to civil authorities if health care providers believed that an infant was “prenatally exposed to an illicit drug”.

Nevertheless, many courts reviewing criminal charges and guilty verdicts based on a woman’s behaviour while pregnant have overturned the rulings. One court pointed out that women couldn’t know exactly what behaviour would be criminal as:

“many types of prenatal conduct can harm a fetus: . . . smoking during pregnancy, . . . failure to obtain prenatal care or proper nutrition, . . . consuming caffeine during pregnancy, . . . environmental hazards, such as exposures to solvents used by painters and dry cleaners, . . . [and] the contraction of or treatment for certain diseases, such as diabetes and cancer.”

In addition, several courts have warned that criminal sanctions could compel women to terminate their pregnancies in order to avoid arrest. Others have pointed out that criminal sanctions motivate pregnant women to avoid medical care, since to go to a doctor or hospital is to risk prosecution.

These prosecutions of women, in short, do not promote fetal health, protect children or resolve addiction problems, but rather undermine the health and well-being of both women and children. Roberts concludes that they:

“are better understood as a way of punishing Black women for having babies rather than as a way of protecting Black fetuses”.

“Voluntary” Efforts

It is not only the state that is targeting the fertility of impoverished women of colour. Some non-profit programmes such as Positive Prevention/CRACK (Children Requiring a Caring Community) aim to stop “crack mothers” having children altogether.

Positive Prevention offers US\$200 to women who are addicted to drugs or alcohol who can document that they have been sterilised or are using long-term birth control such as an injectable or implanted contraceptive. Those most likely to accept sterilisation or birth control in exchange for cash are invariably economically desperate. Because of poverty, they are often dealing with sexual and physical violence, HIV, mental illness, homelessness, instability, imprisonment, death row sentences, and discrimination and oppression.

Positive Prevention/CRACK does not provide long-term drug

treatment, low-cost or free prenatal and health care, affordable childcare, or educational and employment opportunities. Its approach ignores the fact that a pregnancy often motivates chemically-addicted women to seek treatment, and its birth control methods offer no protection from HIV. Instead, Positive Prevention/CRACK targets and punishes low income women with substance abuse problems, particularly black and Latina women, for their fertility. Concludes Roberts:

“the objective of reproductive control has never been primarily to reduce the numbers of Black children born into the world. It perpetuates the view that racial inequality is caused by Black people themselves and not by an unjust social order.”

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American Civil Liberties Union, “Welfare Drug Testing,” 15 April 2003, <http://www.aclu.org/DrugPolicyDrugPolicy.cfm?ID=12384&c=79>;

Roberts, D., “The Welfare Debate,” *Killing the Black Body*, Vintage Books, New York, 1997;

Paltrow, L., “Punishing Women for Their Behavior During Pregnancy: An Approach that Undermines the Health of Women and Children,” http://www.nida.nih.gov/PDF/DARHW/467-502_Paltrow.pdf;

Committee on Women, Population and the Environment, http://www.cwpe.org/Sex_Lies_and_Contraception_and_Fact_Sheet_on_Positive_Prevention/CRACK.

Policing and criminalising young people harms their education and reproductive health — and increases the likelihood of their entering the adult criminal justice system.

The “teen welfare queen” image, however, although it is as exaggerated as the “superpredator” image, has yet to be retracted by the government, and both images live on in the public and media imagination. The US continues to live with the punitive legacy of both theories, which perpetuate a public fear of young people as potential criminals and feed policies that increasingly police and criminalise young people in ways that affect their education, reproductive health, and likelihood of entering the adult criminal justice system.

The “superpredator” theory, for instance, is implicated in the rise in the number of young adults channelled into the criminal justice system. A 1998 report by the National Center for Juvenile Justice states that between 1992 and 1995, 40 states and the District of Columbia passed laws making it easier for states to try juvenile offenders as adults.¹⁶ For instance, California’s Proposition 21 requires children of 14-years-old and over to be tried in adult courts for murder or other serious crime charges.¹⁷

Moreover, although levels of juvenile violent crime remained constant between the 1980s and 1990s, juvenile violent crime arrest rates went up,¹⁸ disproportionately affecting young people of colour. According to the Center on Juvenile Crime and Justice, African-Americans make up more than half of youth admitted to prison, but only 15 percent of the population.¹⁹ Zero Tolerance Policies that institute high levels of surveillance and policing have, meanwhile, changed public school environments radically. In May 2003, the Advancement Project, a democracy and justice action group in the US, reported that:

“In school district after school district, an inflexible and unthinking zero tolerance approach to an exaggerated juvenile crime problem is derailing the educational process . . . The educational system is starting to look more like the criminal justice system.”²⁰

High school students across the country agree that “they’re making schools like prisons”:

“Most US high school students will have to walk by numerous hidden security cameras, outdoors and indoors, and go through an institutional-size metal detector manned by guards just to get into school each morning. Once there, students are subject to random searches of their bodies and belongings. Lockers can be searched without warning with or without the student present, and in many places police will use drug-sniffing dogs during raids where they search lockers and even students’ parked cars.”²¹

The “superpredator” myth, in short, though discredited, has seemingly grown beyond the scope first intended by DiIulio and his colleagues, and beyond the juvenile justice system, with far-reaching and still unfolding consequences on schools, courtrooms and welfare policies.

Birth of the Bulge

Although similar to the “superpredator” myth, the “youth bulge” theory incorporates additional ideas and images relating to globalisation, resource scarcity and the environment, and has different policy implications.

16. Griffin, P., Torbet, P., and Szymanski, L., *Trying Juveniles as Adults in Criminal Court: An Analysis of State Transfer Provisions*, US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Washington, DC, 1998.

17. ACLU, “ACLU Challenges CA Juvenile Justice Initiative”, 7 June 2000, Northern California ACLU, <http://www.aclu.org/CriminalJustice/CriminalJustice.cfm?ID=7970&c=46>.

