6

The Perpetuation of
the Underclass

One notable difference appears between the Immigrant and Negro populations. In the case of the former, there is the possibility of escape, with improvement in economic status in the second generation.

1931 report to President Herbert Hoover
by the Committee on Negro Housing

If the black ghetto was deliberately constructed by whites through a series of private decisions and institutional practices, if racial discrimination persists at remarkably high levels in U.S. housing markets, if intensive residential segregation continues to be imposed on blacks by virtue of their skin color, and if segregation concentrates poverty to build a self-perpetuating spiral of decay into black neighborhoods, then a variety of deleterious consequences automatically follow for individual African Americans.[1] A racially segregated society cannot be a race-blind society; as long as U.S. cities remain segregated–indeed, hypersegregated–the United States cannot claim to have equalized opportunities for blacks and whites. In a segregated world, the deck is stacked against black socioeconomic progress, political empowerment, and full participation in the mainstream of American life.

In considering how individuals fare in the world, social scientists make a fundamental distinction between individual, family, and structural characteristics. To a great extent, of course, a person's success depends on individual traits such as motivation, intelligence, and especially, education. Other things equal, those who are more highly motivated, smarter, and better educated will be rewarded more highly in the labor market and will achieve greater socioeconomic success.[2]

Other things generally are not equal, however, because individual traits such as motivation and education are strongly affected by family background. Parents who are themselves educated, motivated, and economically successful tend to pass these traits on to their children. Children who enter the middle and upper classes through the accident of birth are more likely than other, equally intelligent children from other classes to acquire the schooling, motivation, and cultural knowledge required for socioeconomic success in contemporary society.[3] Other aspects of family background, moreover, such as wealth and social connections, open the doors of opportunity irrespective of education or motivation.[4]

Yet even when one adjusts for family background, other things are still not equal, because the structural organization of society also plays a profound role in shaping the life chances of individuals. Structural variables are elements of social and economic organization that lie beyond individual control, that are built into the way society is organized. Structural characteristics affect the fate of large numbers of people and families who share common locations in the social order.[5]

Among the most important structural variables are those that are geographically defined. Where one lives–especially, where one grows up–exerts a profound effect on one's life chances.[6] Identical individuals with similar family backgrounds and personal characteristics will lead very different lives and achieve different rates of socioeconomic success depending on where they reside. Because racial segregation confines blacks to a circumscribed and disadvantaged niche in the urban spatial order, it has profound consequences for individual and family well-being.

Social and Spatial Mobility

In a market society such as the United States, opportunities, resources, and benefits are not distributed evenly across the urban landscape. Rather, certain residential areas have more prestige, greater affluence, higher home values, better services, and safer streets than others. Marketing consultants have grown rich by taking advantage of this "clustering of America" to target specific groups of consumers for wealthy corporate clients.[7] The geographic differentiation of American cities by socioeconomic status does more than conveniently rank neighborhoods for the benefit of demographers, however; it also creates a crucial connection between social and spatial mobility.

As people get ahead, they not only move up the economic ladder, they

move up the residential ladder as well.[8] As early as the 1920s, sociologists at the University of Chicago noted this close connection between social and spatial mobility, a link that has been verified many times since.[9] As socioeconomic status improves, families relocate to take advantage of opportunities and resources that are available in greater abundance elsewhere. By drawing on benefits acquired through residential mobility, aspiring parents not only consolidate their own class position but enhance their and their children's prospects for additional social mobility.[10]

In a very real way, therefore, barriers to spatial mobility are barriers to social mobility, and where one lives determines a variety of salient factors that affect individual well-being: the quality of schooling, the value of housing, exposure to crime, the quality of public services, and the character of children's peers. As a result, residential integration has been a crucial component in the broader process of socioeconomic advancement among immigrants and their children.[11] By moving to successively better neighborhoods, other racial and ethnic groups have gradually become integrated into American society. Although rates of spatial assimilation have varied, levels of segregation have fallen for each immigrant group as socioeconomic status and generations in the United States have increased.[12]

The residential integration of most ethnic groups has been achieved as a by-product of broader processes of socioeconomic attainment, not because group members sought to live among native whites per se. The desire for integration is only one of a larger set of motivations, and not necessarily the most important. Some minorities may even be antagonistic to the idea of integration, but for spatial assimilation to occur, they need only be willing to put up with integration in order to gain access to socioeconomic resources that are more abundant in areas in which white families predominate.

To the extent that white prejudice and discrimination restrict the residential mobility of blacks and confine them to areas with poor schools, low home values, inferior services, high crime, and low educational aspirations, segregation undermines their social and economic well-being. The persistence of racial segregation makes it difficult for aspiring black families to escape the concentrated poverty of the ghetto and puts them at a distinct disadvantage in the larger competition for education, jobs, wealth, and power. The central issue is not whether African Americans "prefer" to live near white people or whether integration is a desirable social goal, but how the restrictions on individual liberty implied by

severe segregation undermine the social and economic well-being of individuals.

Extensive research demonstrates that blacks face strong barriers to spatial assimilation within American society. Compared with other minority groups, they are markedly less able to convert their socioeconomic attainments into residential contact with whites, and because of this fact they are unable to gain access to crucial resources and benefits that are distributed through housing markets.[13] Dollar for dollar, blacks are able to buy fewer neighborhood amenities with their income than other groups.

Among all groups in the United States, only Puerto Ricans share blacks' relative inability to assimilate spatially; but this disadvantage stems from the fact that many are of African origin.[14] Although white Puerto Ricans achieve rates of spatial assimilation that are comparable with those found among other ethnic groups, those of African or racially mixed origins experience markedly lower abilities to convert socioeconomic attainments into contact with whites.[15] Once race is controlled, the "paradox of Puerto Rican segregation" disappears.[16]

Given the close connection between social and spatial mobility, the persistence of racial barriers implies the systematic exclusion of blacks from benefits and resources that are distributed through housing markets. We illustrate the severity of this black disadvantage with data specially compiled for the city of Philadelphia in 1980 (see Table 6.1).[17] The data allow us to consider the socioeconomic character of neighborhoods that poor, middle-income, and affluent blacks and whites can be expected to inhabit, holding education and occupational status constant.[18]

In Philadelphia, poor blacks and poor whites both experience very bleak neighborhood environments; both groups live in areas where about 40% of the births are to unwed mothers, where median home values are under $30,000, and where nearly 40% of high school students score under the 15th percentile on a standardized achievement test. Families in such an environment would be unlikely to build wealth through home equity, and children growing up in such an environment would be exposed to a peer environment where unwed parenthood was common and where educational performance and aspirations were low.

As income rises, however, whites are able to escape this disadvantaged setting by relocating to a more advantaged setting. With a middle-class income ($20,000 1979 dollars), whites no longer reside in a neighborhood where unwed parenthood predominates (only 10% of births are to single mothers) and housing values are well above $30,000. At the same

Table 6.1   Characteristics of neighbourhoods inhabited by blacks and
whites at different income levels in Philadelphia, 1980

| | Level of household income | | | | | |
| | Poor ($8,000) | | Middle ($20,000) | | Affluent ($32,000) | |
	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks
Percentage of births to unwed mothers	40.7	37.6	10.3	25.8	1.9	16.7
Median value of homes (in thousands of 1980 dollars)	$19.4	$27.1	$38.0	$29.5	$56.6	$31.9
Percentage of students scoring below 15th percentile on CAT in local high school	39.3	35.5	16.5	26.6	5.7	19.2

Source: Douglas S. Massey, Gretchen A. Condran, and Nancy A. Denton, "The Effect of Residential Segregation on Black Social and Economic Weil-Being," *Social Forces* 66 (1987):46–47, 50.
   Note: Household income is in 1979 dollars.

time, school performance is markedly better: only 17% of students in the local high school score below the 15th percentile.

Once whites achieve affluence, moreover, negative residential conditions are left far behind. Affluent whites in Philadelphia (those with a 1979 income of $32,000) live in neighborhoods where only 2% of the births are to unwed mothers, where the median home value is $57,000, and where a mere 6% of high school students score below the 15th percentile on achievement tests. Upwardly mobile whites, in essence, capitalize on their higher incomes to buy their way into improved residential circumstances.

Blacks, in contrast, remain mired in disadvantage no matter what income they achieve. Middle-income blacks live in an area where more than a quarter of the births are to unwed mothers, where housing values languish below $30,000, and where 27% of all students in the local high school score below the 15th percentile. Even with affluence, blacks achieve neighborhood environments that compare unfavorably with

those attained by whites. With an income of $32,000, a black family can expect to live in a neighborhood where 17% of all births are to unwed mothers, home values are barely over $30,000, and where a fifth of high school students score below the 15th percentile.

