Mark S. Granovetter, *Getting a Job* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 5–11.

10. Mercer Sullivan, *Getting Paid* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 103.

11. Paul Osterman, *Getting Started* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1980), p. 143.

12. Soo Son, Suzanne W. Model, and Gene A. Fisher, "Polarization and Progress in the Black Community: Earnings and Status Gains for Young Black Males in the Era of Affirmative Action," *Sociological Forum* 4:3 (1989):309–327; William J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 109–118; Michael Hout, "Occupational Mobility of Black Men: 1962–1973," *American Sociological Review* 49 (1984):308–322; Richard Freeman, *Black Elite: The New Market for Highly Educated Black Americans* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976); Andrea H. Beller, "Trends in Occupational Segregation by Sex and Race, 1960–1981," in *Sex Segregation in the Workplace*, ed. Barbara F. Reskin (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1984), pp. 11–26.

13. Marshall I. Pomer, "Labor Market Structure, Intragenerational Mobility, and Discrimination: Black Male Advancement Out of Low-Paying Occupations," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986):650–659; Soo Son et al., "Polarization and Progress"; Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*.

14. Joleen Kirschenman and Kathryn M. Neckerman, "'We'd Love to Hire Them, But ...': The Meaning of Race for Employers," in *The Urban Underclass*, ed. Christopher Jencks and Paul E. Peterson (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1991), pp. 203–232.

15. Philippe Bourgois, "In Search of Respect: The New Service Economy and the Crack Alternative in Spanish Harlem" (Russell Sage Foundation Working Paper #21, May 1991).

16. Robert Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1949), pp. 131–153.

17. See Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Terry Williams, *The Cocaine Kids* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1989).

18. Paul E. Willis, *Learning to Labor* (Aldershot: Gower, 1977).

J. MacLeod, Ain't No Making It, 2nd ed., Boulder: Westview, 1995: pp.239-269.

Conclusion: Outclassed and Outcast(e)

One afternoon, while hitchhiking to the city, I was picked up by a motorist in a BMW. The charitable middle-aged man chatted away for an hour about his teenage children. As we drove into the city and past Clarendon Heights, however, he peered at the young men lounging in the project's doorways, shook his head in disgust, and dismissed them as ignorant, lazy losers. That sort of causal simplicity is attractive: Losers lose; wanting individuals lead to wasted lives; poverty is self-generated. What we see on the streets, however, is actually complex. Once we push beneath the surface texts of individual lives, we discover the hard contours of structural inequality.

Our society is *structured* to create poverty and extreme economic inequality. There are simply not enough good jobs to go around. For every boss there are many workers, and the gap in their pay is unparalleled among industrialized nations. Chief executives of large U.S. companies made 160 times as much as the average blue-collar worker in 1989.[1] Indeed, while Juan, Mokey, Stoney, and Shorty struggled to survive on earnings of five dollars per hour, top corporate executives routinely raked in up to $5,000 per hour (including stock options and other income).[2] By 1993 the median pay package for the chief executive officers of the Fortune 1,000 largest companies was worth over $2.4 million. By comparison, the median annual earnings for everyone over fifteen years of age in 1992 was $17,696.[3] Our occupational structure is shaped much like the Eiffel Tower. There is little room at the top, a larger but still limited number of tolerably well-paid positions in the middle, and near the bottom a wide band of inferior positions (with no "positions" at all for the unemployed). This roughly pyramidal structure ensures that even if everyone excels in school and strives ceaselessly for the top, the great majority are automatically bound to be disappointed.

The occupational structure guarantees a vast divide between rich and poor. In 1989, 1 percent of the population owned 37 percent of the wealth and 10 percent of the population owned 86 percent of the wealth.[4] By the end of Reagan's second

term, 32 million Americans were living below the poverty level and the gap between rich and poor was at an all-time high.[5] Consider not only the sheer magnitude of inequality between winners and losers but also the fact that most losers have had to play on a field slanted against them. The pyramid isn't shaken up and recast from scratch for each generation; rather, families tend to occupy similar locations in the social division of labor over time. Families at the top of the class structure can use their superior status and resources to stay there, while other families, low on options, languish at the bottom. We are all born into a social class, and most of us die in the one into which we were born. Although a few working-class individuals with dedication and ability will rise to the top of the heap, most (including many who are just as conscientious and able) will remain close to where they started.[6]

The United States has a remarkably stable class structure, albeit one that is obscured by the rhetoric of classlessness. To be sure, social mobility does exist—just enough to maintain the myth of America as the land of opportunity. Whereas a completely closed society cannot maintain a semblance of openness, a society that allows some mobility, however meager, can always hold up the so-called self-made individual as "proof" that barriers to success are purely personal and that the poor are poor of their own accord. And so most Americans, the denounced teenagers often as much as the denouncer in the BMW, see poverty in purely individual terms rather than as structurally induced.

This book shifts the emphasis from individual deficits to structural inequality. Part One discloses that the roots of perceived individual pathology—unruliness in school, alcohol and drug abuse, violence, and crime—actually lie deep within the social structure. The leveled aspirations and behavior of the Hallway Hangers cannot be understood apart from structural constraints on opportunity that in their cumulative effect are all too forbidding. The Brothers, in contrast, refuse to be cowed by the long odds. Spurred on by the distinctively American language of aspiration that gushes forth from our television shows, our pop songs, and our advertisements, the Brothers lace up their sneakers and "just go for it." But we have seen that schools, even ones as good as Lincoln High, end up reinforcing social inequality while pretending to render it superfluous. The Brothers struggle academically in school and are socialized for positions near the bottom of the class pyramid.

Part Two explores how the Hallway Hangers and Brothers fare in the structure of the job market. The results are depressing. The experiences of the Hallway Hangers since 1984 show that opting out of the contest—neither playing the game nor accepting its rules—is not a viable option. Incarceration and other less explicit social penalties are applied by society when the contest is taken on one's own terms. There is no escape: The Hallway Hangers must still generate income, build relationships, and establish households. The stresses of everyday life have led Stoney to "escape" by choosing captivity over life outside prison. Trapped inside the game, the Hallway Hangers now question their youthful resistance to schooling and social norms. Granted the opportunity to do it over again, the Hallway Hangers say they would have tried harder to succeed.

But the Brothers *have* always tried, which is why their experiences between 1984 and 1991 are as disheartening as the Hallway Hangers'. If the Hangers show that opting out of the contest is not a viable option, the Brothers show that dutifully playing by the rules hardly guarantees success either. Conservative and liberal commentators alike often contend that if the poor would only apply themselves, behave responsibly, and adopt bourgeois values, then they will propel themselves into the middle class. The Brothers follow the recipe quite closely but the outcomes are disappointing. They illustrate how rigid and durable the class structure is. Aspiration, application, and intelligence often fail to cut through the firm figurations of structural inequality. Though not impenetrable, structural constraints on opportunity, embedded in both schools and job markets, turn out to be much more debilitating than the Brothers anticipated. Their dreams of comfortable suburban bliss currently are dreams deferred, and are likely to end up as dreams denied.

Poverty: A Class Issue

This book shows clearly that poverty is not a black issue. In absolute terms, most poor people are white, although a disproportionate number of African Americans are impoverished. Many of the black poor live in ghettos: urban neighborhoods that are racially segregated, economically devastated, socially stigmatized, and politically abandoned. As government and civic institutions have crumbled and the labor market has declined, the vacuum has largely been filled by "the blossoming of an underground economy dominated by the only expanding employment sector to which poor minority youths miseducated by public school can readily accede: the retail trade of drugs."[7] As a result, these enclaves of concentrated and pernicious poverty have become virtual war zones where terror, despair, and death are commonplace. To much of the American public, however, the state of the ghetto signifies not the gross inadequacy of the welfare state but its overgenerosity to a black underclass that is morally dissolute, culturally deprived, and socially undeserving. The underclass has been twisted into a racial rather than a class formation, and poverty has become a black issue.

By bringing the white poor into view, our story dissolves the mistaken connection between African Americans and behavior associated with poverty—crime, family disruption, substance abuse, and so on. The Brothers and Hallway Hangers fail to follow the script penned by journalists, academics, politicians, and policy analysts. Because criminality is almost completely confined to the Hallway Hangers, this study debunks stereotypes about the black poor. Even in the case of white youths, what appears to be a tangle of pathology and purely self-destructive

behavior turns out to have an underlying social rationality. Far from being a distinctive breed apart, the urban poor are ordinary human beings struggling to cope as best they can under oppressive circumstances. Poverty is not a moral problem, much less a black moral or cultural problem.

The underclass debate in the popular media divides the poor along racial lines, focuses the spotlight on African American poverty, and largely ignores the socioeconomic context in which the drama is set. This book draws the white poor out of the shadows, widens the debate beyond race, and recovers the common class basis of exploitation that bedevils all the urban poor—black, white, Latino, Asian, or Native American.