18. For more information on crime rates during the 1990s, see US Department of Justice, *op. cit. supra* note 15.

19. http://www.cjcj.org/jjic/race_jj.php. Information from the Bureau of Justice Statistics indicates that of the 5.6 million people imprisoned in the US in 2001, 16.6 per cent were African-American, 7.7 per cent Hispanic and 2.6 per cent white. See <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/crimoff.htm#prevalence>, accessed 15 August 2004.

20. Advancement Project, “Zero Tolerance Policies Put Thousands of Kids on Jailhouse Track,” Advancement Project Press Release, Syndicated Programming, Inc., Washington, D.C., 12-18 June 2003.

21. Lyderson, K., “Zero Tolerance for Teens,” AlterNet, 1 July 2003, <http://www.alternet.org/story/16035>, accessed 1 July 2004.

The Economics and Politics of US Prisons

The number of people in United States prisons has more than quadrupled from half a million in 1980 to 2.1 million in 2003. In absolute numbers of those in jail and in per capita incarceration rates, the US leads the world.

Today, more than 6.9 million people in the US are behind bars, on parole, probation, or otherwise under supervision by the criminal justice system.

Two-thirds of prisoners are black or Latino — groups that comprise just over one-fifth of the population as a whole, but almost half of Americans living in poverty. Between 1986 and 1991, in addition, the number of women in prison -- although small in comparison with that of men — increased eight-fold. Most of these women are mothers, leaving future generations to grow up in care homes or on the streets.

Less Crime, More Prisoners

Like the postwar growth of the US military-industrial complex, the growth of today's prison-industrial complex reflects the interweaving of business and government interests for purposes of profit and social control.

The public rationale for the prison boom revolves around the "fight against crime", enthusiasm for which is stoked by an omnipresent media blitz about serial killers, missing children and "random violence".

Yet in reality, most of those locked up have committed non-violent crimes out of economic need. Violence occurs in less than 14 per cent of all reported crime, and injuries in just three per cent. In California, the top three charges resulting in incarceration are possession of a controlled substance; possession of a controlled substance for sale; and robbery. Murder, rape, manslaughter and kidnapping don't even make the top ten.

Prison population growth in the US, moreover, is linked not to crime rates — which have dropped since 1991 — but to

economic stagnation, unemployment, and the consequences of structural adjustment.

During the past two decades or so, welfare and social services have been cut, unions busted and corporations deregulated. Much capital has fled in search of cheaper labour markets in the South. The resulting plant closures and layoffs have disproportionately affected African-Americans and semi-skilled workers in urban centres, who have lost decent-paying jobs.

Into the economic hole left by this exodus of jobs has rushed the drug economy, duly followed by the state's "War on Drugs". Unsurprisingly, drug offenders today comprise the bulk of the population either in jail or on parole or probation.

Domestically, the War on Drugs has been a war against poor people, particularly black, urban men and women. African-Americans account for only 13 per cent of drug users, but 35 per cent of drug arrests, 55 per cent of drug convictions and 74 per cent of drug prisoners.

The difference between sentences handed down for possession of crack cocaine and those given for possession of powdered cocaine highlights the institutional racism of this system. Under federal law, it takes only five grams of crack cocaine to trigger a mandatory five-year minimum sentence — but 500 grams of powder. About 90 per cent of crack arrests are of African-Americans, while 75 per cent of powdered cocaine arrests are of whites.

Once in prison, moreover, offenders are likely to stay there longer than before. It is not so much by committing more people to prison but by imposing longer sentences and denying parole to prisoners that the US has attained an incarceration rate so out of proportion to that of other countries or its own previous history.

Costs and Profits

The cost of building prisons in the US averaged about US\$7 billion each year during the 1990s. Estimates for the annual expense of incarceration vary from \$20 billion

to \$35 billion. One report calculates that more than half a million people work in the US corrections system — more than any *Fortune* 500 company except General Motors.

Private corrections companies now run many prisons. Forming one of the fastest-growing sectors of the prison-industrial complex, such firms are paid a fixed sum per prisoner and hence have strong incentives to cut corners by skimping on food, staff, medicine, education, accommodation and other services. Staff tend to be poorly paid, poorly trained, ill-equipped and non-unionised. They are also often brutal — and private contracts mean less public scrutiny.

Other private companies are involved in building and provisioning prisons. Investment houses, construction firms, architects and firms specializing in food delivery, medical services, transportation and furniture all profit from prison expansion. Used military equipment is also flogged to the criminal justice system.

Still other private businesses, meanwhile, attempt to profit from prison labour. Superficially, the attractions are obvious: no strikes, no union organising, no unemployment insurance or workers' compensation to pay. Prisoners now do data entry for oil company Chevron, make telephone reservations for the airline TWA, raise hogs, shovel manure, and make circuit boards, limousines, waterbeds, and lingerie. They are generally paid a mere fraction of the cost of "free labour". Yet many have to work since, increasingly, prisons are charging inmates for basic necessities ranging from medical care to toilet paper to use of the law library to room and board itself.

Prisons have become a leading rural growth industry in the US. With traditional agriculture pushed aside by agribusiness, and many manufacturing industries stagnating, rural communities are vying with each other to get prisons built in their localities as sources of jobs and tax revenues.

Prison as Social Control

But the search for profits can explain only part of the skyrocketing growth in federal and state imprisonment over the past three decades.

For-profit prisons, which control about five per cent of all US prison beds, are losing money. Prison labour, although expanding, is not profitable or widespread. Less than five per cent of the incarcerated population are working. For most firms, argues sociologist Christian Parenti:

“there is simply too much cheap, military-disciplined labor on the outside [of prison] to make the hassles and irrationalities of doing business in prison worthwhile. With wages as low as 40 cents an hour . . . and generous tax breaks to boot, why open a sweatshop inside some bureaucratic hellhole?”

The economic benefits of new prisons are also disappointing for nearby communities if prison employees live outside the area. And while new prisons can pull in other employers such as medical services and retail chains, most prisons provision themselves from outside their local area.