For blacks, in other words, high incomes do not buy entree to residential circumstances that can serve as springboards for future socioeconomic mobility; in particular, blacks are unable to achieve a school environment conducive to later academic success. In Philadelphia, children from an affluent black family are likely to attend a public school where the percentage of low-achieving students is three times greater than the percentage in schools attended by affluent white children. Small wonder, then, that controlling for income in no way erases the large racial gap in SAT scores.[19] Because of segregation, the same income buys black and white families educational environments that are of vastly different quality.[20]

Given these limitations on the ability of black families to gain access to neighborhood resources, it is hardly surprising that government surveys reveal blacks to be less satisfied with their residential circumstances than socioeconomically equivalent whites.[21] This negative evaluation reflects an accurate appraisal of their circumstances rather than different values or ideals on the part of blacks.[22] Both races want the same things in homes and neighborhoods; blacks are just less able to achieve them. Compared with whites, blacks are less likely to be homeowners,[23] and the homes they do own are of poorer quality, in poorer neighborhoods, and of lower value.[24] Moreover, given the close connection between home equity and family wealth, the net worth of blacks is a small fraction of that of whites, even though their incomes have converged over the years.[25] Finally, blacks tend to occupy older, more crowded dwellings that are structurally inadequate compared to those inhabited by whites;[26] and because these racial differentials stem from segregation rather than income, adjusting for socioeconomic status does not erase them.[27]

The Politics of Segregation

Socioeconomic achievement is not only a matter of individual aspirations and effort, however; it is also a matter of collective action in the political arena. Generations of immigrants have entered American cities and struggled to acquire political power as a means to enhance individual mobility. Ultimately most were incorporated into the pluralist political

structure of American cities. In return for support at the polls, ethnic groups were awarded a share of public services, city contracts, and municipal jobs in rough proportion to their share of the electorate. The receipt of these public resources, in turn, helped groups consolidate their class position and gave their members a secure economic base from which to advance further.[28]

The process of political incorporation that followed each immigrant wave grew out of shared political interests that were, to a large extent, geographically determined. Although neighborhoods may have been labeled "Polish," "Italian," or "Jewish," neighborhoods in which one ethnic group constituted a majority were rare, and most immigrants of European origin never lived in them. As a result, levels of ethnic segregation never reached the heights typical of black-white segregation today.[29]

This geographic diversification of ethnicity created a situation in which ethnic groups necessarily shared common political interests.'[30] In distributing public works, municipal services, and patronage jobs to ethnic groups in return for their political support, resources were also allocated to specific neighborhoods, which typically contained a diverse array of ethnicities. Given the degree of ethnic mixing within neighborhoods, political patronage provided to one group yielded substantial benefits for others as well. Building a new subway stop in an "Italian" neighborhood, for example, also provided benefits to Jews, Poles, and Lithuanians who shared the area; and allocating municipal jobs to Poles not only benefited merchants in "Polish" communities but generated extra business for nearby shopkeepers who were Hungarian, Italian, or Czech.

At the same time, threats to curtail municipal services encouraged the formation of broad, interethnic coalitions built around common neighborhood interests. A plan to close a firehouse in a "Jewish" neighborhood, for example, brought protests not only from Jews but from Scandinavians, Italians, and Slovaks who shared the neighborhood and relied on its facilities. These other ethnics, moreover, were invariably connected to friends and relatives in other neighborhoods or to co-ethnic politicians from other districts who could assist them in applying political pressure to forestall the closure. In this way, residential integration structurally supported the formation of interethnic coalitions, providing a firm base for the emergence of pluralist political machines.

Residential integration also made it possible for ethnic groups to compete for political leadership throughout the city, no matter what their size.[31] Because no single group dominated numerically in most neighbor-

hoods, politicians from a variety of backgrounds found the door open to make a bid for elective office. Moreover, representatives elected from ethnically diverse neighborhoods had to pay attention to all voters irrespective of ethnic affiliation. The geographic distribution of political power across ethnically heterogeneous districts spread political influence widely among groups and ensured that all were given a political voice.

The residential segregation of blacks, in contrast, provided no basis for pluralist politics because it precluded the emergence of common neighborhood interests; the geographic isolation of blacks instead forced nearly all issues to cleave along racial lines.[32] When a library, firehouse, police station, or school was built in a black neighborhood, other ethnic groups derived few, if any, benefits; and when important services were threatened with reduction or removal, blacks could find few coalition partners with whom to protest the cuts. Since no one except blacks lived in the ghetto, no other ethnic group had a self-interest in seeing them provided with public services or political patronage.

On the contrary, resources allocated to black neighborhoods detracted from the benefits going to white ethnic groups; and because patronage was the glue that held white political coalitions together, resources allocated to the ghetto automatically undermined the stability of the pluralist machine. As long as whites controlled city politics, their political interests lay in providing as few resources as possible to African Americans and as many as possible to white ethnic groups. Although blacks occasionally formed alliances with white reformers, the latter acted more from moral conviction than from self-interest. Because altruism is notoriously unreliable as a basis for political cooperation, interracial coalitions were unstable and of limited effectiveness in representing black interests."

The historical confinement of blacks to the ghetto thus meant that blacks shared few political interests with whites. As a result, their incorporation into local political structures differed fundamentally from the pluralist model followed by other groups.[34] The geographic and political isolation of blacks meant that they had virtually no power when their numbers were small; only when their numbers increased enough to dominate one or more wards did they acquire any influence at all. But rather than entering the pluralist coalition as an equal partner, the black community was incorporated in a very different way: as a machine within a machine.[35]

The existence of solid black electoral districts, while undermining interracial coalition-building, did create the potential for bloc voting along

racial lines. In a close citywide election, the delivery of a large number of black votes could be extremely useful to white politicians, and inevitably black political bosses arose to control and deliver this vote in return for political favors. Unlike whites, who exercised power through politicians of diverse ethnicities, blacks were typically represented by one boss, always black, who developed a symbiotic and dependent relationship with the larger white power structure.[36]

In return for black political support, white politicians granted black bosses such as Oscar DePriest or William Dawson of Chicago and Charles Anderson of Harlem a share of jobs and patronage that they could, in turn, distribute within the ghetto.[37] Although these bosses wielded considerable power and status within the black community, they occupied a very tenuous position in the larger white polity. On issues that threatened the white machine or its constituents, the black bosses could easily be outvoted. Thus patronage, services, and jobs were allocated to the ghetto only as long as black bosses controlled racial agitation and didn't threaten the color line, and the resources they received typically compared unfavorably to those provided to white politicians and their neighborhoods.[38]

As with black business owners and professionals, the pragmatic adaptation of black politicians to the realities of segregation gave them a vested interest in the ghetto and its perpetuation.[39] During the 1950s, for example, William Dawson joined with white ethnic politicians to oppose the construction of public housing projects in white neighborhoods, not because of an ideological objection to public housing per se, but because integration would antagonize his white political sponsors and take voters outside of wards that he controlled.[40]

The status quo of a powerful white machine and a separate but dependent black machine was built on shifting sand, however. It remained viable only as long as cities dominated state politics, patronage was plentiful, and blacks comprised a minority of the population. During the 1950s and 1960s, white suburbanization and black in-migration systematically undermined these foundations, and white machine politicians became progressively less able to accommodate black demands while simultaneously maintaining the color line. Given the declining political clout of cities, the erosion of their tax base, and the rising proportion of blacks in cities, municipal politics became a racially charged zero-sum game that pitted politically disenfranchised blacks against a faltering coalition of ethnic whites.[41]

In cities where blacks came to achieve an absolute majority–such as Baltimore, Newark, Gary, Detroit, Cleveland, and Washington, D.C.– the white political machine was destroyed as blacks assumed power and ended white patronage. In cities where the share of blacks peaked at around 40%–as in Chicago and Philadelphia –blacks were able to acquire power only by pulling liberal whites and disaffected Hispanics into a tenuous coalition, but given prevailing patterns of segregation these alliances were not politically stable. Chicago, for example, quickly reverted to white control in a way that succinctly illustrates the vulnerability of black politicians under conditions of racial segregation.

By the beginning of the 1980s, black in-migration to Chicago had stopped, white out-migration had leveled off, and the movement of Hispanics into the city was accelerating. As the share of blacks stalled at just above 40%, it became clear that they would not soon, if ever, comprise a majority of the Chicago's population. Latinos had become the swing voters and whoever pulled them into a coalition would rule the city. Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, however, had traditionally been ignored by the city's white machine politicians, and in frustration they joined with blacks in 1983 to elect the city's first black mayor, Harold Washington.[42]

But under black leadership the fruits of political power did not come fast enough to satisfy rising Latino expectations. Given the high degree of residential segregation between blacks and Hispanics, resources provided to black constituents had few spillover benefits for Mexican Americans or Puerto Ricans, and when Mayor Washington died early in his second term, they bolted from the black politicians to form a new coalition with the chastened and now politically receptive ethnic whites. Together Latinos and European whites constituted a working majority of voters who elected a new white mayor, Richard M. Daley, son of the city's last white political boss. Given their relative integration, moreover, white Europeans and Latinos found a stable basis for coalition politics based on geographically structured self-interest.