Industrial restructuring—the decline of manufacturing, the suburbanization of blue-collar employment, and the ascendancy of the service sector—has hit all the urban poor. Real wages and job security have fallen dramatically, as the experiences of the Hallway Hangers and Brothers illustrate. Layoffs, seasonal cutbacks, closings, and abrupt dismissals have been widespread for both groups of men. The economic recession of the late 1980s has exacerbated the instability of the low-wage labor market, and so has the weakening of labor unions and the absence of government regulation—both matters of public policy. It may be that insecurity and volatility are structural features of the new urban economy.

The experiences of both the Brothers and the Hallway Hangers also indicate that "career tracks" are sparse for uncredentialed individuals. The jobs these men manage to obtain seldom lead to a sequence of ascending positions with increased wages, responsibility, and security. Movement, when it occurs at all, tends to be lateral or between firms but not along an occupational ladder. Disappointed, workers like Mokey and Jinks move rapidly between dead-end jobs, a strategy that ends up reinforcing irregularity because they become even less attractive to employers. Contrary to popular perception, none of the Hallway Hangers or Brothers shun employment in low-wage entry-level positions as working for "chump change."

JM: You're looking for a job now?

BOO-BOO: Yeah.

JM: And how's that going?

BOO-BOO: Not that good. Not that good at all. I just gotta keep on looking. I'd even work at McDonald's or something. Just so I can get some money together, just til I can find something a little bit better. ... I'll work at McDonald's if I have to. I need something. Sell newspapers, anything.

Boo-Boo's stated willingness to accept any job is no empty declaration: Among other places, he applied for work at car washes, grocery stores, and fast-food chains. Mokey, Shorty, and Slick echo Boo-Boo's willingness to accept poorly

paid menial employment. What they and the others object to are so-called entry-level positions that lead nowhere.

Both groups of men have been stuck in the secondary labor market with low wages, infrequent raises, awkward working hours, minimal training, and high turnover. Only James has earned a family wage, and he was soon laid off. Only a couple of these men have held jobs with basic health and retirement benefits. Most cannot afford to own a car, let alone a home. Stable employment is the crucial pivot for social and cultural transitions into adulthood. Without it, many of these young men have been unable to contemplate settling down, marrying, or establishing households independent of parents. Their physical mobility has been minimal, and they have generally been excluded from leisure pursuits that most Americans take for granted. In short, the lives of both the Brothers and the Hallway Hangers have been severely circumscribed by their subordinate position in the class structure.

Racial Domination: Invidious but Invisible

Both the Brothers and the Hallway Hangers are victims of class exploitation, but the African Americans among them have had to cope with racial oppression as well. Sometimes this oppression is brutally direct, as Shorty and Boo-Boo's contrasting experiences attest. Shorty assaulted several police officers after ransacking his girlfriend's apartment, but he was let off.

SHORTY: I had fucking, I coulda' been doing at least twenty years for that, right there. Three counts of mayhem, I had like eight assault and batteries on police officers, each one carries two and a half years to four and a half years. Mayhem alone carries fifteen to twenty. I had three of 'em for biting three cops. Lucky my brothers were cops. If I didn't have no brothers that are cops, I'd be, I'd be doing at least forty fucking years right now.

JM: So no charges were ever pressed?

SHORTY: Yeah, they pressed 'em at first, but then I got 'em all dropped. The judges were pissed off about that; they didn't like that. None of the cops showed up to court. I fucking lucked out big time then.

Contrast Shorty's experience with that of Boo-Boo when he was stopped by the police for reckless driving.

BOO-BOO: I was drinkin' and drivin'; I was cheatin' on my girlfriend with this other girl, Josie, from the Heights. We were drivin' around. The cops, they beat me up and they called me nigger and black bastard and all this stuff, y'know. It

& DATE

was crazy. And they put me in jail. ... They broke my nose and cracked my jaw, y'know, and ripped all my chains off my neck and scarred up my arms and all that stuff like that.

Racial domination is seldom as graphic and straightforward as police brutality, although some police officers are openly racist. Standing in front of Clarendon Heights one evening, I was asked by an officer in a cruiser, "Seen a carload of niggers drive by just now?" Doubtless, Boo-Boo was beat up largely because he is black. Yet there is also a history of police violence against white residents of Clarendon Heights: In the 1970s a white youth from Clarendon Heights was beaten by police in front of the project and died in custody. Moreover, black police officers can be just as brutal as their white colleagues. Even police violence cannot be explained in purely racial terms. Racial oppression, though it often takes the form of direct discrimination, is also more subtly embedded in the social order.

As African Americans, the Brothers are not as connected as the Hallway Hangers to informal networks that can provide access to jobs. Consider a string of three jobs Frankie held when he returned to the area from out of state.

FRANKIE: Then I moved back. I had my son. So I come back down here. I tried a little floor-laying.

JM: How did you get in?

FRANKIE: Mutual friends, y'know. ... Got the floor-layin' job. That didn't kick out. So I started seein' people, y'know, that I knew, guys that had jobs, and I went on to a few city jobs and state jobs—they were real good jobs, but doin' my drinkin'—like I had one job as a custodian up the high school, and it was a real good job. And I screwed that up by drinkin'. Y'know, it's a job where you got so much to do and then you can slack. And my slackin', I was leavin' the premises, goin' to the bar and playing the dogs, y'know. I just got in the way of fuckin' goin' to the bar and goin' to the dogs. So I left that. And when I left that I got another job through the same guy—a politician—and I was over to the big convention center and they made me crew chief. I was over there, I was a crew chief, and I didn't have a fuckin' inkling of what I was doin'. They have a cleanin' crew, just Spanish guys. Y'know, they couldn't even understand me. So I didn't show up much, evidently. But I was still gettin' paid. They paid me hours I didn't work. Y'know, I did eighty hours one week, and I was lucky to have worked ten, y'know. These were set jobs. And I couldn't even hold them. I know why today: cuz I was drinking.

Apart from access to jobs, personal connections provided some job security for Frankie. During roughly the same period, Juan, Mokey, and James all lost their jobs on account of minor infractions of bureaucratic rules in their workplaces. Frankie's experience also underlines the poor prospects of promotion for people of color. When people like Frankie come in at a supervisory level, people like the Brothers and Frankie's Spanish crew are robbed of opportunities for advancement. It is instructive that Frankie was able to exploit personal contacts to secure employment in the public sector, the area where antidiscrimination policies should most improve the prospects of racial and ethnic minorities. If Frankie can leapfrog over others in government jobs, it is no wonder that industries with informal hiring and training practices are virtually closed to the Brothers. Jobs in construction are a notorious case in point.[8] Slick, Shorty, Steve, and Jinks have all landed jobs in the construction industry through informal social networks. Jobs like roofing are hardly prestigious, secure, or highly paid; nevertheless, they are jobs for which white ethnic networking has given the white Hallway Hangers an edge over their black counterparts.

Their exclusion from occupational networks handicaps the Brothers, but they also have special tensions to negotiate if they do manage to get a job. In the new postindustrial service economy, both the Hallway Hangers and the Brothers are in closer contact with supervisors and clients than they would be in manufacturing jobs. The members of neither group have much social space in which to express their class and cultural identities. Frankie finds it difficult to interact with young, bossy, bourgeois supervisors, gossiping middle-aged colleagues, and the upper-class consumers whom his catering job served. But the Brothers must also deal with racial prejudice that stereotypes them as hoodlums. The interpersonal experiences of black jobholders, especially those who do not convey a mastery of middle-class cultural conventions, are a special source of tension in service jobs. Busing tables in a posh restaurant, Mokey will find it more difficult than Frankie to put customers at ease simply because his black skin evokes so many stereotypes.

Whether the result of social tension in the workplace, reduced access to occupational networks, or straightforward discrimination, African Americans fare poorly on the job market. Unemployment is higher and wages are lower for blacks than for whites. Moreover, the economic returns for a high school education are substantially less. The labor market is far from color-blind. And yet the Brothers do not cite racism as a factor that holds them back. Perhaps race is so seamlessly woven into their identities and daily lives that it simply does not stand out. Deeply embedded in their consciousness and inscribed everywhere in the outside world, race is simply taken for granted as a suffusive and ubiquitous fact of life.[9] In this respect, Boo-Boo is the exception that reinforces the rule. For the Brothers, their blackness hardly bears comment. But Boo-Boo, an African American who associated with the Hallway Hangers nearly all of his life, fell in with an exclusively black crowd when he moved to Raymond. For Boo-Boo, race is an issue.

BOO-BOO: It was kinda weird for me in Raymond. All of a sudden all my friends were black. It was weird, cuz they're just, they're more different than white peo-

ple cuz of the fact the way they carry themselves, the way they dress and stuff, dress and talking, just being black. Like when I go down to see, y'know, say Chub and all them [in Clarendon Heights], they're like, "Wow, Boo-Boo changed." Then, y'know, I just, I dunno.

JM: Is that kinda hard for you, to balance that out, or ...