A more significant root of the prison boom, sociologist Christian Parenti argues, lies in the need of US capitalism to “manage and contain its surplus populations and poorest classes

with paramilitary forms of segregation, containment, and repression.” The US criminal justice system, argues Parenti:

“regulates, absorbs, terrorizes, and disorganizes the poor. At the same time it promulgates racism, demonizing, disenfranchising, and marginalizing ever-larger numbers of brown working-class people; and in so doing it creates pseudo-explanations and racialized scapegoats”.

This provides politicians who cannot blame the US economic and social structure for economic and social anxieties with useful scapegoats: “the Black/Latino criminal, the immigrant, the welfare cheat, crackheads, super-predators, and so on.” A crucial function of prison labour, Parenti contends, is ideological:

“Working convicts make prison look efficient, moral, and useful . . . It is the perfect hybrid between moral revenge and economic efficiency.”

More important, prison allows for mass unemployment without the political destabilisation mass poverty can bring. In effect:

“The criminal justice crack-down, and its attendant culture of fear, absorbs the dangerous classes without politically or economically empowering them.”

The War on Drugs, for example, while it has not stopped drug use, has succeeded in taking thousands of unemployed (and potentially angry and rebellious) young men

and women off the streets. This US model of social control is now being marketed to the rest of the world along with neoliberal institutions and ideology.

According to prison activists Eve Goldberg and Linda Evans, prison can in many ways be seen as a pre-emptive strike. Put poor people away before they get angry. Incarcerate those at the bottom before they demand change. What drugs don’t damage (for example, the ability of communities to take action and to organise) mass imprisonment will surely destroy. In the view of Goldberg and Evans, opposing the expansion of the prison-industrial complex and supporting the rights and basic humanity of prisoners may be the only way to stave off the consolidation of a police state.

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Parenti, C., *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis*, Verso, London and New York, 1999;

The Sentencing Project, <http://www.sentencingproject.org>.

Although perhaps most strikingly pressed into service as justification for US programmes to remake the Middle East, the notion of the “youth bulge” is not applied to that region alone. Personified as a discontented, angry young man, almost always a person of colour, the “youth bulge” is seen as an unpredictable, out-of-control force in the South generally, with Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Asia and Latin America all considered hot spots. “Youth bulge” conflicts, it is implied, are capable of spilling over into neighbouring countries and even other areas of the world, including the US, and are an immediate threat that must be stopped.

The concept is not entirely new. US military analysts and academics have defined the growing numbers of young people in the South as a potential national security threat since the end of the Second World War, when the US became increasingly aware of the need for access to Southern raw materials to fuel US industry and for good relationships with Southern governments, while contending with anti-colonial

nationalism. Anxieties about population growth rates, which were increasing at an unprecedented rate, particularly in the South, added to US concerns about competition for resources, and young people were labelled as a particular threat. As social scientist Betsy Hartmann suggests in her book *Reproductive Rights and Wrongs*:

“The success of the Chinese Revolution, Indian and Indonesian nonalignment, independence movements in Africa, economic nationalism in Latin America — all these contributed to growing US fears of the Third World. Population growth, rather than centuries of colonial domination, was believed to fuel nationalist fires, especially given the growing proportion of youth.”²²

Decades later, the National Security Council’s 1974 Memorandum 200 on the “Implications of Worldwide Population Growth for US Security and Overseas Interests” also presented young people as a distinct threat to the US due to their presumed extreme, violent behaviours and susceptibility to “persuasion.” The language is similar to that framing today’s “youth bulge” figure of speech:

“[Y]oung people, who are in much higher proportions in many less developed countries, are likely to be more volatile, unstable, prone to extremes, alienation and violence than an older population. These young people can more readily be persuaded to attack the legal institutions of the government or real property of the ‘establishment,’ ‘imperialists,’ multinational corporations, or other — often foreign — influences blamed for their troubles.”²³

Buttressing such claims about the “volatility” of young people in general is scholarly work such as historian Herbert Moller’s 1968 article “Youth as a Force in the Modern World” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. Moller, indeed, goes so far as to associate young people’s presumed volatile behaviour with psychopathology:

“Although the individual ‘age curves’ of psychopathy (or ‘sociopathy’) assume a variety of shapes, all manifestations of this personality disorder — from ‘wild oats’ behaviour, excessive self-assertion and pugnacity to criminal acts — are predominantly correlated with youth. It follows that primitive tendencies and psychopathic behaviours can be expected to increase in any population commensurately with its youthfulness.”²⁴

This discourse of youth volatility in turn draws on a tradition of thought in Western psychology of adolescence dating back to the early 19th century. At that time, many intellectuals depicted young people as primitive savages on the path to “civilized” adulthood, characterising them as experiencing “storm and stress,” emotional changeableness, and, as savages, a proclivity for violence. People of colour and women were often seen as perpetually trapped in a “savage” stage of development, unable to obtain white men’s level of civilization, reason and maturity.²⁵

Of course, much of the language used to describe young people has changed since then. But, as the “superpredator” myth demonstrates, many of the basic assumptions of this discourse of adolescent savagery — and of colonialist language describing the savage, young, black Other — have endured.²⁶

***The “youth bulge”
is seen as an
unpredictable,
out-of-control force
in the South that
threatens
other areas.***

22. Hartmann, B., *Reproductive Rights and Wrongs*, South End Press, Boston, 1995, p.102.
23. “National Security Study Memorandum 200”, 1974, <http://www.africa2000.com/INDX/nssm200all.html>.
24. Moller, H., “Youth as a Force in the Modern World,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 10(3), 1968, p.257.
25. See, for example, Hall, G. S., *Adolescence*, D. Appleton & Co., New York, Vols. 1-2, 1904. Hall is credited with launching the psychology of adolescence through these books.
26. Education professor Nancy Lesko suggests that the “centrality of recapitulation theory in the history of the ideas of the modern adolescent alerts us to several important understandings: First, the modern concepts of child and adolescent development have a color and a gender. Second, recapitulation theory links ideas about developing children and adolescents to a paternalistic and exploitative colonial system, which endlessly reiterated the inadequacies of the natives and the need for Western rule. Finally, recapitulation theory’s intimacy with colonialism suggests that knowledge will provide a continuing gloss of and cover for the exercise of subordinating power that speaks of immaturity, emotionality, conformity, and irrationality” (Lesko, N., *Act Your Age: A Cultural Construction of Adolescence*, Routledge, London, 2001, p.35).