Chicago's Latinos now appear to be following the pluralist political model of earlier European immigrant groups; and because they are the only major group in the city whose numbers are growing, their political power and influence can only be expected to increase. As long as the working coalition between Latinos and European whites holds, blacks will be unable to win citywide power. The political isolation of blacks continues because of the structural limitations imposed on them by racial

segregation, which guarantees that they have will few interests in common with other groups.

Even in cities where blacks have assumed political leadership by virtue of becoming a majority, the structural constraints of segregation still remain decisive. Indeed, the political isolation experienced by blacks in places such as Newark and Detroit is probably more severe than that experienced earlier in the century, when ghetto votes were at least useful to white politicians in citywide elections. Once blacks gained control of the central city and whites completed their withdrawal to the surrounding suburbs, virtually all structural supports for interracial cooperation ended.

In the suburbs surrounding places such as Newark and Detroit, white politicians are administratively and politically insulated from black voters in central cities, and they have no direct political interest in their welfare. Indeed, money that flows into black central cities generally means increased taxes and lower net incomes for suburban whites. Because suburbanites now form a majority of most state populations–and a majority of the national electorate–the "chocolate city–vanilla suburb" pattern of contemporary racial segregation gives white politicians a strong interest in limiting the flow of public resources to black-controlled cities.[43]
In an era of fiscal austerity and declining urban resources, therefore, the political isolation of blacks makes them extremely vulnerable to cutbacks in governmental services and public investments. If cuts must be made to balance strained city budgets, it makes political sense for white politicians to concentrate the cuts in black neighborhoods, where the political damage will be minimal; and if state budgets must be trimmed, it is in white legislators' interests to cut subventions to black-controlled central cities, which now represent a minority of most states' voters. The spatial and political isolation of blacks interacts with declining public resources to create a powerful dynamic for disinvestment in the black community.

The destructiveness of this dynamic has been forcefully illustrated by Rodrick and Deborah Wallace, who trace the direct and indirect results of a political decision in New York City to reduce the number of fire companies in black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods during the early 1970s.[44] Faced with a shortage of funds during the city's financial crisis, the Fire Department eliminated thirty-five fire companies between 1969 and 1976, twenty-seven of which were in poor minority areas located in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn, areas where the risk of lire was,

in fact, quite high. Confronted with the unpleasant task of cutting services, white politicians confined the reductions to segregated ghetto and barrio wards where the political damage could be contained. The geographic and political isolation of blacks and Puerto Ricans meant that their representatives were unable to prevent the cuts.

As soon as the closings were implemented, the number of residential fires increased dramatically. An epidemic of building fires occurred within black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods.[45] As housing was systematically destroyed, social networks were fractured and institutions collapsed; churches, block associations, youth programs, and political clubs vanished. The destruction of housing, networks, and social institutions, in turn, caused a massive flight of destitute families out of core minority areas.[46] Some affected areas lost 80% of their residents between 1970 and 1980, putting a severe strain on housing in adjacent neighborhoods, which had been stable until then. As families doubled up in response to the influx of fire refugees, overcrowding increased, which led to additional fires and the diffusion of the chaos into adjacent areas. Black ghettos and Puerto Rican barrios were hollowed out from their cores.

The overcrowded housing, collapsed institutions, and ruptured support networks overwhelmed municipal disease prevention efforts and swamped medical care facilities.[47] Within affected neighborhoods, infant mortality rates rose, as did the incidence of cirrhosis, gonorrhea, tuberculosis, and drug use.[48] The destruction of the social fabric of black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods led to an increase in the number of unsupervised young males, which contributed to a sharp increase in crime, followed by an increase in the rate of violent deaths among young men.[49] By 1990, this chain reaction of social and economic collapse had turned vast areas of the Bronx, Harlem, and Brooklyn into "urban deserts" bereft of normal community life.[50]

Despite the havoc that followed in the wake of New York's fire service reductions, the cuts were never rescinded. The only people affected were minority members who were politically marginalized by segregation and thereby prevented, structurally, from finding allies to oppose the service reductions. Although residential segregation paradoxically made it easier for blacks and Puerto Ricans to elect city councillors by creating homogeneous districts, it left those that were elected relatively weak, dependent, and unable to protect the interests of their constituents.

As a result of their residential segregation and resultant political isolation, therefore, black politicians in New York and elsewhere have been

forced into a strategy of angrily demanding that whites give them more public resources. Given their geographic isolation, however, these appeals cannot be made on the basis of whites' self-interest, but must rely on appeals to altruism, guilt, or fear. Because altruism, guilt, and fear do not provide a good foundation for concerted political action, the downward spiral of black neighborhoods continues and black hostility and bitterness grow while white fears are progressively reinforced. Segregation creates a political impasse that deepens the chasm of race in American society.

Under the best of circumstances, segregation undermines the ability of blacks to advance their interests because it provides ethnic whites with no immediate self-interest in their welfare. The circumstances of U.S. race relations, however, can hardly be described as "best," for not only do whites have little self-interest in promoting black welfare, but a significant share must be assumed to be racially prejudiced and supportive of policies injurious to blacks. To the extent that racism exists, of course, the geographic and political isolation of the ghetto makes it easier for racists to act on their prejudices. In a segregated society, blacks become easy targets for racist actions and policies.

The Isolation of the Ghetto

The high degree of residential segregation imposed on blacks ensures their social and economic isolation from the rest of American society. As we have seen, in 1980 ten large U.S. cities had black isolation indices in excess of 80 (Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Gary, Newark, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C.), meaning that the average black person in these cities lived in a neighborhood that was at least 80% black. Averages in excess of 80% occur when a few blacks live in integrated areas, and the vast majority reside in areas that are 100% black.[51]

Such high levels of racial isolation cannot be sustained without creating a profound alienation from American society and its institutions. Unless ghetto residents work outside of their neighborhoods, they are unlikely to come into contact with anyone else who is not also black, and if they live in an area of concentrated poverty, they are unlikely to interact with anyone who is not also *poor* and black. The structural constraints on social interaction imposed by segregation loom large when one considers that 36% of black men in central cities are either out of

the labor force, unemployed, or underemployed, a figure that rises to 54% among black men aged 18 to 29.[52]

The role that segregation plays in undermining blacks' connection to the rest of society has been demonstrated by William Yancey and his colleagues at Temple University.[53] They undertook a representative survey of people in the Philadelphia urban area and asked them to describe the race and ethnicity of their friends and neighbors. Not surprisingly, blacks were far more concentrated residentially than any other group, even controlling for social and economic background. They were also very unlikely to report friendships with anyone else but blacks, and this remarkable racial homogeneity in their friendship networks was explained entirely by their residential concentration; it had nothing to do with group size, birthplace, socioeconomic status, or organizational membership. Unlike other groups, blacks were prevented from forming friendships outside their group because they were so residentially segregated: spatial isolation leads to social isolation.

The intense isolation imposed by segregation has been confirmed by an ethnographic study of blacks living in Chicago's poorest neighborhoods.[54] Drawing on detailed, in-depth interviews gathered in William Julius Wilson's Urban Family Life Survey, Sophie Pedder found that one theme consistently emerged in the narratives: poor blacks had extremely narrow geographic horizons. Many of her informants, who lived on Chicago's South Side, had never been into the Loop (the city's center), and a large number had never left the immediate confines of their neighborhood. A significant percentage only left the neighborhood after reaching adulthood. According to Pedder, this racial isolation "is at once both real, in that movement outside the neighborhood is limited, and psychological, in that residents feel cut off from the rest of the city."[55]

Thus residents of hypersegregated neighborhoods necessarily live within a very circumscribed and limited social world. They rarely travel outside of the black enclave, and most have few friends outside of the ghetto. This lack of connection to the rest of society carries profound costs, because personal contacts and friendship networks are among the most important means by which people get jobs. Relatively few job seekers attain employment by responding to ads or canvassing employers; most people find jobs through friends, relatives, or neighbors, and frequently they learn of jobs through acquaintances they know only casually.[56]

The social isolation imposed on blacks by virtue of their systematic

residential segregation thus guarantees their economic isolation as well. Because blacks have weak links to white society, they are not connected to the jobs that white society provides. They are put at a clear disadvantage in the competition for employment, and especially for increasingly scarce jobs that pay well but require little formal skill or education.[57] This economic isolation, moreover, is cumulative and self-perpetuating: because blacks have few connections outside the ghetto, they are less likely to be employed in the mainstream economy, and this fact, in turn, reduces the number and range of their connections to other people and institutions, which further undermines their employment chances. Given the levels of residential segregation typically found in large American cities, therefore, the inevitable result is a dependent black community within which work experience is lacking and linkages to legitimate employment are weak.