BOO-BOO: It is kinda hard for me. I mean, I been around white people all my life and then for one, for like six or seven months, whatever how long it was, to just, to just change, I changed that quick. And then got caught up in the drugs and all stuff like that. It's just a big change. It was. Big change. ... I just can't handle, I don't really understand, I don't understand black people at all, really. Cuz I haven't been around 'em. They don't understand why I can sit there and listen to rock 'n' roll, Led Zeppelin and stuff like that, sit in the house and listen to Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath. Call me white man, Uncle Tom or something. So that's the deal with it. ...

JM: You and Frankie and Slick and Steve and Shorty were really tight way back; how did that kinda break up?

BOO-BOO: Well, they'd get to drinkin' and they'd want to fight me and stuff like that. We never got into a fight, but they like started calling me a nigger and stuff like that. It didn't really bother me, but after a while, y'know, they're s'posed to be my friends, and all the time we'd been hanging around it had never came to my mind to call a white person a honky. I don't understand that. It's strange to me. I never called anybody anything like that in my life. I don't consider myself a nigger either. I just consider myself as Boo-Boo Taylor. Same as anybody else. So I just broke loose from that.

Having traversed the racial divide and negotiated the tensions on each side, Boo-Boo thinks in racial terms. Of the African Americans featured in this study, Boo-Boo alone emphasizes racial discrimination in the labor market. Asked whether he'd been actively looking for work, Boo-Boo recounted how a friend had directed him to a store that was taking job applications.

BOO-BOO: So we walk up there, and she said, "We're not hiring." And she said it in a bad way where it came down to me like she was prejudiced cuz I was black or something. Cuz why would she say that, why should she lie and say she wasn't hiring?

JM: Has that been a factor a lot, do you think?

BOO-BOO: It has been around here, yeah.

JM: Discrimination, in terms of you trying to get a job.

BOO-BOO: Basically, around here, yeah. It bothers me, but—it's part of life.

For the black Brothers, race is so much a part of life that it figures only tangentially in their expressed worldviews. But to say that race is inscribed in the social scenery is not to denigrate its importance. On the contrary, the experiences of the Brothers and Hallway Hangers since 1984 beg the question of whether race is a more fundamental cleavage than class in American society.

Race Versus Class: Can They Be Untangled?

On the face of it, race appears to have taken on heightened importance as these young men have sought jobs. Racial inequality seems to account for differences in outcome both between and within the two groups. Given their ambition, schooling, and skills, the Brothers could have been expected to leave the Hallway Hangers in the dust. They haven't. Indeed, the Brothers are only marginally better off than the Hangers. Moreover, the African Americans within each group have fared poorly relative to the whites. Of the Hallway Hangers, the two black members—Boo-Boo and Chris—are in the most desperate straits. And of the Brothers, the sole white member—Mike—has been far and away the most successful on the job market. Does race matter as much as (or more than) class in determining the economic fate of African Americans in Clarendon Heights?

The race (caste) versus class debate has raged with particular passion since the publication in 1978 of William Julius Wilson's *The Declining Significance of Race*. Wilson's title is misleading, for he argues not that racial-caste oppression has become less significant in absolute terms for African Americans, but that it has become less significant *relative to social class* as a determinant of life chances. Whereas all blacks faced a wall of direct racial discrimination in past eras, a chasm between middle-class and working-class blacks has opened up since the 1960s. The relative success and security of the black middle class contrast sharply with the plight of poorer blacks who are trapped in the secondary labor market and in blighted inner cities. Racial inequality results not so much from direct discrimination as from structural changes in the economy that marginalize the black proletariat. Class, Wilson argues, "has become a more important factor than race in determining job placement for blacks."[10]

Wilson's book unleashed a furious storm of criticism and debate that continues to this day. Sociology journals still feature articles that purport to measure the effects of race versus class. Statistical analyses typically use a complex series of regression equations to discover that black-white disparities in educational and occupational attainment cannot be explained by other variables, and so are vestigially ascribed to race. But the entire quantitative quest to measure the relative importance of race and class is founded on the assumption that race and class can be reduced to one-dimensional, quantifiable factors that can be isolated from one another.[11]

The present study shows quite clearly that neither race nor class can be reduced to abstract forces that mechanically manipulate people like electrons in a charged field. Rather, race and class (along with gender) are interwoven in variable patterns, and the resultant geometry is complex. Class and race work simultaneously, and each can magnify or mitigate the effects of the other. Part One disclosed, for example, how race introduces new structural constraints and also serves as a mediation through which the limitations of class are refracted. Largely because the Brothers are black, they accept the achievement ideology and act as if class and racial barriers to success don't exist. And yet for African Americans living half a mile away in a black housing project, black skin becomes a reason to reject the American Dream. Class and race interact with factors like a neighborhood's distinctive social ecology to produce complex patterns that defy quantification.

This ethnography, with its minute "sample" sizes, cannot measure the relative effects of class and race any more effectively than quantitative studies have done. There is nothing to guarantee that the occupational outcomes of the Hallway Hangers and Brothers are representative rather than mere accidents of the job market. What this study can do, however, is explore and elaborate how simplistic and static concepts of class and race can be deepened.

Ain't No Makin' It demonstrates that class and race each have objective and subjective dimensions, a distinction pressed by Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant. Drawing upon and extending Bourdieu's theory of social space, Wacquant argues that

> both class and race lead a dual existence: each exists first in materiality, as objective differences that can be observed, measured in the form of distributions of efficient resources and goods; and second in subjectivity, as schemes of perception, appreciation and action, in the form of symbolic distinctions produced and reproduced via socially engrained dispositions.[12]

In other words, class and race introduce objective structural contraints that individuals must face. The bricklayer's child has barriers to overcome that the banker's child need never negotiate. And blacks face limits on opportunity relative to whites. These are real differences rooted in objective material conditions.

On the subjective side, individuals can make of these objective conditions what they will in forging their identities. The bricklayer's son may look across his high school desk at the banker's boy sitting in front of him, shake his head dismissively, and silently wager that the other can't change the oil in his Volvo. Or he may see in the banker's son an effortless ease with girls, grades, and teachers and shake his head despairingly at his own oil-stained fingers. Or he may do both, depending on the context—which peers are around, who the teacher is, and whether the class is algebra or technical drawing. Both attitudes are subjective articulations of class identity that are ultimately rooted in objective economic inequality. But neither attitude can easily be traced to that source. The subjective refuses to be reduced to a reflex of the objective.

There is a real tendency to collapse the objective and subjective dimensions of class into each other. As a youth worker in Clarendon Heights, I had to struggle to make any sense of what I was seeing on the street until Bourdieu, Bowles and Gintis, and especially Willis introduced me to the logic of social reproduction. Seeing how heavily structural inequality weighs on the Brothers and Hallway Hangers, I now tend to analyze the primary material in that light. Thus, when the young men acknowledge constraints on opportunity, I applaud them as "insightful," "discerning," "penetrating." And I judge their subjective interpretations by how closely they point to the objective limitations of social class. There is an implicit yardstick of truth and an implicit politics here, both provided by the social reproduction perspective. Reading the research data along this *evaluative* axis allows an assessment of the truth of individuals' views and also of their political potential. If those who are denied opportunities see their condition clearly, they are more likely to kick up a stink and change things. This is a crucial issue, and it deserves to be addressed.

At the same time, the primary data need to be analyzed along a *descriptive* axis that revolves around the question of identity. The task here is to describe the opinions, values, and actions of the men as they seek to make sense of their situations. Leaving aside the sociological accuracy of their views, the descriptive part of my task concentrates on how the Hallway Hangers and Brothers maintain their identities in their distinctive social and cultural contexts. The class identities articulated by the young men in Clarendon Heights cannot be reduced to the question of whether they discern structural constraints on opportunity. The descriptive axis sees class identity as just one more identity, constructed around images of space and common cultural reference points. In this view, there is a class ideology in the United States, but it has almost none of the socialist content and symbolism that working-class identity features in, for example, Europe. The Hallway Hangers' opinions are explained not only by the absence of the good or true ideology that the evaluative axis presupposes, but also by the presence of numerous other ideologies. Class identity is always articulated in historically specific circumstances and always incorporates ideological or imaginary components: a sense of community, status symbols, territories, rituals, and gender and racial inflections.[13]

In combining the descriptive and evaluative tasks, always a treacherous enterprise, Willis is relatively optimistic about the capacity of British working-class culture to penetrate the dominant ideology and to catalyze constructive social change.[14] The Hallway Hangers and Brothers give few grounds for optimism. Given the sway of the achievement ideology, many of their counterhegemonic views are penetrating indeed. But insightful opinions are of little use in isolation; there needs to be an ideological perspective and a cultural context in which their insights can be applied that leads to *positive* and potentially transformative rituals, symbols, territories, and political strategies.

In fact, the Hallway Hangers completely invert objective reality in their subjective rendering of it. Their racial and gender identities as white working-class men are actually assets on the job market, whereas their class background puts them at a disadvantage. But most of the Hallway Hangers see exactly the reverse: They complain not about class oppression but about discrimination against white men. Here again, the views of the Hallway Hangers point to the potency, pervasiveness, and persuasiveness of neoconservative ideology and the historical slough of class analysis in the United States. Perhaps the Hallway Hangers fail to see class as a variable because they grew up so ensconced in their own class culture. Just as the Brothers do not consider race an issue, the Hallway Hangers fail to see class as constraining.