Biological Terrorists/Biological Mothers

The angry young men in the “youth bulge” story are often seen as driven to violence by their very biology. Researchers such as Christian Mesquida and Neil Weiner of Canada’s York University go so far as to contend that large groups of young men are biologically driven to engage in “coalitional aggression” partly because they want to attract sexual partners: “[in] poor countries, aggression may be the only resource young men possess to gain a spouse.”²⁷

In a similar vein, political science researchers Valerie Hudson and Andrea Den Boer argue that the practice of offspring sex selection in Asian countries – aborting female foetuses or abandoning girl children – is leading to a phenomenon of “surplus sons and missing daughters” that drives the males (whom Hudson and Den Boer label “losers in societal competition”) to coalitional aggression when they cannot find sexual partners, employment and education.²⁸ Despite (or perhaps because of) the arrogance displayed in this theory, the Central Intelligence Agency has consulted Hudson and Den Boer about how the US should develop policy towards countries with high male-female ratios.²⁹

The counterpart to the image of the aggressively heterosexual angry young man is that of a passive, veiled young woman, whose presence accentuates the implied violence and menace.³⁰ Volatile male youth in the South, it is implied, are a threat not only to US national security but also to the women in their own countries.

This, of course, is the cue for the White House and the US military to be presented as the saviour of these passive, veiled young victims in the name of “women’s rights”. In a November 2001 US radio broadcast, Laura Bush, wife of President George W. Bush, remarked:

“Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment. Yet the terrorists who helped rule that country now plot and plan in many countries. And they must be stopped. The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women.”³¹

The image is one which literary critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak identifies as a commonplace of the ideology of colonialism: “white men saving brown women from brown men.”³²

As Egyptian scholar Lila Abu-Lughod points out, however, the result is actually to harm women by promoting stereotypes and silencing their voices. The “passive young woman” image lumps together Southern and Muslim women into a single figure hidden behind a veil interpreted as a sign of “women’s unfreedom.”³³ Revealingly, the so-called “freedoms” promised by US invaders for women in Afghanistan and Iraq have yet to materialise. The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, a political/social organisation of Afghan women struggling for peace, freedom, democracy and women’s rights, reports that:

“The people of the world should know that though the disgusting, ludicrous and oppressive rule of Taliban was over in our ill-fated Afghanistan . . . this never means the end of the horrible miseries of our tortured women. Because contrary to the aspirations

27. Mesquida, C. and Weiner, N., “Young Men and War: Could We Have Predicted the Distribution of Violent Conflicts at the End of the Millennium?” *Woodrow Wilson ESCP Report*, 7, 2000.
28. Hudson, V. M. and Den Boer, A., “A Surplus of Men, A Deficit of Peace: Security and Sex Ratios in Asia’s Largest States,” *International Security*, 26, 4, 2002, p.12. “There is only one short-term strategy for dealing with [this] problem: Reduce their numbers”, suggest Hudson and Den Boer. “There are several traditional ways to do so: Fight them, encourage their self-destruction, or export them” (p.26). The researchers mention only in passing the contexts of “unequal resource distribution and generalized resource scarcity” without analysing the causes and creators of these contexts. See also Hudson, V. M. and Den Boer, A., *Bare Branches: The Security Implications of Asia’s Surplus Male Population*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2004. For an introduction to some of the issues concerning sex selection, see “A Decade After Cairo: Women’s Health in a Free Market Economy”, Corner House Briefing 31, www.thecornerhouse.org.uk
29. Glenn, D., “A Dangerous Surplus of Sons?” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 50, 34, 2004, p.A14.
30. The one arguably cannot exist without the other, even though the “veiled woman” image is never explicitly framed in the theory.
31. “Radio Address by Mrs. Bush,” Crawford, Texas, 17 November 2001, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011117.html>, accessed 16 August 2004.
32. Spivak, G. C., “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Nelson, C. and Grossberg, L., (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1988, pp.271-313.
33. Abu-Lughod, L., op. cit. supra note 1.
The politics of veiling is complex. In some historical contexts, taking the veil has been an act of resistance, for example, to the Shah in Iran before his overthrow in 1979. Today, some Muslim women regard wearing the veil as a refusal to be cowed by anti-Islamic sentiments. At the same time, however, many who do wear the veil may feel pressured to do so by conservative voices, often of men, from the Muslim religious Right who proclaim the binary formula: “either you support the Muslims by wearing the veil or you strengthen the infidels by abandoning your religion, community and traditions”.
In France, for example, the Muslim religious Right’s discourse has claimed that the new law implemented in September 2004 preventing the “display of all religious symbols in state schools” is an instance of racism directed exclusively against Muslims. The Right goes on to equate “traditions” with an anti-racist struggle – yet in the service of a right-wing political-religious project that generally opposes women’s rights. Indeed,

of our people and expectations of the world community, the Northern Alliance, these brethren-in-creed of the Taliban and Al-Qaida, are again in power and generously supported by the US government.”³⁴

Afghani women are still subject to state and family violence, rape, abduction and forced marriage, and still have very limited access to basic health care and education.³⁵ Nevertheless, “women’s rights” is likely to continue as a rationale for US military action in countries experiencing a “youth bulge”.³⁶

In line with the reactionary gender stereotyping of the “veiled young woman”, the young women of the “youth bulge” are seen mainly as potential mothers.³⁷ This reinforces the notion that young Southern women’s fertility is responsible for population growth — and, more specifically, for the rise in numbers of young male terrorists. For instance, US public policy professor Jack Goldstone opens an article drawing links between demographic change and violent conflict by noting that the current number of young women in the Third World ensures a rise in the number of young people in the global South.³⁸ (Here the resemblance to the “superpredator/teenage welfare queen” imagery used to describe the US itself is striking.) All the more reason, according to the “youth bulge” theory, for curtailing Southern birth rates immediately through population programmes focusing on women.³⁹ The lobby group, Population Action International, which works to strengthen political and financial support worldwide for population programmes, proposes that the US military team up with international aid agencies to further Southern women’s education, family planning services, and economic opportunity to ensure both US national security and the well-being of Southern countries themselves.⁴⁰