The Language of Segregation

The depth of isolation in the ghetto is also evident in black speech patterns, which have evolved steadily away from Standard American English. Because of their intense social isolation, many ghetto residents have come to speak a language that is increasingly remote from that spoken by American whites. Black street speech, or more formally, Black English Vernacular, has its roots in the West Indian creole and Scots-Irish dialects of the eighteenth century.[58] As linguists have shown, it is by no means a "degenerate," or "illogical" version of Standard American English; rather, it constitutes a complex, rich, and expressive language in its own right, with a consistent grammar, pronunciation, and lexicon all its own.[59] It evolved independently from Standard American English because blacks were historically separated from whites by caste, class, and region; but among the most powerful influences on black speech has been the residential segregation that blacks have experienced since early in the century.[60]

For several decades, the linguist William Labov and his colleagues have systematically taped, transcribed, and analyzed black and white speech patterns in American cities.[61] In city after city they have found that whites "constitute a single speech community, defined by a single set of norms and a single, extraordinarily uniform structural base. Linguistic features pass freely across ethnic lines within the white community. But not across racial lines: black(s) ... have nothing to do with these sound

changes in process."[62] Divergent black and white speech patterns provide stark evidence of the structural limits to interracial communication that come with high levels of residential segregation.

Whereas white speech has become more regionally specialized over time, with linguistic patterns varying increasingly between metropolitan areas, Labov and his colleagues found precisely the opposite pattern for Black English: it has become progressively more uniform across urban areas. Over the past two decades, the Black English Vernaculars of Boston, Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia have become increasingly similar in their grammatical structure and lexicon, reflecting urban blacks' common social and economic isolation within urban America.[63] Although black speech has become more uniform internally, however, as a dialect it has drifted farther and farther away from the form and structure of Standard American English. According to Labov's measurements, blacks and whites in the United States increasingly speak different tongues, with different grammatical rules, divergent pronunciations, and separate vocabularies.[64]

Labov has concluded that this separate linguistic evolution stems from the high degree of segregation imposed on blacks in U.S. urban areas, which confines them to isolated and self-contained linguistic communities. In a series of critical tests, he and Wendell Harris demonstrated that the less contact blacks have with whites, the greater their reliance on Black English Vernacular and the less their ability to speak Standard American English.[65] Blacks who live within the ghetto, in particular, display speech patterns that are quite remote from the dialect spoken by most white Americans. Because of segregation, the languages spoken by blacks and whites are moving toward mutual unintelligibility.

The recognition of Black English Vernacular's progressive evolution away from Standard American English in no way implies that it is inferior as a language; nor does the fact that whites may have a difficult time understanding Black English mean that it is flawed as medium of human communication. The linguistic drift of black English does, however, symbolize the breakdown of communication between the races, and suggests at least two additional barriers to black socioeconomic advancement.

U.S. schools rely almost exclusively on the standard dialect for instruction and exposition. Thus when children grow up speaking Black English Vernacular rather than Standard American English, their educational progress is seriously hampered. When ghetto children enter schools where texts and instructional materials all arc written in Standard En-

glish, and where teachers speak primarily in this dialect, they experience a culture shock akin to that felt by immigrant children from non-English-speaking countries. Because the language they are being taught to read and write is not the same as the one they speak, their confidence and self-esteem are threatened, thereby undermining the entire learning process.[66] Unless special efforts are made to compensate for the wide discrepancy between the language of the classroom and the spoken language of everyday life, formal education is likely to be a frustrating and alienating experience for ghetto children.

Acquiring fluency in Standard English is difficult for black children whose entire social world is bounded by the ghetto and whose families have no familiarity with the mainstream dialect. Children learn language through frequent interaction with other speakers. Although they will be able to understand Standard English from exposure to television, radio, and other media, children growing up in the ghetto will not be able to speak it unless they have had the opportunity to use it actively to manipulate their social environment.[67] The passive consumption of mass media does not provide this sort of active learning experience. Without systematic reinforcement in other social contexts, ghetto dwellers are unlikely to learn to speak a style of English familiar to most whites.

The educational barriers facing ghetto children are exacerbated by teachers and school administrators who view Black English as "wrong," "bad," or "inferior," thereby stigmatizing black children and further undermining their motivation to learn.[68] In many school settings, Black English is pejoratively stereotyped and taken to indicate a lack of intelligence, an absence of motivation, or the presence of a learning disability. These perceptions lead to a lowering of expectations and to the systematic tracking of ghetto children into remedial courses, thereby making low achievement a self-fulfilling prophecy. Thus black educational progress is hampered not only because segregation concentrates poverty within ghetto schools but also because segregation confines blacks to an isolated linguistic community. Segregation ensures that black children will speak a nonstandard dialect of English that is not taught, spoken, or appreciated in the American school system.

The difficulties caused by a reliance on Black English do not stop at the classroom door. Facility with Standard English is required for many jobs in the larger economy, especially those that carry good prospects for socioeconomic advancement and income growth. To the extent that an

exclusive reliance on Black English undermines employability, therefore, it constitutes a second barrier to socioeconomic achievement.[69]

The ability to speak, write, and communicate effectively in Standard English is essential for employment in most white-collar jobs. The ability to speak Standard English, at least, is also widely demanded by employers for clerical or service positions that bring jobholders into frequent contact with the general public, most of whom are white.[70] Employers make frequent use of language as a screening device for blue-collar jobs, even those that involve little or no interaction with the public. They assume that people who speak Black English carry a street culture that devalues behaviors and attitudes consistent with being a "good worker," such as regularity, punctuality, dependability, and respect for authority.[71]

The inability to communicate in Standard American English, therefore, presents serious obstacles to socioeconomic advancement. Black Americans who aspire to socioeconomic success generally must acquire a facility in Standard English as a precondition of advancement, even if they retain a fluency in black speech. Successful blacks who have grown up in the ghetto literally become bilingual, learning to switch back and forth between black and white dialects depending on the social context.[72]

This "code switching" involves not only a change of words but a shift between contrasting cultures and identities. Although some people acquire the ability to make this shift without difficulty, it causes real social and psychological problems for others. For someone raised in the segregated environment of the ghetto, adopting white linguistic conventions can seem like a betrayal of black culture, a phony attempt to deny the reality of one's "blackness." As a result, black people who regularly speak Standard American English often encounter strong disapproval from other blacks. Many well-educated blacks recall with some bitterness the ridicule and ostracism they suffered as children for the sin of "talking white."[73]

The Culture of Segregation

This struggle between "black" and "white" speech patterns is symptomatic of a larger conflict between "black" and "white" cultural identities that arises from residential segregation. In response to the harsh and isolated conditions of ghetto life, a segment of the urban black population has evolved a set of behaviors, attitudes, and values that are increasingly

at variance with those held in the wider society. Although these adaptations represent rational accommodations to social and economic conditions within the ghetto, they are not widely accepted or understood outside of it, and in fact are negatively evaluated by most of American society.

Middle-class American culture generally idealizes the values of self-reliance, hard work, sobriety, and sacrifice, and adherence to these principles is widely believed to bring monetary reward and economic advancement in society.[74] Among men, adherence to these values means that employment and financial security should precede marriage, and among women they imply that childbearing should occur only after adequate means to support the raising of children have been secured, either through marriage or through employment. In the ideal world, everyone is hardworking, self-sufficient, and not a burden to fellow citizens.

In most white neighborhoods the vast majority of working age men are employed. Because jobs are available and poverty is relatively uncommon, most residents can reasonably expect to conform to ideal values most of the time. Men generally do find jobs before marrying and women have reason to believe that men will help support the children they father. Although these ideals may be violated with some frequency, there is enough conformity in most white neighborhoods for them to retain their force as guides for behavior; there are still enough people who exemplify the values to serve as role models for others. Those failures that do occur are taken to reflect individual flaws, and most whites derive a sense of self-esteem and prestige by conforming to the broader ideals of American society.

Ghetto blacks, however, face very different neighborhood conditions created by residential segregation. A large share live in a geographically isolated and racially homogeneous neighborhood where poverty is endemic, joblessness is rife, schools are poor, and even high school graduates are unlikely to speak Standard English with any facility. Employment opportunities are limited, and given the social isolation enforced by segregation, black men are not well connected to employers in the larger economy. As a result, young men coming of age in ghetto areas are relatively unlikely to find jobs capable of supporting a wife and children,[75] and black women, facing a dearth of potential husbands and an absence of educational institutions capable of preparing them for gainful employment, cannot realistically hope to conform to societal ideals of marriage and childbearing.[76]

The conditions of the ghetto, in short, make it exceedingly difficult to live up to broader societal values with respect to work, marriage, and family formation, and poor blacks are thus denied the opportunity to build self-esteem and to acquire prestige through channels valued in the wider society. As a result, an alternative status system has evolved within America's ghettos that is defined *in opposition to* the basic ideals and values of American society. It is a culture that explains and legitimizes the social and economic shortcomings of ghetto blacks, which are built into their lives by segregation rather than by personal failings. This culture of segregation attaches value and meaning to a way of life that the broader society would label as deviant and unworthy.[77]

The effects of segregation on black cultural identity were first noted by the psychologist Kenneth Clark in *Dark Ghetto:* "Because the larger society has clearly rejected [the black ghetto dweller), he rejects . . . the values, the aspirations, and techniques of that society. His conscious or unconscious argument is that he cannot hope to win meaningful self-esteem through the avenues ordinarily available to more privileged individuals, [which] have been blocked for him through inadequate education, through job discrimination, and through a system of social and political power which is not responsive to his needs."[78] As a psychological defense mechanism, therefore, ghetto dwellers evolve a cultural identity defined in opposition to the larger ideals of white society.