Like class, race has an objective dimension rooted in the structure of opportunities.[15] Educational attainment, annual earnings, rates of employment, and a host of other measures confirm that African Americans are disadvantaged relative to whites. Yet race exists not just in material differences in power and resources but also in its subjective dimension—in individuals' minds as a category that shapes the way they view themselves and the social world. As with class, the subjective articulation of race seldom lines up with its objective dimension. Thus, although race is a central category by which both the Brothers and the Hallway Hangers understand themselves, neither group underscores the objective constraints faced by African Americans. Structural constraints on opportunity, whether rooted in race or class, are largely invisible to the young men in this study. The Hallway Hangers and the Brothers, like almost all Americans, tend to interpret their situation in individual rather than structural terms.

Structure Versus Agency: "No One to Blame but Me"

Every individual in this study holds himself acountable for his condition. Chapter 7 disclosed how the Brothers blamed themselves for their academic mediocrity. The Hallway Hangers were less self-critical but still reproached themselves for screwing up in school. Eight years later, for both groups, the verdict is similar. The previous chapter shows how the Brothers variously chastise themselves for being lazy, unmotivated, indecisive, unrealistic, overly opportunistic, fickle, and generally inept. Juan is straightforward: "I really screwed up." Super is equally succinct: "I just fucked everything up." The Hallway Hangers, it turns out, are also hard on themselves.

(*all in separate interviews*)

JINKS: I could kick myself in the ass, because if I stayed in school, I'd probably have a better job, and I'd be doing better in life right now.

CHRIS: I fucked up. I regret everything. I feel real bad about my mom. I just fucked up, man, fucked everything up. I'd like to regain back the trust of my family. Man, I wouldn't wish this situation on anyone.

STONEY: I was doing good for a while. Running this pizza place over in Medway. He gave me the keys, the boss did. I was running it, doing a good job, too. The money wasn't great but still. I ended up fucking the guy over. He vouched for me when I was in the pre-release center. I burned that bridge. About two months after I got out I said, "Here, here's the key, I'm fuckin' through, I'm sick of this." Shoulda stayed. Shoulda stuck it out. He might've given me more money, who knows? My judgment sucks sometimes.

FRANKIE: I know today I wasted a lot of my life. I had a lotta fun but I wasted a lot of it. Lotta guys went to jail, lotta guys were just fucked up, man. And I was fucked up in my own way.

BOO-BOO: I should never have got into drugs. I dunno, if I could do one thing, start all over again, I'd just go right back to school, I'd do my thing, wouldn't get tied up in all this bullshit I got tied up in.

STEVE: I've been fucking up big time, Jay, no lie. Going away [to jail] too much, man. Fighting with my girl. I left her, and she called up and said I was doing drugs and drinkin' and all that other shit. Which I was. Called my probation officer and ratted me right out.... I dunno, dude, I guess I've got no one to blame but me.

Both the Brothers and the Hallway Hangers hold themselves responsible for their plight. Like most Americans, they point to personal vices and individual shortcomings to account for their subordinate position in the class structure.

But this is not the whole story. We have already seen that, apart from Mike and Derek, the Brothers blame not only themselves but also the socioeconomic order for their failure to get ahead. James argues most forcefully that the economic system is also to blame. He acknowledges constraints on economic opportunity, holds the government accountable, and sympathizes with those who turn to illegal activity. But James also contends that lower-class culture prevents people from developing proper ambition.

JM: What do you think about the white kids at Clarendon Heights? Steve, Slick, Frankie, Jinks?

JAMES: They, er, gee, what can I say about that? They reached a certain level in their life and then they just stayed at that level. They just said, "Oh well, this is my life. This is what my life's gonna be." But it's all attitude, it's all if you wanna go farther than you are. They're gonna be in the Heights all their life. It's like back to, if you grow up in a certain environment, then that's what you gonna

live. That's what you're gonna live all your life. That's what you're used to. And that's how their life is. It's the same as the Coopers next door. The Coopers next door are always gonna be the same. They're never gonna change. Fifty years from now a new set of Coopers will be the same exact as these Coopers. Because they've reached a certain level, and they're always gonna be at that level. I'm not down on them, that's all they know. They're gonna just say, "I stopped at that level." But you can't say that. You have to want more for your kids and for your grandkids.

The idea that the intergenerational transmission of poverty is due, at least in part, to cultural attitudes and behavior is also implied by Slick. Like James, Slick points to macroeconomic constraints on opportunity, cultural deficiencies of the community, and individual shortcomings.

SLICK: I feel like I was robbed. I look at people and I say, y'know, I could be doin' what this guy's doing. If I had a college degree or something. But how was I gonna go to college? Know what I'm sayin'? I couldn't afford to go back to Latin Academy. My par—, my mother couldn't, because we moved into this city. So that robbed me of that deal, know what I mean? You've just got to deal with it the best way you fucking can. Believe me, I was pissed off about it, and I still think about it to this day. I shouldn't be this dirty. Look at how filthy I am, working with my hands, blisters all over me and shit. I should be working at an office with a tie and nice suit on.

JM: So what do you say to the rich guy who listens to this story and says, "Wait a minute. He wasn't robbed. That was him. He could've, when he came to Lincoln High, he could've made it. It was the people he hung out with, or ..."

SLICK: Nope.

JM: What do you say to him?

SLICK: What I say to him is, "Come down and learn for yourself, come down and see for yourself what it's like." Because you take it—I was a perfect A student all through my school years til I got yanked out of Latin Academy. When I moved here it was like, I ain't never got beat up before. I was into school. I was into sports and shit. I come here, get picked on, get my ass kicked all the fucking time. Finally, I went from being an A student to being, you know, you gotta defend yourself. What are you gonna study, you can't read a book on how to, on how to act like these people do. Y'know, you gotta treat an animal like a fucking animal. That's how it goes.

In the next breath, Slick places the corrosive influence of Clarendon Heights culture within a broader context of class inequality. Slick challenges the apparent superiority of the rich who, he claims, would be lost in Clarendon Heights without the props and symbols of their social status.

SLICK: Tell a person like that to come on down. I'll let 'em stay at my mother's house. The rich people you're talking about. Let 'em stay there with the cockroaches and the junkies shooting up outside and see how they react to it. Without their little Porsches and their little Saabs. Y'know, let them survive for a little while.

Slick's passing reference to roaches touches on an important dimension of lower-class life often missed by outside observers: what Wacquant calls the "demoralization effects" of life in intense poverty and permanent material insecurity. Living in places like Clarendon Heights tends to eat away at a person's energy and insides over time.[16] Slick knows it is different elsewhere and begins to articulate a critique of class privilege. But like the others, he holds himself responsible for his condition.

SLICK: I personally should've finished high school, then went on to some sort of college, any kinda college. Then looked over my options and *planned* on what I was doing. *Planned* on having children. *Planned* on my career. Instead of things just happening.

Like social theorists, both the Brothers and the Hallway Hangers wrestle with the roles of structure, culture, and agency in the reproduction of social inequality.

It should be obvious from this study that all three levels of analysis—the individual, the cultural, and the structural—play their part in the reproduction of social inequality. Had Slick been born into a middle-class family, he probably *would* be sitting in an office with a suit and tie on. Had his peer group been into Shakespeare and square roots rather than beer balls and bong hits, Slick might not be so blistered and dirty. Finally, Slick would be in better shape had he made different choices himself. Although all three levels have explanatory power, the structural one is primary because it reaches down into culture and individual agency. The culture of Clarendon Heights—with its violence, racism, and other self-destructive features (as well as its resilience, vitality, and informal networks of mutual support)—is largely a response to class exploitation in a highly stratified society. Similarly, Slick's individual strategies have developed not in a social vacuum but in the context of chronic social immobility and persistent poverty. To be sure, individual agency is important. Causality runs in both directions in a reflexive relationship between structure and agency. Structural constraints on opportunity lead to leveled aspirations, and leveled aspirations in turn affect job prospects. Contrary to popular belief, structure is still the source of inequality.

Most Americans tend to ignore the link between individual behavior and cultural patterns on the one hand and economic inequality on the other, but neither Jinks nor Frankie fall into this trap. Both contextualize their peer group in a nexus of class injustice.

JM: When you look back on the heyday, back in high school as teenagers and the closeness you guys had, what d'you think brought you together that way, compared to other people?

JINKS: Probably because we all grew up together, we were all the same age. We all went to school together. We were spendin' most of our times together as a unit, most of the time in the day. We were spendin' more time together, all of us, than we were with our families. We went through the good and the bad together. Most of the times were bad. I mean, in the projects, it's not everybody's happy-go-lucky. Nine times out of ten you're strugglin' to get what you want. So it makes your friendships bond tighter. Because you gotta rely on other people to help you through whatever it is you need. We didn't have money. So we had to get by with whatever we could. And how I look at it, what we used to get by with was our friendship.