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a policy advocacy group with close ties to the US military and government, also aims to influence military policy. Senior fellow in strategic assessment at CSIS, Anthony Cordesman, contends that the US, as the primary global power, needs to shield its economy from threats such as the “youth bulge” by promoting population control.⁴¹

Such prescriptions virtually ignore the role of neoliberalism — and Western foreign policy — in increasing global insecurity and assume that demographic transitions from high birth and death rates to low birth and death rates, such as those experienced in the West over the past few hundred years, are templates for other countries to follow. In addition, they do not acknowledge the many varying economic, power and technological factors that affect population trends in different countries. One example is the “twin forces of modern technology and capitalism” that international development scholar Asoka Bandarage contends will serve to keep birth rates high in the South because they increase “social inequality and undermine economic security and self-sufficiency for the masses.”⁴²

Without examining such complexities, US humanitarian and military efforts to “empower” Southern women without changing US foreign policy are likely to be wildly ineffective. Given the history of sterilisation and other “population control” abuses in the South,⁴³ it is unlikely that new US initiatives to hasten a demographic transition will be welcome in many areas. Programmes to “empower” women

many critics of the French state would usually oppose such an agenda if it were not blurred by the conflation of “traditions” and identity. Many Muslim women in France, accordingly, both oppose the imposition of dress codes, denying that the veil is a symbol of their identity, and at the same time fight racism and Islamophobia. At issue is not just affirmation of identity, but also the construction and manipulation of identity.

For more information, see Ahmed, L., *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1993; Women Living Under Muslim Laws, <http://www.wluml.org>.

34. Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, “On the Situation of Afghan Women,” <http://rawa.fancymarketing.net/wom-view.htm>, accessed 13 July 2004.

35. “Afghanistan ‘No one listens to us and no one treats us as human beings’: Justice denied to women”, Amnesty International, October 6, 2003, <http://www.web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa110232003>.

36. Recent, seemingly more enlightened Western presentations of Middle Eastern women — such as *Time* magazine’s 2004 cover feature on new, mould-breaking female leaders in the region — in fact continue to follow the old narrative of passive, veiled women guided to freedom by the West’s tutelage and example.

37. Goldstone, J. A., “Population and Security: How Demographic Change Can Lead to Violent Conflict,” *Journal of International Affairs* 56, 1, 2002, p.3.

38. Ibid.

39. Cordesman, A. H., “The US Military and the Evolving Challenges in the Middle East,” 2002, at <http://www.nwc.navy.mil/press/Review/2002/summer/art3-su2.htm>, on file with the author.

40. Cincotta, R., Engelman, R. and Anastasion, D., *The Security Demographic: Population and Civil Conflict After the Cold War*, Population Action International, Washington, DC, 2003.

41. Cordesman, A. H., op. cit. supra note 39.

42. Bandarage, A., “Population and Development: Toward a Social Justice Agenda” in Silliman, J. and King, Y., (eds.) *Dangerous Intersections: Feminist Perspectives on Population, Environment, and Development*, South End Press, Boston, 1999, p.26.

43. For a summary of this history, see Betsy Hartmann’s *Reproductive Rights and Wrongs* op. cit supra note 22.

“Youth bulge” theory not only justifies US policies but also creates a picture of a disordered South prone to stereotypical violence and degradation.

economically, educationally or politically are also likely to be ineffective insofar as they (to use the words of writer Meredith Tax) “either bow to patriarchal culture or try to impose the culture of the developers.”⁴⁴ The practice issuing from “youth bulge” theory, in short, is fraught with dangers.

Bursting the Bounds

But “youth bulge” theory is not only a justification for US policy. It also contributes to an over-generalised picture of a disordered South prone to a stereotypical violence and degradation that its governments are not sophisticated enough to handle.⁴⁵ In addition, it reinforces a view of Southern cities as pathological, underestimating their functionality and over-exaggerating their violence.⁴⁶

Ex-CIA Director George Tenet, for example, testifies that:

“places that combine desperate social and economic circumstances with a failure of government to police its own territory can often provide nurturing environments for terrorist groups, and for insurgents and criminals. The failure of governments to control their own territory creates potential power vacuums that open opportunities for those who hate.”⁴⁷

Tenet goes on to assert that unemployed “youth bulges” “are historical markers for increased risk of political violence and recruitment into radical causes” and warns of an especially increased risk in the Middle East, particularly Iraq, Syria, Kuwait, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

In the hands of such “youth bulge” theorists, “radical causes” typically mean Islamic extremism and terrorism. The Chair of the National Intelligence Council, to take another example, suggests that the South’s pockets of youth unemployment and governmental chaos (which he calls “hard-to-govern, lawless zones—veritable no man’s lands”) create “terrorist havens”.⁴⁸ He locates these supposed havens in the Muslim world and implies a link between terrorism and Islam. Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies overtly suggests a link. He argues that “youth bulge” unemployment and urbanization combine to unsettle young people by:

“destroying traditional social safety nets, while modern media publicize the region’s weakness and at the same time present images of material wealth that most citizens can never obtain. The result is to drive many into mosques, and some toward an Islamic extremism that is at least as opposed to modernization and secular government as it is anti-Western.”⁴⁹

In keeping with the popular US discourse claiming that Islam is one pole of a “clash of the civilizations” with the West, “youth bulge” theory overgeneralises Islam and tends not to distinguish too clearly between fundamentalists, terrorists and Arabs in general. It dovetails neatly with the claim of Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington’s influential 1996 book, *Clash of the Civilizations*, that there exists a “Muslim propensity toward violent conflict.”⁵⁰ In his book, Huntington adds his voice to those who warn that the expansion of the youth cohort in Muslim countries provides recruits for fundamentalism, terrorism insurgency and migration.