The anthropologists John Ogbu and Signithia Fordham, building on Clark's work, have shown that the formation of such oppositional identities is a common psychological adaptation whenever a powerless minority group is systematically subordinated by a dominant majority.[79] "Subordinate minorities like black Americans develop a sense of collective identity or sense of peoplehood in opposition to the social identity of white Americans because of the way white Americans treat them in economic, political, social, and psychological domains . . . The oppositional identity of the minority evolves because they perceive and experience the treatment by whites as collective and enduring oppression. They realize and believe that, regardless of their individual ability and training or education, and regardless of their place of origin . . ., they cannot expect to be treated like white Americans."[80]

As a protection against the persistent assaults to self-esteem that are inherent in ghetto life, black street culture has evolved to legitimate certain behaviors prevalent within the black community that would otherwise be held in contempt by white society. Black identity is thus con-

structed as a series of oppositions to conventional middle-class "white" attitudes and behavior. If whites speak Standard American English, succeed in school, work hard at routine jobs, marry, and support their children, then to be "black" requires one to speak Black English, do poorly in school, denigrate conventional employment, shun marriage, and raise children outside of marriage. To do otherwise would be to "act white."

By concentrating poor people prone to such oppositional identities in racially homogeneous settings, segregation creates the structural context for the maintenance and perpetuation of an ongoing oppositional culture, "which includes devices for protecting [black] identity and for maintaining boundaries between [blacks] and white Americans. [Blacks] regard certain forms of behavior and certain activities or events, symbols, and meanings as *not appropriate* for them because... [they] are characteristic of white Americans. At the same time, they emphasize other forms of behavior and other events, symbols, and meanings as more appropriate for them because they are *not* a part of white Americans' way of life."[81]

Ogbu and Fordham are educational specialists who have specifically documented the effect of oppositional black culture on educational achievement among black children. Their investigations show how bright, motivated, and intellectually curious ghetto children face tremendous pressure from their peers to avoid "acting white" in succeeding in school and achieving academic distinction.[82] The pressure for educational failure is most intense during the teenage years, when peer acceptance is so important and black young people live in fear of being labeled "Oreos," "Uncle Toms," or "Aunt Jemimahs" for speaking Standard English or doing well in school. If they actually achieve academic distinction, they risk being called a "brainiac," or worse, a "pervert brainiac" (someone who is not only smart but of questionable sexuality as well).[83]

Black children who do overcome the odds and achieve academic success in inner-city schools typically go to great lengths, and adopt ingenious strategies, to lessen the burden of "acting white." Some deliberately fail selected courses, others scale back their efforts and get B's or C's rather than the A's they are capable of, and still others become class clowns, seeking to deflect attention away from their scholarly achievements by acting so ridiculous that their peers no longer take them seriously.[84] Better to be called "crazy" or a "clown" than a "pervert brainiac."

The powerful effect of oppositional ghetto culture on black educational

performance is suggested by the recent work of James Rosenbaum and his colleagues at Northwestern University.[85] Working in the Chicago area, they compared low-income black students from families assigned to scattered site housing in a white suburb (under the *Gautreaux* court decision) with comparable students from families assigned to public housing in Chicago's ghetto. Although the two groups were initially identical, once removed from ghetto high schools black students achieved higher grades, lower dropout rates, better academic preparation, and higher rates of college attendance compared with those who remained behind in ghetto institutions.

Another study by Robert Crain and Rita Mahard, who used a nation-wide sample, found that northern blacks who attended racially mixed schools were more likely to enter and stay in college than those who went to all-black high schools.[86] Susan Mayer followed students who attended the tenth grade in poor and affluent high schools in 1980 and determined the likelihood of their dropping out before 1982. Controlling for family background, she discovered that students who went to affluent schools were considerably less likely to drop out than those who attended poor schools, and that girls in affluent schools were much less likely to have a child. Moreover, white students who attended predominantly black high schools were considerably more likely to drop out and have a child than those who attended predominantly white schools.[87]

All too often, whites observe the workings of black oppositional culture and conclude that African Americans suffer from some kind of "cultural defect," or that they are somehow "culturally disadvantaged." In doing so, they blame the victims of segregation rather than the social arrange-ments that created the oppositional culture in the first place.[88] It is not a self-perpetuating "culture of poverty"[89] that retards black educational progress but a structurally created and sustained "culture of segregation" that, however useful in adapting to the harsh realities of ghetto life, undermines socioeconomic progress in the wider society.

As Kenneth Clark pointed out in 1965, "the invisible walls of a segre-gated society are not only damaging but protective in a debilitating way. There is considerable psyhological safety in the ghetto; there one lives among one's own and does not risk rejection among strangers. One first becomes aware of the psychological damage of such 'safety' when the walls of the ghetto are breached and the Negro ventures out into the repressive, frightening white world . . . Most Negroes take the first steps into an integrated society tentatively and torn with conflict. To be the

first Negro who is offered a job in a company brings a sense of triumph but also the dread of failure."[90] More recently, Shelby Steele has written of the "integration shock" that envelops blacks who enter white society directly from the isolated world of the ghetto.[91]

The origins of black oppositional culture can be traced to the period before 1920, when black migration fomented a hardening of white racial attitudes and a systematic limiting of opportunities for African Americans on a variety of fronts.[92] Whereas urban blacks had zealously pursued education after the Civil War and were making great strides, the rise of Jim Crow in the south and de facto segregation in the north severed the links between hard work, education, sobriety, and their presumed rewards in society.[93] Although black elites continued to promote these values, the rise of the ghetto made them look increasingly pathetic and ridiculous to the mass of recent in-migrants: in the face of pervasive barriers to social and residential mobility, the moral admonitions of the elites seemed hollow and pointless.[94] If whites would not accept blacks on the basis of their individual accomplishments and if hard work and education went unrewarded, then why expend the effort? If one could never be accepted as white, it was just demeaning and humiliating to go through the motions of "acting white." Malcolm X summed up this attitude with his sardonic quip, "What do you call a Negro with a Ph.D.? A nigger."[95]

Unlike other groups, the force of oppositional culture is particularly powerful among African Americans because it is so strongly reinforced by residential segregation. By isolating blacks within racially homogeneous neighborhoods and concentrating poverty within them, segregation creates an environment where failure to meet the ideal standards of American society loses its stigma; indeed, individual shortcomings become normative and supported by the values of oppositional culture. As transgressions lose their stigma through repetition and institutionalization, individual behavior at variance with broader societal ideals becomes progressively more likely.[96]

The culture of segregation arises from the coincidence of racial isolation and high poverty, which inevitably occurs when a poor minority group is residentially segregated. By concentrating poverty, segregation simultaneously concentrates male joblessness, teenage motherhood, single parenthood, alcoholism, and drug abuse, thus creating an entirely black social world in which these oppositional states are normative. Given

the racial isolation and concentrated poverty of the ghetto, it is hardly surprising that black street culture has drifted steadily away from middle-class American values.

The steady divergence of black street culture from the white main-stream is clearly visible in a series of participant observer studies of ghetto life conducted over the past thirty years. Studies carried out during the 1960s and 1970s–such as Elliot Liebow's *Tally's Corner,* Lee Rainwater's *Behind Ghetto Walls,* Ulf Hannerz's *Soulside,* and Elijah Anderson's *A Place on the Corner*–were remarkably consistent in reporting that ghetto dwell-ers, despite their poverty and oppression, essentially subscribed to the basic values of American society.[97] What set ghetto blacks apart from other Americans was not their lack of fealty to American ideals but their inability to accomplish them. Specifically, the pervasiveness of poverty, unemployment, and dependency in the ghetto made it nearly impossible for them to live up to ideals they in fact held, which in turn undermined their self-esteem and thus created a psychological need for gratification through other means.

The participant observer studies indicated that feelings of personal in-adequacy led black men to reject the unskilled and poorly paid jobs open to them, to denigrate the kind of work these jobs represented, and to seek gratification through more accessible channels, such as sexual liaisons or intoxication. Women and men tended to begin sexual relations at a young age, and woman generally found themselves pregnant as teenag-ers. Childbirth was typically followed by marriage or some informal living arrangement, at least for a time; but eventually the woman's demands for financial support undermined her partner's self-esteem, and family responsibilities blocked his access to the alternate status system of the streets. Given the cross-cutting pressures of poverty, joblessness, low self-esteem, family demands, and the allure of the streets, most male-female relationships were short-lived and devolved sooner or later into female-headed families.