JM: What would you say to those people who drive by and look over and see us. You can almost see it in their eyes, in ...

JINKS: Yeah, they're stereotyping right away: "Yeah, these kids are no good." But they should try to take the time out to understand us instead of right away, "He's a hoodlum because he lives in a project." I mean, there are a lot of people out here who are just like me—hardworkin'. They'll do anything for anybody. All they want is to be treated the way they treat people, y'know, with respect and kindness. They're not out there to screw anybody, but there are a lot of people, "Areas like this bring trouble."

Frankie also refers to class prejudice and, like Jinks, sees their peer group as rooted in the experience of growing up poor in a hostile dominant culture.

FRANKIE: Well back then, y'know, back then we were cool. We hung tight because, I know today, because we were looked down on our whole lives, man. From the projects. I believe, in my opinion, we were never invited anywhere. When we were places, y'know, people always knew: "Those are the kids from the projects." I would say we stuck together just, for a fact that, just, just to prove these people right. "You're right." We were from the fucking projects, and you didn't invite us to your party so we're gonna come anyways, just to fuck it up. And it was the generation before us, the generation before us, when my brothers and them were growing up ... it was just our values, man: Stick tight. We were taught that you had to stick together, just from generation to generation. ... I grew up thinking I was a bad fucking kid. And I liked that. I liked being known as a bad kid. I look back there—there aren't any bad kids—there's a lotta kids that just had a fucking tough life.

Bad kids or bad circumstances? Frankie leads us right back to the theoretical impasse between structure and agency. To what extent are the Hallway Hangers and Brothers victims of a limited opportunity structure, and to what extent are they victims of their own flawed choices?

Is Super, for example, forced to deal drugs because he was born at the bottom of a class society that glorifies conspicuous consumption while denying the poor real opportunity? Or does Super simply choose to deal drugs because he can't be bothered to work his way up legitimately like everybody else? In short, to paraphrase the title of Diego Gambetta's book, was he pushed or did he jump?[17] Is Super *pushed* into crime by the forces of social reproduction? Or does he *jump* as a matter of individual choice? Certainly Super is *pushed from behind* by forces of which he is largely unaware. Super was handicapped in school by the effects of cultural capital, tracking, and teacher expectations. On the job market, Super's alternatives are limited by the sectoral shift from manufacturing jobs to poorly paid service positions and then squeezed further by racial discrimination embedded in the labor market. Thus, Super is pushed from behind by structural forces acting "behind his back" that propel him into the street economy. In addition, Super is *pulled from the front*, as it were, by structural forces that he sees and with which he wittingly struggles. Super is aware, for example, that the economy's recessionary plunge means fewer legitimate jobs are available and that his high school diploma is far less helpful than he imagined. He also believes that cocaine capitalism proffers more of a career structure than do legitimate jobs in the new postindustrial economy. Pushed from behind and pulled from the front by structural forces, Super's entry into the informal economy is nevertheless his own decision individually taken. Super *jumps* into the cocaine trade because he wants to. Super wants "to be someone, make fast money, have respect," and his decision is intentional and even rational. And yet the decision cannot be understood apart from the structural limitations on his options. In the end, perhaps the fairest account is that Super was *pushed into jumping*.

Structure and agency are inseparable. Individual agents like Super are always structurally situated, and thus human agency is itself socially structured. Social structures reach into the minds and even the hearts of individuals to shape their attitudes, motivations, and worldviews. Structural determination is thus inscribed in the very core of human agency.[18] Bourdieu's concept of habitus captures the interpenetration of structure and agency, but habitus is more a label for a site than an explanation of what goes on within it. Bourdieu neglects the actual process whereby external forces and internal consciousness wrestle with each other. Rather, he seems to imply that agents are unwittingly and unconsciously disposed to adjust their dispositions and practices to the external constraints that

bear upon them. In Bourdieu's view, all this happens behind the backs of agents in the sense that it unfolds beneath the level of rationality, conscious deliberation, and intentional choice. And yet while pushed from behind by structural constraints of which they are unaware, the Brothers and Hallway Hangers are also pulled by forces that they actively and consciously manipulate. Although he claims otherwise, Bourdieu's notion of habitus fails to allow space for this kind of conscious, calculative decisionmaking. Habitus is an ingenious concept, and Bourdieu is surely correct to insist on a dialectical relationship between objective structures and internal subjectivities. However, Bourdieu never makes clear *how* the habitus engenders thought and action, and so his resolution of the agency-structure dualism seems more a sidestep than a solution.[19]

Still, by insisting on the inseparability of structure and agency, Bourdieu reminds us not only that structure is at the heart of agency but also that agency can reach to the heart of structure. The social universe people inhabit isn't simply received as a given from without; rather, it is produced and constructed anew by agents. As Wacquant explains, "The structures of society that seem to stand over and against agents as external objects are but the 'congealed' outcome of the innumerable acts of cognitive assembly guiding their past and present actions."[20] Structures are not fixed, binding, nor unalterable, yet they often appear so. Bourdieu unravels and picks apart the symbolic power that cloaks exploitative and oppressive relationships with an aura of inevitability and renders them fair, natural, and normal.

Now we begin to see why the Brothers and Hallway Hangers give no indication that they might be able to alter the structures that constrain them. Among them there is very little political or collective energy, or even a sense that change is possible. Of the Brothers, for example, James is critical of the economic system and government policy but never suggests an alternative to the policy he criticizes, much less an alternative to the economic system. Neither do the Hallway Hangers envisage the possibility of substantive change. As we saw in Chapter 9, Jinks complains about class injustice in his workplace but feels politically impotent.

JINKS: … He's a complete moron, and he can do as he pleases because his father's the boss. Because he's got money it makes everything he does right, y'know, whether it be wrong or right. He can't do no wrong. I see it at my job and everywhere else, and it's just all over the world.

JM: But apart from just recognizing that, it doesn't seem to make you that angry.

JINKS: It does and it don't. At times it does, but there's a lot of things in this world that make me angry. If I was to let every little thing that makes me angry bother me, I would be upset twenty-four hours a day. I would hate the world. I just try to have a few beers, smoke a few joints, and laugh at the world. It's so fucked

up, it ain't even funny any more. That's why I try gettin' the philosophy, Hooray for me, and fuck everybody else. Cuz no matter how hard you try, you're not gonna change it. I cannot worry about every little thing in life, okay, because there's too much out there to piss me off. And no matter what I do, if anything I try, it's not gonna change it. It's not gonna make it a better place for anybody.

JM: Most people say, y'know, this is the United States, it's a democracy. Is it impossible that we could vote into office people that would change things for the better?

JINKS: That's my philosophy. I don't even vote because all politicians are crooks. The only thing they can agree on is to give themselves a raise. What about the poor folk? I mean, how many people are out on the streets homeless? They cannot put money aside to help feed them and support them, right, but they can give themselves a ten, twenty thousand dollar a year raise. … We're in a state of recession, right? Fine, the cost of living goes up. How come our paychecks don't go up? It's just, I look at it at times, the whole world's fucked. No matter what you do, you gotta come out losin'. You can try and try and try and never get anywhere.

These last comments highlight the deeply felt sense of powerlessness amongst residents of Clarendon Heights. In 1983 Jinks was adamant that personal ambition was pointless: "I think you're kiddin' yourself to have any [aspirations]. We're just gonna take whatever we can get." Now his pessimism extends to aspirations for social change as well. "No matter what you do, you gotta come out losin'. You can try and try and try and never get anywhere."

This is pretty depressing stuff. We might expect those who are suspicious of the chances for individual upward mobility to be disposed toward collective political action to transform society. But when political *and* personal efficacy is judged illusory, then resignation and despair are liable to take over. The human psyche, however, resists hopelessness, and the Hallway Hangers are cast back on individual aspirations to sustain them. Slick is angling to be a supervisor on his roofing crew. Frankie wants to qualify as a mechanical contractor and supervise a building. Boo-Boo still hopes to be a mechanic; and Stoney, to own a pizza parlor. Shorty's aspirations are untempered by reality.

SHORTY: I'm s'posed to be getting my settlement soon, for gettin' stabbed. It's called victim of a violent crime, y'know. And I'm s'posed to get like probably forty grand. I'm gonna give my mother some money, help her out with some of her bills, and I'm gonna go halfs with my brother. We're gonna buy a two-family house and rent it out, the whole thing, and I still live with my mother, y'know. We'll see how that goes, and if it goes good we'll gonna buy another

one and then another one, and just keep buyin' real estate, that's the thing to get into. ... I will make money one of these days. Like to buy a nice fucking condo on Palm Beach. Next to the Kennedys' (*laughter*). No, I'm serious. I'm gonna make some money.

As implausible as Shorty's vision may be, his aspirations help to keep him going. Whereas the Hallway Hangers previously drew sustenance from their peer group, today they rely on their own individual hopes. The Hallway Hangers have slid into the system alongside the Brothers. Without their tight clique and its own definitions of success, the Hallway Hangers have become much more incorporated into mainstream culture. Far from celebrating their outcast status, they see retrospectively in 1991 that their youthful resistance dug them deeper into marginality.