44. Tax, M., with Women’s WORLD, “Power of the Word: Culture, Censorship, and Voice,” in Silliman, J. and King, Y., op. cit. supra note 42, p.115. Tax suggests that imposing patriarchal culture or the culture of the developers results in economic programmes for women’s liberation that are often reductionist and do not address the complexity of women’s experiences. They tend to see women as economic resources rather than “full human beings” and to promote equal rights laws as the sole answer to systemic gender inequality issues.

45. Fuller, G. E., op. cit. supra note 8, pp.1-2.

46. Suhrke, A., “Environmental Degradation, Migration and the Potential for Violent Conflict,” in Gleditsch, N. P., (ed.) *Conflict and the Environment*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, 1997.

47. Tenet, G. J., “The Worldwide Threat 2004: Challenges in a Changing Global Context,” 2004, http://www.odci.gov/cia/public_affairs/speeches/2004/tenet_testimony_03092004.html, accessed 12 July 2004.

48. Hutchings, R. L., “Terrorism and Economic Security,” National Intelligence Council web site, http://www.odci.gov/nic/speeches_terror_and_econ_sec.html, accessed 7 November 2004.

49. Cordesman, A., op. cit., supra note 39.

50. Huntington, S., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1996, p.258.

“Youth Bulge” vs. Resources

In line with the US’s post-Second World War fears that a growing population of unruly young people could interfere with its resource flows, the “youth bulge” has also been seen, both before and after 9/11, as a factor complicating strategic control of Middle Eastern oil exports. Anthony Cordesman opens his remarks on the “youth bulge” and other challenges to the US military by noting that neither 9/11 or the “war on terror” changed the basic reasons for the US military presence in the Middle East:

“... we need to remember what our key strategic priorities are. The United States is ever more dependent on a globalized economy, and the global economy is becoming steadily more dependent on Middle Eastern energy exports.”⁵¹

General Anthony C. Zinni, former Commander in Chief of US Central Command (USCENTCOM), agrees. In testimony before the Armed Services Committee in March 2000, he asserts that “primary among US interests in the USCENTCOM Area of Responsibility is the promotion of regional stability and the insurance of uninterrupted, secure access to Arabian Gulf energy resources.”⁵² “Youth bulge” extremism, he goes on, threatens that objective. Zinni, as well as other proponents of the “youth bulge” theory, also notes that population growth in the Arabian Gulf region is “increasing dramatically, putting pressure on natural resources, specifically water, and economic systems.”

It is characteristic of talk about the “youth bulge”, as it is of population discourse more generally, that Zinni fails to mention forces other than “population growth” that might reduce the extent and availability of resources and divert much-needed funds from health, education and job creation. Examples include seizure of resources by the rich, US and other aid programmes’ erosion of basic food production, decay of public welfare institutions in the wake of neoliberal policies, and growing military expenditures.⁵³

The Military Moves In

As a source of terrorism, radicalism and anti-Western violence, the “youth bulge” ranks in the minds of some alongside weapons of mass destruction as a major threat to US security. Following geographer Gary Fuller’s proposal, “youth bulges” have indeed come under military surveillance in many countries, and are an important object of military plans to fight terrorism in a whole range of Southern countries and regions where the US has military and industrial interests.

Ex-CIA Director George Tenet’s suggestions for combating the threat of the “youth bulge” echo the tough-on-crime rhetoric about policing the “superpredator.” Tenet even resorts to police dialect:

“We’re used to thinking of [the war against terrorism] as a sustained worldwide effort to get the perpetrators and would-be perpetrator off the street.”⁵⁴

He pictures the US military as a global cop, particularly in “stateless zones” and nations whose governments cannot contain their own “youth bulges”.

Some analysts rank the “youth bulge” with weapons of mass destruction as a source of terrorism, radicalism and anti-Western violence.

51. Cordesman, A., op. cit. supra note 39.
52. Zinni, A. C., “Prepared Testimony of General Anthony C. Zinni, Commander in Chief US Central Command,” Federal News Service, Inc., Washington, DC, 2000.

53. See “Food? Health? Hope? Genetic Engineering and World Hunger”, Corner House Briefing No. 10; “The Malthus Factor: Poverty, Politics and Population in Capitalist Development”; Corner House Briefing No. 20; “The Origins of the Third World: Markets, States and Climate”, Corner House Briefing No. 27; “Re-imagining the Population Debate”, Corner House Briefing No. 28; and “A Decade After Cairo: Women’s Health in a Free Market Economy”, Corner House Briefing No. 31, all at <http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk>.

54. Tenet, G. J., op. cit. supra note 47.

“Youth bulge” theory reinforces gender, age and race hierarchies.

55. Smith, C. S., “US Training North Africans to Uproot Terrorists,” *The New York Times*, 11 May 2004, A1.

56. Volpp, L., op. cit., supra note 1.

Ironically, while military analysts warn of “extremist” groups recruiting new members from the “youth bulge”, the US military itself is adopting the same tactic in a section of Africa stretching from the Horn to the Western Sahara’s Atlantic Coast. In Mali and Mauritania, US Special Operations forces are training and arming soldiers as a “preventative” measure to guard against their recruitment by Al-Qaeda, and to “protect” the region. US military training in the region is part of a larger, US\$7 million programme, the Pan-Sahel Initiative, to “shore up border controls and deny sanctuary to suspected terrorists.”⁵⁵

Homeland Insecurity

In policing suspected terrorists in the US following the attack on the World Trade Center, the US government has increasingly come to identify citizenship with race. In the words of American University law professor Leti Volpp:

“September 11 facilitated the consolidation of a new identity category that groups together persons who appear ‘Middle Eastern, Arab or Muslim.’ This consolidation reflects a racialization wherein members of this group are identified as terrorists, and are disidentified as citizens.”⁵⁶

One example of Volpp’s “racialization” is the US Department of Homeland Security’s immigration enforcement, which uses racial profiling of Arab, Muslim and South Asian men in the name of national security. In June 2003, federal efforts to predict and stop terrorist acts within the US were pointedly exempted from a Justice Department ban on racial

Resisting the “Superpredator” Myth

The superpredator myth has been resisted from many angles, including grassroots actions against punitive legislation directed at “superpredator” youth, lawsuits, and critical studies on zero tolerance policies (policies that punish all offences severely, no matter how minor).