Once they had been through this cycle of romance, pregnancy, family formation, and dissolution, black men and women came to see romantic relationships as a mutually exploitative contest whose pleasures were temporary and whose stability could not be relied upon. At the same time, the pervasive poverty of the ghetto meant that families were con-stantly bombarded with energy-sapping demands for assistance and de-bilitating requests for financial aid from extended family, friends, and

neighbors. Given the association of poverty with crime and violence, moreover, they were constantly at risk of criminal victimization, injury, or even death.

In this social world, ghetto dwellers acquired a tough, cynical attitude toward life, a deep suspicion of the motives of others, and a marked lack of trust in the goodwill or benevolent intentions of people and institutions. Growing up in the ghetto, blacks came to expect the worst of others and to experience little sense of control over their lives. They adapted to these feelings by confining relationships of trust to close kin, especially maternal relatives.

Underlying this bleak portrait of ghetto life painted by studies carried out during the 1960s and 1970s was a common thread. Early participant observers saw ghetto culture as rooted in the structural conditions of poverty, dependency, and joblessness, over which ghetto residents had little control,and all characterized ghetto culture as essentially oppositional.That is, the attitudes and behaviors of ghetto blacks were fundamentally defined in opposition to the ideals of white society. Underneath the jaded rejection of conventional mores, ghetto dwellers, at least in the first or second generations, still clung to the basic values of American society. Indeed, it was because they judged themselves so harshly by broader standards that the psychological need for an oppositional identity arose in the first place.

Over time, however, as intense racial isolation and acutely concentrated poverty have continued, ghetto attitudes, values, and ideals have become progressively less connected to those prevailing elsewhere in the United States. More and more, the culture of the ghetto has become an entity unto itself, remote from the rest of American society and its institutions, and drifting ever further afield. As conditions within the ghetto worsen, as the social environment grows more hostile, and as racial isolation deepens, the original connection of ghetto culture to the broader values of American society–even if only in opposition–has faded.

The new culture of the ghetto increasingly rejects the values of American society as a farce and a sham, and traits that were once clearly oppositional and therefore somehow *linked* to the rest of American society have become ends in themselves, esteemed in their own right and disconnected from their relationship to the surrounding "white" society. Under the combined pressure of isolation and poverty, black street culture has increasingly become an autonomous cultural system. Participant

observer studies of ghetto life done in the 1980s have an even darker and more pessimistic tone than those carried out in earlier decades. The contrast is clearly illustrated by two studies conducted by the sociologist Elijah Anderson: one carried out in the ghetto of Chicago during the early 1970s and the other conducted in a poor black neighborhood of Philadelphia during the late 1980s.

In Anderson's first study, *A Place on the Corner,* basic American values such as hard work, honesty, diligence, respect for authority, and staying out of trouble were still very much in evidence in the thoughts and words of the poor black men gathered around the corner bar he studied.[98] Indeed, these values provided the basis for an alternative status system that arose to confer esteem when broader standards were not met, and to encourage young men to live up to ideals despite the long odds. As a result, Anderson's subjects–who would be considered of "no account" by conventional standards–acquire a certain nobility for their pursuit of dignity and honor in the face of adversity.

In contrast, the subjects of Anderson's latest study, *Streetwise,* scorn and ridicule conventional American ideals.[99] Symbolic of the disappearance of traditional values from the ghetto is the breakdown of the long-standing relationship between "old heads" and young boys. According to Anderson, "an old head was a man of stable means who was strongly committed to family life, to church, and, most important, to passing on his philosophy, developed through his own rewarding experience with work, to young boys he found worthy. He personified the work ethnic and equated it with value and high standards of morality; in his eyes a workingman was a good, decent individual."[100]

In the ghetto environment of earlier decades, the old head "acted as a kind of guidance counselor and moral cheerleader who preached anticrime and antitrouble messages to his charges," and "the young boy readily deferred to the old head's chronological age and worldly experience."[101] In contrast, today, "as the economic and social circumstances of the urban ghetto have changed, the traditional old head has been losing prestige and credibility as a role model . . . When gainful employment and its rewards are not forthcoming, boys easily conclude that the moral lessons of the old head concerning the work ethnic, punctuality, and honesty do not fit their own circumstances."[102]

In the past, black ghettos also used to contain numerous "female old heads," who served as "neighborhood mothers," correcting and admonishing children in the streets and instructing them in proper behavior.

They "were seen as mature and wise figures in the community, not only by women and girls, but also by many young men" because of their motherly love and concern for children.[103] According to Anderson, however, these role models also have increasingly disappeared, indicating "a breakdown in feelings of community. Residents. . . keep more to themselves now, [and] no longer involve themselves in their neighbors' lives as they did as recently as ten years ago."[104]

In place of traditional mores that assign value to steady work, family life, the church, and respect for others, a drug culture and its economy have arisen, with profound effects on community well-being. Anderson and others have studied and written on the appeal of the underground drug economy to young men and women from the ghetto.[105] According to Anderson, "the roles of drug pusher, pimp, and (illegal) hustler have become more and more attractive. Street-smart young people who operate this underground economy are apparently able to obtain big money more easily and glamorously than their elders, including traditional male and female old heads. Because they appear successful, they become role models for still younger people."[106]

The proliferation of the drug culture within the ghetto has exacerbated the problems caused by segregation and its concentration of poverty, adding a powerful impetus to the cycle of neighborhood decline.[107] Given the financial gain to be had from drugs, ghetto dealers establish aggressive marketing strategies to capture business from disillusioned young people who see little hope for improvement through work, education, or staying out of trouble. Because limited economic opportunities in the ghetto as well as drug use itself make it difficult for drug users to support themselves, the spread of drug use leads inevitably to the escalation of crime and violence. As a by-product of the new drug culture, the violent death rate has skyrocketed among black men, prostitution has spread among black women, and the number of drug-addicted babies has mushroomed.[108] The old social order of the ghetto has increasingly broken down and veered off on an independent path dramatically different from that prevailing in the rest of American society.

At the same time, relations between the sexes, which were already antagonistic and mutually exploitative in the ghetto world of the 1960s, had by the 1980s lost all connection to conventional family values. According to Anderson, by the late 1980s sexual relations in the ghetto had degenerated into a vicious, competitive contest in which young men and women exploited each other with diametrically opposed goals.[109] For

young ghetto men, sex had become strictly a means of enhancing status among male peers and of experiencing pleasure at the expense of women. "To the young man the woman becomes, in the most profound sense, a sexual object. Her body and mind are the object of a sexual game, to be won for personal aggrandizement. Status goes to the winner, and sex is prized not as a testament of love but as testimony to control of another human being. Sex is the prize, and sexual conquests are a game whose goal is to make a fool of the young woman."[110]
In the ghetto of the 1960s, a pregnancy growing out of such casual sexual encounters was relatively likely to be followed by a marriage or some other housekeeping arrangement, however unstable or short-lived it might have been. By the late 1980s, however, this bow to conventional culture had been eliminated in black street culture. "In the social context of persistent poverty, [black men] have come to devalue the conventional marital relationship, viewing women as a burden and children as even more of one."[111] Even if a young man "admits paternity and 'does right' by the girl, his peer group likely will label him a chump, a square, or a fool."[112]

Ghetto women, for their part, seek gratification less through sex than through pregnancy and childbirth. They understand that their suitors' sweet words and well-honed "rap" are fabrications being told in order to extract sex from them, and despite a few romantic self-deceptions along the way, they realize that if they become pregnant the father is unlikely to support their child. Nonetheless, they look forward to getting pregnant, for in the contemporary ghetto "it is becoming socially accept-able for a young woman to have children out of wedlock–supported by a regular welfare check."[113]

These findings are corroborated by other ethnographic interviews gath-ered as part of William Julius Wilson's larger study of urban poverty in Chicago. When the sociologist Richard Taub examined the interview transcripts, he found that marriage had virtually disappeared as a mean-ingful category of thought and discourse among poor blacks."[114] Infor-mants consistently stated that husband-wife relationships were neither important nor reliable as a basis for family life and childrearing, and they were deeply suspicious of the intentions of the opposite sex.

The disappearance of marriage as a social institution was underscored by field observations that Taub and his associates undertook in black and Mexican neighborhoods. Whereas a four-block shopping strip in one of Chicago's poor Mexican neighborhoods yielded fifteen shops that pro-

vided goods or services explicitly connected to marriage, a trip to a comparable black shopping area uncovered only two shops that even mentioned marriage, and not very prominently at that."[115]

Elijah Anderson argues that childbearing has become increasingly disconnected from marriage in the ghetto; black women now seek childbirth to signal their status as adults and to validate their worth and standing before their own peer group–namely, other young black women, A baby is a young girl's entry ticket into what Anderson calls "the baby club."[116] This "club" consists of young black mothers who gather in public places with their children to "lobby for compliments, smiles, and nods of approval and feel very good when they are forthcoming, since they signal affirmation and pride. On Sundays, the new little dresses and suits come out and the cutest babies are passed around, and this attention serves as a social measure of the person. The young mothers who form such baby clubs develop an ideology counter to that of more conventional society, one that not only approves of but enhances their position. In effect, they work to create value and status by inverting that of the girls who do not become pregnant. The teenage mother derives status from her baby; hence, her preoccupation with the impression that the baby makes and her willingness to spend inordinately large sums toward that end."[117]

According to Anderson, sex is thus a key component in the informal status system that has evolved in the street culture of America's urban ghettos. In the absence of gratification through the conventional avenues of work and family, young men and women have increasingly turned to one commodity that lies within their reach. Through sex, young men get pleasure and a feeling of self-esteem before their peers, whereas young women get a baby and a sense of belonging within the baby club. This relationship of mutual exploitation, however, has come at a price. It has further marginalized black men from black women and has escalated the war of the sexes to new heights, a fact that is clearly revealed in the music of black street culture–rap.