Frankie articulates this point most clearly. Today, he wants and needs to see opportunity. His recovery program from drug and alcohol abuse is predicated on a sense of personal efficacy, on a can-do mentality that emphasizes control over one's destiny. Given his own recovery, Frankie is preoccupied with the toll that substance abuse has taken on the Hallway Hangers.

FRANKIE: There's a lot of sickness there and I see it. I see it today, y'know. Two years ago I was part of it, y'know, and today I'm not, and I can see. For once I'm on the outside lookin' in. It's changes and it's drugs—there's no other way to put it. That's the bottom line. And I just know that from experience.

JM: Do you see any causes even beneath the drugs? Like, I'm hearin' you say that a lot of your problems during that time and individuals' problems now is the drinking, is the drugs. Are there things, are there other things that have kept people back?

FRANKIE: The economy sucks. It's just bad, a lotta people just don't see a lotta opportunity, y'know? They just don't see opportunity in life, man.

JM: Is it that they don't see it, or is it that the opportunity's not there?

FRANKIE: (*After a long pause*) Back then, I would say it's, y'know, they'd probably think it's not there. I, I, some days I still don't think it's there, but it's there, man. Y'know, you only feel when you stop tryin'. My whole problem is I never began to try, y'know? And I'm sure maybe that's some of their problems, y'know? You gotta be willing to try.

JM: It's interesting to hear you say, y'know, that you gotta try, cuz I remember back then you would look at the black kids from around the Heights—the Dereks and Mokey and ...

FRANKIE: Your buddies.

JM: Yeah, right. You said they were chumps because they did try, because they tried in school and they were convinced that they would make it.

FRANKIE: Well, I look today, and if anyone shoulda had a chance to make it, it's fuckin', it's black people. ... But no, I look at it today, y'know, they were probably doing the right thing, y'know? But my motives were different then, you hafta realize. I know I realize that. My motives were fucked up back then.

JM: Has it paid off for them?

FRANKIE: I dunno. I don't see them. I dunno what the fuck they're doin'. I don't care (*laughs*). But I dunno. I haven't seen them. I know I wasted quite a bit of my life.

Here Frankie cuts to the crux of the matter. His confession that "my motives were fucked up back then" sounds like an admission that the Hallway Hangers' resistance ultimately proved counterproductive. Caught in the game and convinced that the rules are beyond changing, Frankie's only sensible option is to commit himself to the competition. Frankie wants to believe that the future is in his own hands, only "you gotta be willing to try." Otherwise, what is left to hang on to? But the Brothers have always tried, and unbeknownst to Frankie, they have failed to make it. And what does Frankie himself have to show for all his aspiration and application, his job counseling and vocational training, his sobriety and disabled status? Frankie is unemployed. But he is absolutely right to make the effort and seize what little opportunity may arise. What other choice does he have? As Rickey, a street hustler from the ghetto of Chicago's South Side, relates: "You know, like I said, it's a goo' feelin' sayin,' 'Hey, you can't make it but you try.'"[21] For Frankie, as for the Brothers, Hallway Hangers, and countless Rickeys across the country, hope flies in the face of crushing odds. The American Dream may be but a mirage. Still, it provides a vision toward which the thirsty may stumble.

What Is to Be Done?

The picture that emerges from this ethnography deviates substantially from the myth of America as the land of opportunity in which any child can grow up to be president. American society is not as open as we like to think; the ladder of social mobility is not accessible to all, nor are its rungs easy to grasp. Both the Brothers and the Hallway Hangers testify to the prevalence of social reproduction rather than social mobility. For many of those in the lowest reaches of the social structure, the American Dream is a hallucination.

Such a picture is troubling, for it shatters many of our illusions about the fairness of the American economic and social system. It also demands a political re-

sponse that goes well beyond the offerings of contemporary American liberalism. Extending the welfare state will not fix the basic problem facing the Brothers and Hallway Hangers. Improving the material conditions under which they live—better housing, health care, child care, and social services, less restricted and larger welfare and unemployment checks—certainly would be a step in the right direction, but such measures leave the basic emotional encumbrance of lower-class life untouched. These boys, all of them, desperately want to be somebody, to make something of their lives. By denying them that opportunity, by undercutting their very aspirations and reducing them to hopelessness at the age of sixteen, or by trapping them in the secondary labor market and leaving them disillusioned but still dreaming at twenty-four, the economic and social system causes untold misery, waste, and despair. The ideology that permeates American society holds out the rags-to-riches story as a valid option, despite the fact that very, very few people can live it out. If the Brothers and the Hallway Hangers are to have the opportunity to fulfill their potential as citizens and as human beings, more will have to change in the American political and social landscape than the expansion of the welfare state.

In short, what is required is the creation of a truly open society—a society where the life chances of those at the bottom are not radically different from those at the top and where wealth is distributed more equitably. Rather than reaching for the dizzying heights of the Eiffel Tower, the occupational structure could be shaped more like an onion. The socialist vision of a transformed class structure that radically reduces social inequality may seem hopelessly out of touch, but there is no denying that the capitalist free market, left to itself, can neither protect the environment nor meet human needs. The market has a major role to play in a decentralized socialist economy—but as a servant, not as a master. A mixed economy combining public power and private ownership can channel market forces so they flow in the desired direction. Competition and incentives do not require capitalism's unconscionable inequalities. Yet the 1980s saw the resurgence of a smug and vainglorious capitalism that widened the gap between the rich and poor to an all-time high. The tide may turn, but Democratic policies tend to tinker with a system that is in desperate need of an overhaul.

Whose Welfare?

For all the public cry for curtailment of the welfare state, the fact is that the United States does not have a welfare system worthy of the name. Public housing is a case in point. Experience has proved over and over again in nation after nation that a free market economy simply cannot provide homes for people on low and moderate incomes. Private developers build for the rich, not for the poor. Yet public provision of low-income housing in the United States lags way behind that in other industrialized nations. In 1980 public housing accounted for roughly 1 percent of the American housing market; in England the figure was 46 percent and in France 37 percent.

Instead of building housing for the poor, the United States has directly and indirectly subsidized homes for the better-off. From 1937 to 1968, 10 million middle- and upper-income private housing units were built with help from the Federal Housing Authority, whereas only 800,000 public units were constructed with federal housing subsidies. Moreover, as Wacquant notes, what little public housing was built consists mostly of cheap, massive, public housing projects stacked in central cities that reinforce racial segregation and the concentration of poverty.[22] The 1980s housing policy was even worse: to cease building public housing altogether. Widespread homelessness has been the result, a condition with which Boo-Boo and Chris are acquainted. And because only the poorest and most troubled families qualify for public housing, even small projects like Clarendon Heights are socially ostracized and physically forsaken.

Far from being an exception, public housing policy typifies America's scant commitment to the poor. Cries for the rolling back of welfare ignore the fact that benefits have already been slashed from levels that were paltry to begin with by international standards. The real value of the standard public aid package has plummeted by half. At the same time, eligibility has been tightened. In any case, only 55 percent of those eligible for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) nationwide actually received "welfare" in 1992. Fewer than a third of the jobless qualify for unemployment payments. Job training programs, revenue sharing, and urban development grants were all axed in the 1980s.[23] These government cutbacks, combined with the disastrous effects of deindustrialization, have marginalized the urban working class more than ever.

And still the politicians and the populace clamor for more cuts, claiming in utter ignorance confident knowledge of the world in which the urban poor live. Yet the lives of the Brothers and Hallway Hangers—their youthful passion and desperation as they struggle to cope with poverty and devise strategies to escape its grip—point in a rather different political direction than the nation is willing to look. I read the story of the Brothers and Hallway Hangers as a harsh indictment of American class society and as a sharp spur to work for its reformation.

Better Schools?

In Clarendon Heights I was not primarily a sociologist; I was primarily a youth worker. If sociological study drives us to acknowledge the degenerative effects of gender-, race-, and class-based constraints upon young people, then educational practitioners are left in a quandary: If the problems go beyond the kids, what can we do? "Better schools" has been the standard rallying cry for social reformers concerned about sustained economic inequality in the United States. If only poor children had access to quality education, opportunity for individual mobility would be equalized across social classes and the gap between rich and poor sub-

SIGN & DATE

stantially reduced. But the problems with this approach are substantial. First, as we have seen, schools actually maintain and legitimize social inequality. Second, educational reform leaves the underlying structure of economic inequality untouched. Still, though no substitute for fundamental structural change, improved schooling could help countless individuals like the Brothers and Hallway Hangers.