Many people opposed the 1999 Juvenile Crime Initiative Statute (or Proposition 21 as it was known) in California that requires juvenile offenders to be tried as adults; reduces confidentiality protections for juvenile offenders; and increases penalties in some cases. In 2000, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a suit challenging Proposition 21 on behalf of the League of Women’s Voters, the Children’s Advocacy Institute, Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth and Peter Bull on the grounds that it was unconstitutional. As a result, some of the law was altered.

Youth-focused organisations such as the California-based C-Beyond: Youth Making History; the School of Unity and Liberation (SOUL); Underground Railroad; and the Youth Force Coalition collaborated to oppose Proposition 21. One organiser, Rona Fernandez, reported that activists used “old direct action stand-bys like rallies and sit-ins and added a hip-hop flavor.” She notes that their protests:

“made a huge impact in the media by portraying young people not as dangerous criminals, but as passionate activists willing to put their bodies on the line for an issue they felt strongly about.”

Although Proposition 21 became law, the groups continue to work against the prison industrial complex and to support young leaders, artists and activists.

Other youth-led and focused organising initiatives worldwide work for reproductive justice, youth

self-determination and social justice, in addition to prison activism. Set against the many levels of progressive and radical youth organising, the destructive stereotypes of young people promoted by the “superpredator” myth lose their force.

Sources

Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, http://www.cjcj.org/jjic/prop_21.php;

American Civil Liberties Union, “CA Appeals Court Says Decision to Try Juveniles in Adult Court Belongs to Judges, Not Prosecutors”, 7 February 2001, Northern California ACLU, <http://www.aclu.org/CriminalJustice/CriminalJustice.cfm?ID=7122&c=46>;

Fernandez, R., “Keepin’ It Real: Young People Organize for True Juvenile ‘Justice’,” *Newsletter*, Resist, Inc., Somerville, MA, <http://www.resistinc.org/newsletter/issues/2002/09/fernandez.html#author0>.

and ethnic profiling in law enforcement. Racial profiling is also now built into a “Special Call-In Registration System” which requires all immigrant men over the age of 16 from a list of 25 Muslim and Middle Eastern countries and North Korea to register in person at immigration offices and to check in annually.⁵⁷

The “youth bulge” image has helped put young male Arab and Muslim immigrants in special danger of deportation. In the wake of the government’s post-9/11 detention campaign that swept through South Asian and Arab communities in New York and New Jersey, hundreds of detained immigrants were deported immediately and, by 2003, more than 13,000 male registrants had been forced into deportation proceedings.⁵⁸ As the proceedings unfold, predicts the National Network of Immigrant and Refugee Rights, “many more men will be deported or will opt for ‘voluntary’ departure, devastating families and harming communities.”⁵⁹

In stark contrast to the “disidentification” of Arabs, Muslim and South Asian men as US citizens, US soldiers, the global police force, have been allocated a level of “supercitizenship.”⁶⁰ While those who appear “Middle Eastern, Arab or Muslim” are experiencing an erosion of rights, US soldiers can cross borders for the most part unhampered, and in many cases are not held to international standards of conduct, as in the instance of US soldiers’ abuse of Iraqi prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison, which came to light during 2004.

Overcoming “Youth Bulge” Theory

The United States, as scholar Catherine Lutz has observed, has an “especially intimate relationship to war”.⁶¹ Its violence has “centred on the idea of race and, moreover, has contributed to the making of races.”⁶²

“Youth bulge” theory, like the “superpredator” myth, is part of this pattern of violence, and reinforces gender and age hierarchies as well as those of race. It helps produce the “threats” embodied in the racially “Other” figures of the young male predator and the veiled young woman, and has perpetuated “clash of the civilizations” thinking. In doing so, it helps privilege the US as the guardian of “good” and as a global police and humanitarian force against terror and “evil.”

At the same time, “youth bulge” and “superpredator” theories implicitly place young whites in the category of scarce “assets”. Yale historian Paul Kennedy, for example, contrasts exploding birth rates in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia with stagnating birth rates in Western Europe in the course of recommending that if Europe intends to remain a world power, it “needs, frankly, to get its youthful population going again”.⁶³ Although Kennedy does not state outright that he envisages this youthful population as majority white, neither does he suggest that Europe increase its global power through inviting young people from the global South to emigrate there.

Both theories also tend to reinforce the most reactionary politics of gender by reducing male and female roles to the supposedly biologically-driven functions of violence and motherhood. In addition, “youth bulge” theory situates its biologically-driven young people in the context of a mythical, culturally and religiously violence-prone Third World,

57. Murray, N., “Profiled: Arabs, Muslims, and the Post-9/11 Hunt for the ‘Enemy Within,’” *Civil Rights in Peril: The Targeting of Arabs and Muslims*, Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2004, p.44.

58. Nimr, H., Tactaquin, C. and Garcia, A., “Human Rights and Human Security at Risk: The Consequences of Placing Immigration Enforcement and Services in the Department of Homeland Security,” prepared for the National Network of Immigrant and Refugee Rights, Oakland, 2003.

59. Ibid.

60. Lutz, C., “Making War at Home in the United States: Militarization and the Current Crisis,” *American Anthropologist*, 104, 3, September 2002, p.731.

61. Lutz borrows Michael Geyer’s definition of militarization: “the contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence” (Geyer, M., “The militarization of Europe 1914-1945” in Gillis, J., (ed.) *The Militarization of the Western World*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ, pp 65-102, cited in Lutz, C., op. cit. supra, p.723).