An unabashedly misogynist viewpoint is extolled by rap groups such as N.W.A. ("Niggers with Attitude"), whose song "A Bitch Iz a Bitch" depicts black women as scheming, vain, whining mercenaries whose goal is to deprive black men of their self-esteem, money, and possessions. In the view of N.W.A., women are good for little more than sex, and their incessant demands for attention, constant requests for money and support, and their ever-present threats to male pride can only be checked through violence, "...'cause a bitch is a bitch."[118]

The female side of the issue is aired by the female rap group H.W.A. ("Hoes (Whores] with Attitude") in songs such as "A Trick Is a Trick," "Little Dick," and "1-900-BITCHES," which attack men as vain, superficial creatures who are incompetent in their love-making, ill equipped to satisfy, and prone to meaningless violence when their inflated pride is punctured. Their metaphor for the state of male-female relations in the ghetto is that of a whorehouse, where all women are whores and men are either tricks or pimps. The liner notes leave little doubt as to the group's message: "Everybody is a pimp of some kind and pimpin' is easy when you got a Hoe Wit Attitude."[119]

The war of words between black men and women has also been fought in the black press, exemplified in 1990 by the appearance of *The Blackman's Guide to Understanding the Blackwoman,* by Shaharazad Ali, which presents a vituperative attack on black women for their supposedly historical emasculation of black men. The book advocates the violent subjugation of women by black men, advising male readers that "there is never an excuse for ever hitting a Blackwoman anywhere but in the mouth. Because it is from that hole, in the lower part of her face, that all her rebellion culminates into words. Her unbridled tongue is a main reason she cannot get along with the Blackman ... If she ignores the authority and superiority of the Blackman, there is a penalty. When she crosses this line and becomes viciously insulting it is time for the Blackman to soundly slap her in the mouth."[120] Ten black scholars answered to the attack in a pamphlet entitled *Confusion by Any Other Name,* hoping "to respond to the range of insulting myths, half-truths and generalized personal experiences by the author."[121]

From a sociological point of view, the specific content of these works is less important than what they illustrate about the state of relations between the sexes within the black community. After evolving for decades under conditions of intense social and economic isolation, black street culture has become increasingly divorced from basic American ideals of family, work, and respect for others. By confining large numbers of black people to an environnment within which failure is endemic, negative role models abound, and adherence to conventional values is nearly impossible, segregation has helped to create a nihilistic and violent counterculture sharply at odds with the basic values and goals of a democratic society. As Kenneth Clark presciently noted in 1965, "the pathologies of the ghetto community perpetuate themselves through cumulative ugliness, deterioration, and isolation."[122]

The social environment created by segregation places a heavy burden

on black parents aspiring to promote conventional attitudes and behavior in their children and increase the odds for their socioeconomic success. Although the problem is most acute for the poor, segregation confines all blacks to segregated neighborhoods regardless of social class, so working- and middle-class blacks also have a very difficult time insulating their children from the competing values and attitudes of the street. Compared with children of middle-class whites, children of middle-class blacks are much more likely to be exposed to poverty, drugs, teenage pregnancy, family disruption, and violence in the neighborhoods where they live.

As a result, it requires a great deal of concerted effort by committed parents, and no small amount of luck, to raise children successfully within the ghetto.[123] Given the burden of "acting white," the pressures to speak Black English, the social stigma attached to "brainiacs," the allure of drug taking, the quick money to be had from drug dealing, and the romantic sexuality of the streets, it is not surprising that black educational achievement has stagnated.

Although participant observer studies and rap lyrics illustrate the harsh realities of black street life, they do not "prove" the harmful effects of growing up in a ghetto. Hard evidence about segregation's ill effects requires statistical studies using nationally representative data. Linda Datcher estimates that moving a poor black male from his typical neighborhood (66% black with an average income of $8,500) to a typical white neighborhood (86% white with a mean income of $11,500) would raise his educational attainment by nearly a year.[124] Mary Corcoran and her colleagues found similar results when they considered the effect of moving a man from a typical black to a typical white neighborhood;[125] and Jonathan Crane shows that the dropout probability for black teenage males increases dramatically as the percentage of low-status workers in the neighborhood rises, going from about 8% in areas where three-quarters of the workers are in low-status occupations to nearly 35% when the percentage reaches 97%. [126]

Growing up in a poor neighborhood also undermines the odds of success in the labor market. Linda Datcher's statistical estimates suggest that growing up in a poor black area lowers a man's earnings by at least 27%.[127] Although Mary Corcoran and her colleagues put the percentage loss at about 18%,[128] both teams of researchers agree that black men suffer a loss in earning ability simply for the misfortune of having grown up in a ghetto.

Exposure to conditions typical of the ghetto also dramatically increases the odds of pregnancy and childbirth among teenagers. According to estimates by Jonathan Crane, the probability of a teenage birth increases dramatically as the percentage of low-status workers in the child's neighborhoods increases from 70% to 95%, ultimately reaching a likelihood of about 20%.[129] Similarly, Dennis Hogan and Evelyn Kitagawa found that living in a very poor neighborhood raised the monthly pregnancy rate among black adolescents by 20% and significantly lowered the age at which they became sexually active;"[130] and Frank Furstenburg and his colleagues have shown that attending school in integrated rather than segregated classrooms substantially lowers the odds that fifteen- to sixteen-year-old black girls will experience sexual intercourse."[131]

The quantitative evidence thus suggests that any process that concentrates poverty within racially isolated neighborhoods will simultaneously increase the odds of socioeconomic failure within the segregated group. No matter what their personal traits or characteristics, people who grow up and live in environments of concentrated poverty and social isolation are more likely to become teenage mothers, drop out of school, achieve only low levels of education, and earn lower adult incomes.

One study has directly linked the socioeconomic disadvantages suffered by individual minority members to the degree of segregation they experience in society. Using individual, community, and metropolitan data from the fifty largest U.S. metropolitan areas in 1980, Douglas Massey, Andrew Gross, and Mitchell Eggers showed that group segregation and poverty rates interacted to concentrate poverty geographically within neighborhoods, and that exposure to neighborhood poverty subsequently increased the probability of male joblessness and single motherhood among group members. In this fashion, they linked the structural condition of segregation to individual behaviors widely associated with the underclass through the intervening factor of neighborhood poverty, holding individual background characteristics constant."[132]

Their results are summarized in Table 6.2, which traces what happens to levels of black poverty concentration, male joblessness, and single motherhood when the black poverty rate is systematically increased from 10% to 40% under conditions of no segregation and high segregation (where the latter condition is defined to occur with a black-white dissimilarity index of 90). In the absence of segregation, changing the overall rate of black poverty has a relatively modest effect on the neighborhood environment that blacks experience. By increasing the number of poor

Table 6.2   Predicted neighborhood poverty concentrations, probabilities of male joblessness, and likelihoods of single parenthood, assuming different group poverty rates and levels of segregation

Group's poverty rate and level of segregation	Predicted poverty concentration in neighborhood	Predicted probability that a young black man is jobless	Predicted probability that a young black woman heads a family
No residential segregation			
Poverty rate 10%	7.8%	35.8%	22.8%
Poverty rate 20%	10.2	39.9	28.0
Poverty rate 30%	13.3	39.9	28.0
Poverty rate 40%	17.2	39.9	28.0
High residential segregation			
Poverty rate 10%	10.2	39.9	28.0
Poverty rate 20%	17.2	39.9	28.0
Poverty rate 30%	27.5	43.0	31.6
Poverty rate 40%	40.9	53.3	40.6

Source: Douglas S. Massey, Andrew B. Gross, and Mitchell L. Eggers, "Segregation, the Concentration of Poverty, and the Life Chances of Individuals," Social Science Research 20 (1991):415.

Note: No segregation means black-white dissimilarity index equals 0 and high segregation means this index equals 90; predicted probabilities control for age, nativity, education, marital status, and English-language ability.

blacks, the degree of poverty within neighborhoods where blacks live rises somewhat, but under integrated conditions the additional poor families are scattered evenly throughout the urban area, so the level of poverty concentration does not increase much in any single neighborhood. Overall, it rises modestly from about 8% to 17% as a result of shifting the rate of black poverty from 10% to 40%.