My first recommendation is that the achievement ideology must be replaced with ways of motivating students that acknowledge rather than deny their social condition. When used to cultivate discipline by highlighting the eventual rewards of educational attainment, the achievement ideology is neither effective at drawing obedience and attentiveness out of students nor conducive to the development of a positive self-image among working-class pupils. The familiar refrain of "Behave yourself, study hard, earn good grades, graduate with your class, go on to college, get a good job, and make a lot of money" reinforces the feelings of personal failure and inadequacy that working-class students are likely to bear as a matter of course. By this logic, those who have not made it have only themselves to blame. Because it shrouds class, race, and gender barriers to success, the achievement ideology promulgates a lie, one that some students come to recognize as such. For those pupils whose own experiences contradict the ideology—and in an urban public high school there are bound to be many—it is often rejected, and rightly so. Teachers are left with nothing to motivate their students, and it is no wonder that "acting out," aggressive disobedience, and unruliness predominate. School officials can round up the offending students and label them "slow," "learning impaired," "unmotivated," "troubled," "high-risk," or "emotionally disturbed" and segregate them, but the problem is much more deeply rooted.

Teachers do not promote the achievement ideology because they want to make working-class students miserable. Nor are they intent on maintaining social order and cohesion in the face of class inequality by contributing to the legitimation function of the school. In my experience, most teachers are well-intentioned, hard-working men and women who are striving to do a difficult job as best they can. They parrot the achievement ideology because they think it will motivate students, because it probably does not contradict their own experiences, and because they believe it. Most middle-class Americans do. As Willis writes, "What kind of bourgeoisie is it that does not in some way believe its own legitimations? That would be the denial of themselves."[24] The equality-of-opportunity line of reasoning may have worked in the middle-class high schools from which most teachers hail, but its utility in an urban school serving low-income neighborhoods is diminished greatly.

If students like the Hallway Hangers are to be motivated to achieve in school, it must not be at the expense of their self-esteem but in support of it. Schools serving low-income neighborhoods must help students build positive identities as working-class, black and white, young men and women. Rather than denying the existence of barriers to success, schools should acknowledge them explicitly while motivating students by teaching them, for example, about historic figures who shared the students' socioeconomic origins but overcame the odds. Success stories can be important motivators so long as emphasis is put on the obstacles against which these figures prevailed. Teachers can also strive to include material about which the students, drawing on the skills they have developed in their neighborhoods, are the experts. If the school could believe in the legitimacy and importance of students' feelings, perceptions, and experiences as working-class kids, the students themselves might come to do the same, thereby giving them a positive identity and a dose of self-confidence as a foundation for further application in school.

If such measures were undertaken on a systematic basis, boys like the Hallway Hangers might feel as though they belong in school, that they need not choose between rendering themselves naked and vulnerable by stripping off their street identities or aggressively asserting their street culture in disruptive rebellion. One of the reasons the Hallway Hangers speak so warmly about the Adjustment Class is that in Jimmy Sullivan's classroom they were allowed to maintain their street identities. Even more important, these identities were vindicated and given legitimacy because the teacher himself embodied many of the attitudes, values, and traits esteemed by the culture of the Hallway Hangers. The Hallway Hangers saw in Jimmy Sullivan a bit of themselves and in themselves a bit of Jimmy; because of the status and authority invested in him as a teacher, in addition to his independent financial success, Jimmy Sullivan vicariously defended and justified their self-image.

Teachers need not have a black belt in karate, place a premium on machismo, swear in class, or have working-class roots like Jimmy Sullivan; however, they must be prepared to validate the identities that their students have taken on as part of growing up. Admittedly, this is not an easy task, especially as awareness of class, race, and gender stereotyping should be inculcated by teachers. If part of one's education should involve the confrontation of ingrained sexism and its consequences, Sullivan's class would not receive high marks. There were no girls in his class, and the uncritical affirmation of machismo confronted the observer in every aspect of the room, from the punching bags, posters of Bruce Lee, and *Soldier of Fortune* magazines to the frankly sexist attitudes of the teacher. But easy educational answers do not exist, and we must resist the tendency, all too prevalent among school reformers, to cling to single-solution, essentialist positions. On balance, I consider the Adjustment Class a failure because, for the most part, the students emerged with very few academic skills. Students must still learn the basics.

In my experience, academic rigor itself demands that the curriculum meet the needs and concerns of working-class and minority students. If the curriculum is made responsive to student needs, the gap between academic skill and maturity can be bridged. No one is going to get Shorty to read about the Hardy Boys; on

the other hand, his reading ability may not be much above a fourth-grade level. Novels and poignant nonfiction works dealing with the concerns of working-class and minority youth could be incorporated into the curriculum. It is ludicrous, for instance, to expect students in the Adjustment Class to learn about social studies from a sixth-grade U.S. history textbook. Meanwhile, the thirteen-year-old younger brothers of the Hallway Hangers have managed to research prison life through books, movies, slides, seminars, and field trips and to produce a thirty-page anthology of interviews with former inmates, many of whom live in Clarendon Heights. Their achievement, *Behind Bars*, demonstrates what can be gained in educational terms when local history and culture are taken seriously and when students are actively involved in thinking and doing rather than being passively exposed to textbook material. These would-be Hallway Hangers did not memorize rules of punctuation, spelling, capitalization, subject-verb agreement, and other mechanics of grammar. Rather, they used them time and again in the process of putting together their magazine. Connecting the curriculum with the interests of pupils like the Hallway Hangers can be done; it only requires a commitment—both attitudinal and material—to meeting the needs of working-class students.

Material commitment is crucial. Many schools in poor neighborhoods lack the most basic resources: classrooms, desks, books, science labs, photocopy machines, cafeteria furnishings, functioning toilets, and properly trained teachers. Among the member-countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United States has the lowest per capita expenditure on primary education. Inner-city schools, segregated by color and class, have been allowed to deteriorate to the point where they are downright dangerous. In this context it is worth remembering that the Hallway Hangers and Brothers actually attended a highly regarded public high school. Even a curriculum reformed along the lines I have outlined would neither dissolve a school's social reproductive function nor directly address the fundamental problem of the transmission of class inequality. Thus, educational reform should be pursued not as an end in itself but as a component of more fundamental change in the social fabric of American society.

The transformation of American class society is currently a political impossibility, and progressive social change is bound to be slow and piecemeal. One way forward is through education that fosters a critical understanding of social problems and their structural causes. As students develop tools of social analysis and begin to understand how class-based inequalities in wealth, power, and privilege affect them, this awareness of self in relation to society becomes a motivating force much more powerful than the achievement ideology. Reflection on their personal and social reality frees learners from the debilitating effects of the dominant "blame the victim" way of seeing the world. Consonant with the praxis of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire,[25] when learners perceive the structural roots of their own plight, they develop a new sense of personal dignity and are energized by a new hope. Time and again I have seen poor students face up to long

odds and vow to overcome them instead of resigning themselves to the marginalized fate of the Hallway Hangers. When their passions and intellects are stimulated by indignation, youths are often moved to challenge the heretofore hidden social, political, and economic forces that weigh so heavily upon their lives. For some, this means an intensely personal drive and ambition. Others begin struggling to create a better world. In still others, these impulses coexist; such youths work for social, political, and economic reconstruction as well as personal transformation. For all of them, in contrast to the boys in this study, education has recovered its mission: It has become emancipatory.

Class Dismissed

The experiences of the Hallway Hangers and Brothers, properly mined, highlight failures in economic, social, and educational policy, and the preceding pages offer a rough sketch of the book's broad policy implications. But this study points an accusing finger at one dominant dogma, itself a major obstacle to political change: the persistent belief that poverty is caused by the personal vices and cultural pathologies of the poor. Distinctively American, this old notion was rejuvenated in the 1960s by Oscar Lewis and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who argued that a "culture of poverty" characterized by fatalism, family instability, and social irresponsibility promoted persistent urban poverty. Yet both Lewis and Moynihan contended that this "tangle of pathology" was rooted in sustained social immobility and chronic unemployment.[26]

Today, the link between economic opportunity and lower-class behavior has been completely cut in the popular press and the popular mind. Liberals such as Nicholas Lemann, keen to blame the poor for their plight, long to give ghettos an injection of bourgeois mores to cure the cultural malaise that black migrants allegedly brought up from the South, a theory he borrows from Edward Banfield.[27] Meanwhile, Banfield's archconservative heirs such as Charles Murray have set about convincing the public that welfare programs cause rather than contain poverty and that the social safety net should be scrapped altogether.[28] Egged on by Republican and even Democratic rhetoric, more and more Americans bewail the waste of their tax money on "the mythical black welfare mother, complete with a prodigious reproductive capacity and a galling laziness, accompanied by the uncaring and equally lazy black man in her life who will not work, will not marry her and will not support his family."[29] The war on poverty has become the war on the poor.