62. Lutz, C., op. cit. supra, p.726.

Lutz unpacks the concept of “the making of races” through tracing the construction of races through military acts and policy: “The early US Army, she argues, was defined as the kind of constabulary whose purpose was nation-building through “Indian clearance,” rather than defence of national borders (see Weigley, R. F., *History of the United States Army*, Macmillan, New York, 1967, p.27). The Army also built roads and forts to facilitate colonial settlement, an aim so intrinsic to the military that “any difference between soldiering and pioneering escaped the naked eye” (see Perret, G., *A Country Made By War: From the Revolution to Vietnam—The Story of America’s Rise to Power*, Random House, New York, 1989, p.137). The real and imagined threat of slave insurrection rationalised the raising of local official militias in the 19th century as well, and the militias fought the Mexican-American and the Spanish-American Wars with racial rationales. European colonialism was, of course, also rooted in race violence, and the World War, which ran with brief interruption from 1914 to 1945, was fuelled by contests of colonial holdings and militant expansionism based in racial supremacy (whether European, American or Japanese). US military power went global as the 20th century opened, when Filipinos, Puerto Ricans, and Hawaiians were made racial wards of the state.

63. Kennedy, P., “Europe’s Old Laggards will Never Balance US Power,” *The Guardian*, 24 June 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,983715,00.html>.

64. Thanks to participants at The Corner House's meeting on "Women, Population Control, Public Health and Globalization", held Dorset, UK, in March 2003 for the idea of the "military bulge".

65. Worldwide, spending on the military and arms trading was US\$956 billion in 2003. Since 2001, such spending has increased by 18 per cent in real terms. Expenditure by the United States accounts for almost half the world total. In 2004, US military spending was \$399.1 billion, up from approximately \$288.8 billion in 2000. For 2005, \$420.7 billion has been requested. The US lays out eight times more on the military than the second largest spender, China, which spent \$51 billion in 2002. The US military budget is more than 29 times that of the combined spending of the seven countries that the US government has called "rogue" states (Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan and Syria).

Until 1998, global military spending and expenditure in most nations was declining from its Cold War levels of \$1.2 trillion in 1985. Since 1998, however, military expenditure has begun to rise again, both globally and in most regions of the world. US spending is still close to Cold War levels. The combined military spending of high-income countries, which account for about 75 per cent of world military spending, was slightly higher than the aggregate foreign debt of all low-income countries in 2003 and 10 times higher than their combined levels of official development assistance in 2001.

See Sköns, E., et al., "Military expenditure", in SIPRI Yearbook 2004, *Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, <http://editors.sipri.se/pubs/yb04/ch10.html>.

66. Holmes, J. S., quoted in "Radicalism: Is the Devil in the Demographics?" *New York Times*, 9 December 2001.

67. Sommers, M., "Urbanization, War, and Africa's Youth at Risk: Towards Understanding and Addressing Future Challenges," *Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS) Activity*, USAID, Washington, DC, 2003, p.1. Sommers offers suggestions for programmes for youth at risk in African cities, which he contends could "transform how urban youth are perceived, engaged and ultimately included in urban Africa's civil societies and economies."

68. Boren, M. E., *Student Resistance: A History of the Unruly Subject*, Routledge, New York, 2001, p.249.

This briefing is by Anne Hendrixson, a member of the Committee on Women, Population and the Environment, which supported its research and writing and to whom thanks are due.

Printed by RAP Spiderweb, Clock Street, Hollinwood, Oldham, Lancashire OL9 7LY, UK.

which cannot hope to support them through education, employment or natural resources.

The full impact of the "youth bulge" concept on US policy, however, has probably yet to be seen. Like the "superpredator" theory, its impact will likely continue even as the theory itself is discredited empirically. The theory appeals to both US Democratic and Republican parties, flourished under both Presidents Clinton and Bush, and is likely to influence the new Bush administration as well.

If the theory is in the interests of ruling groups, however, it is clearly not in the interests of the next generation. The threat posed by the "youth bulge" theory to the human rights of the young men and women it singles out is arguably far greater than the threat posed by the uncontrolled violence and fertility to which they are supposedly prone. The theory disrespects the younger generation, underestimates its potential, and leaves it devalued. The question it should provoke is not "why do they hate us?" but instead "why do we hate them?"

Answering this question would require shifting focus from the "youth bulge" to the more genuinely menacing "military bulge"⁶⁴ which has resulted from the overwhelming spending on war undertaken by the US since the 1940s⁶⁵ – and which requires the unending manufacture of enemies. It would require seeking the roots of violence and unrest not in the biology of a burgeoning population of youth, but in the political interests of which US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and US Vice President Dick Cheney are one visible face – interests that would be more apt targets for a "war on terror".

Contesting "youth bulge" theory and its practical effects also requires questioning more general theories that blame social problems on overbreeding or demographics, as well as the determinism that insists that political instability inevitably follows from numbers. As Jennifer S. Holmes, author of *Terrorism and Democratic Stability*, puts it, demography is a "challenge that the state needs to meet", whether it involves youth or old people, but is not going to "predetermine" any outcome.⁶⁶ The prejudice that Southern nations and Southern cities are incapable of accommodating their young people also needs to be countered by acknowledging that African cities, for example, "make sense", and that their wealth of youthful residents constitute a "resource for ingenuity, stability, and economic growth."⁶⁷

Meanwhile, it is important to combat paranoia about youth uprisings and youth activism by pointing out how often they issue in positive, non-violent outcomes. In his book *Student Resistance*, for example, Mark Edelman Boren explains how, "empowered through collective action, unruly students can challenge their institutions, societies, and governments; they can be tremendous catalysts for change."⁶⁸ Although Boren does not address the "youth bulge" concept directly, his work catalogues how collective action by young people has resulted in meaningful social change movements, some of them non-violent. Replacing images like those of the "superpredator", the "teen welfare queen", the angry young male proto-terrorist and the veiled young woman, as well as their white counterparts, with alternative, more complex visions of young people, many of them put forward by youth themselves, will be one of the most crucial steps forward (see Box, "Resisting the Superpredator Myth", p.14).