Although the probabilities of male joblessness and single motherhood are sensitive to the rate of poverty that people experience in their neighborhoods, this modest change in the concentration of neighborhood poverty is not enough to affect these individual outcomes very much. The probability of male joblessness rises only from 36% to 40% as a result of

the increased poverty concentration, and the likelihood of single mother-hood goes from 23% to 28%. In the absence of racial segregation, there-fore, even substantial increases in the overall rate of black poverty (from 10% to 40%) would not greatly affect the welfare of individual blacks, because the additional black poverty would not be concentrated but spread widely around the metropolitan area.

In a highly segregated urban area, in contrast, increasing the rate of black poverty causes a marked increase in the concentration of poverty within the neighborhoods where blacks live. As the overall rate of pov-erty increases from 10% to 40%, the poverty rate in black neighborhoods goes from 10% to 41%. The degree of poverty concentration increases so dramatically because all of the additional poverty must be absorbed by a small number of geographically isolated black neighborhoods. As we demonstrated in the last chapter, segregation and poverty interact to yield geographically concentrated poverty.

This sharp increase in neighborhood poverty has profound conse-quences for the well-being of individual blacks, even those who have not been pushed into poverty themselves, because segregation forces them to live in neighborhoods with many families who are poor. As a result of the increase in neighborhood poverty to which they are exposed, individual probabilities of joblessness and single motherhood rise substantially. As the overall black poverty rate rises from 10% to 40% and the amount of poverty concentrated within black neighborhoods experiences a compa-rable increase, the probability of joblessness among young black males rises from 40% to 53% and the likelihood of single motherhood increases from 28% to 41%.

Increasing the rate of poverty of a segregated group thus causes its neighborhood environment to deteriorate, which in turn causes individ-ual probabilities of socioeconomic failure to rise. The same rise in poverty without segregation would hardly affect group members at all, because it would have marginal effects on the neighborhoods where they live. Segregation, in other words, is directly responsible for the creation of a harsh and uniquely disadvantaged black residential environment, mak-ing it quite likely that individual blacks themselves will fail, no matter what their socioeconomic characteristics or family background. Racial segregation is the institutional nexus that enables the transmission of poverty from person to person and generation to generation, and is there-fore a primary structural factor behind the perpetuation of the urban underclass.

How to Build an Underclass

The foregoing analysis of segregation and its consequences constitutes a primer on how to construct an urban underclass. To begin, choose a minority group whose members are somehow identifiably different front "the majority".

Once the group has been selected, the next step in creating an underclass is to confine its members to a small number of contiguous residential areas, and then to impose on them stringent barriers to residential mobility. These barriers are effectively created through discrimination buttressed by prejudice. Those who attempt to leave the enclave are systematically steered away from majority neighborhoods and back to minority or racially mixed areas. If they inquire about homes in other areas, they are treated brusquely and told none are available, and if they insist on seeing an advertised unit, little information is provided about it and no other units are shown. If these deceptions are overcome and a minority homebuyer succeeds in making an offer on a home in a majority neighborhood, the sales agent provides as little information as possible about the options for financing the sale and makes no effort to assist the customer in obtaining a mortgage. At the same time, the seller is discouraged from coming down in price to meet the offer that has been made.

If, despite these efforts, a minority family succeeds in having its offer to buy a majority home accepted, financial institutions take over the task of enforcing the barriers to residential mobility by attempting to deny the family's application for a mortgage, either on the basis of "objective" criteria such as the applicant's income, employment, or family history or because of more subjective concerns about neighborhood "quality" or "stability." Through whatever means, minority loan applications are rejected at a rate several times that of majority applications.

If the foregoing barriers are still somehow overcome and a minority family actually succeeds in moving into a majority neighborhood, then the fallback mechanisms of prejudice come into play. The minority family is systematically harassed by threatening phone calls, rocks thrown through windows, property vandalism, burning crosses, and if these crass measures are unacceptable, through more genteel mechanisms of social ostracism. If acts of prejudice do not succeed in dislodging the family, the ultimate weapon is the avoidance by majority members of the neighborhood. Those in the immediate area seek to leave as soon as they are

able and no potential majority homebuyers are shown properties in the area. As a result, the neighborhood rapidly turns from a majority to a minority population.

Through the systematic application of these principles, areas where members of the minority manage to gain entry can be restricted in number and confined largely to locations adjacent to existing minority neighborhoods, thereby maintaining the residential structure of the ghetto. Moreover, prejudice and discrimination applied in the manner just discussed have the additional effect of undermining minority self-esteem, because they make it very clear that no matter how much money or education a minority person may have, he or she will never be accepted or treated as an equal by majority neighbors.

Orice a group's segregation in society has been ensured, the next step in building an underclass is to drive up its rate of poverty. Segregation paradoxically facilitates this task, because policies that harm a highly segregated minority group and its neighborhoods will have few untoward side effects on other racial or ethnic groups. Geographic isolation translates into political isolation, making it difficult for segregated groups to form political coalitions with others to end policies inimical to their self-interests or to promote policies that might advance their welfare. Racial segregation thus makes it politically easy to limit the number of government jobs within the ghetto, to reduce its public services, to keep its schools understaffed and underfunded, to lower the transfer payments on which its poor depend, and to close its hospitals, clinics, employment offices, and other social support institutions.

With the political marginalization of minority members ensured by their segregation, the only thing required to set off a spiral of decay within the ghetto is a first-class economic disaster that removes the means of subsistence from a large share of the population. If the minority migrated to cities largely to take industrial jobs vacated by upwardly mobile majority immigrants, the inner-city manufacturing base provides a particularly opportune point at which to undercut the economic supports of the minority community, thereby bringing about the necessary increases in minority poverty.

Through a combination of corporate disinvestments in older plants and equipment, a decentralization of blue-collar employment from city to suburban areas, the relocation of manufacturing processes to nonmetropolitan areas, the transfer of production jobs to the sunbelt or overseas, and the setting of high real interest rates to produce an overvalued dollar

and relatively expensive U.S. products, inner-city manufacturing industries can effectively be driven out of the urban economy. As manufacturing employment falls and employment suburbanizes, thousands of ghetto dwellers, primarily men with little formal education, will be displaced from jobs that pay them relatively high wages and sent into a two-tiered service economy that generates a larger number of menial, low-paying jobs but few high-paying positions for people without education or training.

These inner-city economic dislocations drive up the rate of minority poverty.[1]" The additional deprivation created by the economic flux is concentrated geographically within isolated ghetto neighborhoods. As neighborhood poverty concentrations rise, income is withdrawn from minority neighborhoods, and the resulting increase in dilapidation and abandonment sets off physical decay that soon spreads to surrounding stable neighborhoods. If, owing to the constraints of fiscal austerity and the political isolation of these neighborhoods, fire service to ghetto areas is simultaneously reduced, then the process of neighborhood decay will be substantially accelerated. The increase in poverty concentration also brings a sharp constriction of demand density within the ghetto, leading to the collapse of its retail sector and the elimination of most nonessential goods and services.

The interaction of poverty and segregation acts to concentrate a variety of deleterious social and economic characteristics, creating an environment where male joblessness, female welfare dependency, crime, drug abuse, teenage childbearing, and single parenthood are common or even normative. The ghetto comes to house an abundance of negative role models who exemplify attitudes and behaviors detrimental to success in the emerging post-industrial service economy.

Given the lack of opportunity, pervasive poverty, and increasing hopelessness of life in the ghetto, a social-psychological dynamic is set in motion to produce a culture of segregation. Under the structural conditions of segregation, it is difficult for ghetto dwellers to build self-esteem by satisfying the values and ideals of the larger society or to acquire prestige through socially accepted paths. Precisely because the ghetto residents deem themselves failures by the broader standards of society, they evolve a parallel status system defined in opposition to the prevailing majority culture. As new generations are born into conditions of increasing deprivation and deepening racial isolation, however, the oppositional origins of the status system gradually recede and the culture of segregation becomes autonomous and independent.

A sure sign that the culture of segregation is well advanced occurs when the language of the segregated group diverges sharply from the standard dialect spoken in the wider society. Not only will the breakdown in intergroup communications enhance feelings of racial separation between the underclass and the rest of society, but the lack of facility in the standard dialect will undermine the minority group's prospects for success in education and employment.

The emergence of a culture of segregation also limits the number of minority families who aspire to leave the ghetto. As "minority" culture becomes more firmly established and deeply rooted, members of the minority who seek integration within the larger social and economic institutions of the society will come under increasing pressure from others to stop acting like a majority member. Those who succumb to this pressure, or who themselves promote self-segregation in language, culture, and housing, will be unlikely to meet with socioeconomic success in the larger society and will be limited to a life of persistent poverty and deprivation. Through prolonged exposure to life in racially isolated and intensely poor neighborhoods, this poverty will quite likely be passed to children in the next generation. When this point is reached, a well-functioning and efficient social structure for the creation and maintenance of an urban underclass will have been created.