This book confirms that structural inequality causes poverty. The presumed behavioral and cultural deficiencies of the lower class are the consequence rather than the cause of poverty. Culture of poverty theorists consistently cite lack of ambition as a barrier to lower-class advancement. But the leveled aspirations of

the Hallway Hangers can be directly traced to the impermeability of the class structure. Moreover, the ample ambition of the Brothers has been drained away by the tilted playing field under their feet. Over and over we discover beneath behavior cited as evidence of cultural pathology a social rationality that makes sense given the economic constraints these young men face. Born into the lowest reaches of the class structure, the Brothers and Hallway Hangers variously help and hinder the inertia of social reproduction. Their individual choices matter and make a difference, but the stage is largely set. Even the Hallway Hangers, far from authors of their own problems, are victims of a limited opportunity structure that strangles their initiative and channels them into lifestyles of marginality, and then allows the privileged to turn around and condemn them for doing so.[30]

But it is not merely the man driving by in the BMW who blames the victim. The Hallway Hangers and Brothers largely blame themselves for their plight. Schooled in the rhetoric of equal opportunity, the young men themselves confuse the consequences with the causes of poverty. Their self-blame is not total; many of the men in this study feel the constraining forces of social reproduction. But structural insight usually collapses into a feeling of personal responsibility for their failure to get ahead. Both the Brothers and Hallway Hangers see themselves as basically undeserving.

Class is not in the vocabulary of the Hallway Hangers and Brothers any more than it is in the vocabulary of other Americans. And yet class determines the grammar and idiom of their existence, if not the precise syntax. Yes, Frankie and company chose to follow the example of their older brothers and to hang out in doorway #13; chose to smoke and sell marijuana and angel dust at age thirteen; chose to deny rather than defer to teacher authority; chose to apply themselves to stealing rather than studying; and chose to drink and fight and assert their masculinity in displays of street aggression. Just like, as Benjamin DeMott imagines, a boy on the other side of town chooses to follow the example of his father (an engineer) and develop a science hobby in junior high (taking over the basement lounge for a lab); chooses to develop a research focus on robotics under the guidance of his brilliant young physics teacher (who already has two Young Scientist finalists); chooses at MIT to specialize in space robotics; chooses to take the NASA fellowship offer; and so on and on. In the American mind, life is about individual choices; social class matters not.[31]

The Brothers and Hallway Hangers live in a class society committed to the denial of class. Their lived experience attests to the power and pervasiveness of social class, but in the absence of any organizing and overarching ideology, their awareness of class is politically limp and inchoate. Where is such an ideology to be found? Democrats and Republicans fall over each other to please the mythically all-inclusive "middle class." Apart from conspicuously failing to address poverty as an issue, politicians pepper their public speeches with references to the "decent," "responsible," "hard-working" families they are so keen to court. "Symbolically cast out of the civic community," the poor, far from being a viable constituency, have become a political football to be kicked around in the debate about crime.[32] Politicians of all stripes want simply to lock up the likes of the Hallway Hangers, as if criminality and economic opportunity were not inextricably linked. Once again, social problems are reduced to problems of individual morality and pathology. In contemporary American politics, there is no critique of the class structure; instead, the poor find themselves pushed beyond the political pale.

If the tide and toll of advanced marginality in the United States is to be checked, new organizational forms of popular mobilization need to be nurtured: grassroots organizations, women's groups, community organizing outfits, and coalitions campaigning on issues of health, housing, schooling, child care, crime, and local neighborhood concerns. Political parties and trade unions alone are ill-suited to stop the steady advance of new forms of social inequality.

In many countries, trade unions still carry the cause of workers and promote class consciousness. But the American labor movement has been crippled by red-baiting, right-to-work laws, racism, corporate power, and its own conservatism. In today's postindustrial economy, unions are consumed by the fight for survival, and a comprehensive critique of the class system is far from their agenda. Still, some unions serve their members and instill class solidarity. If it weren't for his progressive hotel and restaurant workers' union, Frankie might still be strung out on coke. Mike, the other union member, makes far more money than the other men in this study. And as much as he rants about welfare cheats and raves about oceans of opportunity, Mike quotes with approval the literature distributed by his postal union about how "the Republicans are fucking us over, selling the working class down the river." Alone among the subjects of this study, Mike speaks of the "working class." And yet he is also the most reactionary, variously characterizing the Hallway Hangers as "fuckin' rejects," "fuckin' trash," and "a bunch of lazy, loser, fuck-up bums." Mike has forged his working-class identity by distancing himself from the "lazy" subproletariat. The class solidarity he articulates is defined as much against those below as against those above. Unfortunately, Mike's attitude is symptomatic of a working class that is severely fragmented.

The top tenth of the population owns 86 percent of the nation's wealth. But the rest of the wealth is distributed in such a way as to turn those in the bottom nine-tenths against each other. The working class is divided. White-collar workers vaunt themselves over manual laborers; skilled workers look down on the unskilled; those in low-status occupations belittle the unemployed. For the bulk of the workforce, there are always groups like the Hallway Hangers to whom they can feel superior. And the Hallway Hangers themselves, their peer group dissolved, seek solace and superiority in sexism and racism. They sense that the odds are stacked against them, but under the sway of New Right rhetoric and in the absence of any alternative political philosophy, the Hallway Hangers believe that they are victimized as white men. Victimized they are, but by a class system so clothed in the rhetoric of classlessness that the Hallway Hangers can be persuaded

to pitch their tents with the powerful in a circle that excludes the Brothers. That is their tragedy, and ours.

Notes

1. J. Castro, "How's Your Pay?" *Time,* 15 April 1991, pp. 40–41.

2. "Corporate Executives Go to the Trough," *Dollars and Sense* 138 (1988):10–11. Cited in Thomas R. Shannon, Nancy Kleniewski, and William M Cross, *Urban Problems in Sociological Perspective* (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1991), p. 104.

3. David R. Francis, "Executive Pay in the U.S. Just Goes Up and Up," *Christian Science Monitor,* May 20, 1994, p. 9.

4. Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), p. 6.

5. Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), p. 207.

6. Leonard Beeghley, "Individual and Structural Explanations of Poverty," *Population Research and Policy Review* 7 (1988):207.

7. Loïc J. D. Wacquant, "Morning in America, Dusk in the Dark Ghetto: The New 'Civil War' in the American City," *Revue française d'études américaines* 60 (May 1994):97–102.

8. See Roger Waldinger and Thomas Bailey, "The Continuing Significance of Race: Racial Conflict and Racial Discrimination in Construction," *Politics and Society* 19:3 (1991):291–323.

9. Loïc J. D. Wacquant, "Urban Outcasts: Stigma and Division in the Black American Ghetto and the French Periphery," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 17:3 (1993):366–383. Wacquant refers to the historic all-black ghetto, but his insight also applies to the Brothers in their different context.

10. William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 12.

11. Loïc J. D. Wacquant, "The Puzzle of Race and Class in American Society and Social Science," *Benjamin E. Mays Monograph Series* 2 (Fall 1989):7–20.

12. Wacquant, "The Puzzle of Race and Class in American Society and Social Science," p. 15. See also Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," *Theory and Society* 14 (October 1985):723–744.

13. I am grateful to John Dickie for this point.

14. Paul E. Willis, *Learning to Labor* (Aldershot: Gower, 1977).

15. This objective dimension of race has nothing to do with the scientific category of race, which is biologically useless. Race is a sociohistorical concept rather than a biological one.

16. Loïc J. D. Wacquant, "The Ghetto, the State, and the New Capitalist Economy," *Dissent* (Fall 1989):508–520.

17. Diego Gambetta, *Were They Pushed or Did They Jump?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). These schemes—of being pushed from behind and pulled from the front—are borrowed from Gambetta but take on a somewhat different meaning in the present context.

18. Loïc J. D. Wacquant, "On the Tracks of Symbolic Power," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 10 (August 1993):3–4.

19. To be fair, Bourdieu reckons that the structure-agency dilemma is improperly framed and leads to a theoretical cul-de-sac. It would be harsh to fault him for failing to resolve this dilemma, if it were not claimed by others that he succeeds in dissolving and transcending the structure-agency dualism.

20. Wacquant, "On the Tracks of Symbolic Power," p. 3.

21. Loïc J. D. Wacquant, "'The Zone': Le métier de 'hustler' dans le ghetto noir américain," *Actes de la recherche en science sociales* 93 (June 1992):58.

22. Loïc J. D. Wacquant, "The State and Fate of the Ghetto: Redrawing the Urban Color Line in Postfordist America," in *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity,* ed. Craig Calhoun (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1994).

23. Wacquant, "Morning in America, Dusk in the Dark Ghetto," pp. 97–102.

24. Willis, *Learning to Labor,* p. 123.

25. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1981).

26. Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 5. See also Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *On Understanding Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

27. Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991). See also Lemann's "The Origins of the Underclass," *Atlantic Monthly* (June 1986):31–55, continued in (July 1986):54–68; and Edward C. Banfield's *The Unheavenly City* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970).

28. Charles Murray, *Losing Ground* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

29. Rosemary L. Bray, "Growing Up on Welfare," *The Observer Magazine,* 2 January 1994, p. 37.

30. Brian Powers, "Two Tracks to Nowhere," *Socialist Review* 19:2 (April–June 1989):157.

31. Benjamin DeMott, *The Imperial Middle* (New York: William Morrow, 1990), p. 186.

32. Wacquant, "Morning in America, Dusk in the Dark Ghetto," p. 5.