

instead of a 3-8 slug to your cranium, I got six and I'm aimin' 'em." I think of W, the shadow that flew behind me that day in front of my mother-in-law's house. Recently, he was involved in a fight at a funeral reception for a slain friend, and he ran shooting after the man into the parking lot of my niece's elementary school, Dwayne's old school. It was afternoon, and the stream of departing children cowered as W fired several shots and then fled. He was out on bail shortly after, and I see him on the street almost every day. Dwayne can't talk about it without beginning to shout.

WHEN WORK DISAPPEARS

William Julius Wilson

William Julius Wilson, a prominent Harvard University sociologist, is the author of a number of articles and books, including The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy (1987), an influential book about the relation between urban poverty and violence. This reading comes from Wilson's 1996 book When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor. Like Susan Straight, Wilson looks at how particular kinds of neighborhoods are associated with increased violence.

Wilson did much of his research in Chicago in the 1970s and 1980s, when there was an ongoing debate over poverty's role in causing violence. At the time, some researchers had speculated that poverty creates an underclass whose habits of behavior, rather than poverty itself, cause their problems. Wilson, however, looked to the economic changes that have transformed cities over the last few decades. In his view, the "truly disadvantaged" live in neighborhoods that middle-class jobholders have fled, where concentrated poverty is accompanied by "social disorganization."

At the beginning of this reading, Wilson compares the current situation in Chicago to an earlier situation described by Chicago researchers St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton. In their 1945 book Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City, these researchers found a "color line" in several areas of the city, blocking blacks from making progress. Evaluating the same neighborhoods in 1962, Drake and Cayton expressed hope for new prosperity and integration in what they called "Bronzeville" (three sections of Chicago's black community: Washington Park, Grand Boulevard, and Douglas).

As you read, note the differences between the current jobless ghetto and the earlier facts about Bronzeville. Note, too, the connections Wilson makes between joblessness and weak social organization in poor city neighborhoods.

The most fundamental difference between today's inner-city neighborhoods and those studied by Drake and Cayton is the much higher levels of joblessness. Indeed, there is a new poverty in our nation's metropolises that has consequences for a range of issues relating to the quality of life in urban areas, including race relations.

By "the new urban poverty," I mean poor, segregated neighborhoods in which a substantial majority of individual adults are either unemployed or have dropped out of the labor force altogether.¹ For example, in 1990 only one in three adults ages 16 and over in the twelve Chicago community areas with ghetto poverty rates held a job in a typical week of the year. Each of these community areas, located on the South and West Sides of the city, is overwhelmingly black. We can add to these twelve high-jobless areas three additional predominantly black community areas, with rates approaching ghetto poverty, in which only 42 percent of the adult population were working in a typical week in 1990. Thus, in these fifteen black community areas—comprising a total population of 425,125—only 37 percent of all the adults were gainfully employed in a typical week in 1990. By contrast, 54 percent of the adults in the seventeen other predominantly black community areas in Chicago—a total population of 545,408—worked in a typical week in 1990. This was close to the citywide employment figure of 57 percent for all adults. Finally, except for one Asian community area with an employment rate of 46 percent, and one Latino community area with an employment rate of 49 percent, a majority of the adults held a job in a typical week in each of the remaining forty-five community areas of Chicago.

But Chicago is by no means the only city that features new poverty neighborhoods. In the ghetto census tracts of the nation's one hundred largest central cities, there were only 65.5 employed persons for every hundred adults who did not hold a job in a typical week in 1990.² In contrast, the nonpoverty areas contained 182.3 employed persons for every hundred of those not working. In other words, the ratio of employed to jobless persons was three times greater in census tracts not marked by poverty.

Looking at Drake and Cayton's Bronzeville,³ I can illustrate the magnitude of the changes that have occurred in many inner-city ghetto neighborhoods in recent years. A majority of adults held jobs in the three Bronzeville areas in 1950, but by 1990 only four in ten in Douglas worked in a typical week, one in three in Washington Park, and one in four in Grand Boulevard. In 1950, 69 percent of all males 14 and over who lived in the Bronzeville neighborhoods

¹Bronzeville: Drake and Cayton's term for the African American communities in Chicago comprising Douglas, Washington Park, and Grand Boulevard.

²The figures on adult neighborhood employment presented in this section are based on calculations from data provided by the 1990 U.S. Bureau of the Census and the *Local Community Fact Book for Chicago—1950* and the *Local Community Fact Book—Chicago Area, 1960*.

³Kasarda (1993).

worked in a typical week, and in 1960, 64 percent of this group were so employed. However, by 1990 only 37 percent of all males 16 and over held jobs in a typical week in these three neighborhoods.

Upon the publication of the first edition of *Black Metropolis* in 1945, there was much greater class integration within the black community. As Drake and Cayton pointed out, Bronzeville residents had limited success in "sorting themselves out into broad community areas designated as 'lower class' and 'middle class.'... Instead of middle-class *areas*, Bronzeville tends to have middle-class *buildings* in all areas, or a few middle-class blocks here and there."³ Though they may have lived on different streets, blacks of all classes in inner-city areas such as Bronzeville lived in the same community and shopped at the same stores. Their children went to the same schools and played in the same parks. Although there was some class antagonism, their neighborhoods were more stable than the inner-city neighborhoods of today; in short, they featured higher levels of what social scientists call "social organization."

When I speak of social organization I am referring to the extent to which the residents of a neighborhood are able to maintain effective social control and realize their common goals. There are three major dimensions of neighborhood social organization: (1) the prevalence, strength, and interdependence of social networks; (2) the extent of collective supervision that the residents exercise and the degree of personal responsibility they assume in addressing neighborhood problems; and (3) the rate of resident participation in voluntary and formal organizations.⁴ Formal institutions (e.g., churches and political party organizations), voluntary associations (e.g., block clubs and parent-teacher organizations), and informal networks (e.g., neighborhood friends and acquaintances, coworkers, marital and parental ties) all reflect social organization.

Neighborhood social organization depends on the extent of local friendship ties, the degree of social cohesion, the level of resident participation in formal and informal voluntary associations, the density and stability of formal organizations, and the nature of informal social controls. Neighborhoods in which adults are able to interact in terms of obligations, expectations, and relationships are in a better position to supervise and control the activities and behavior of children. In neighborhoods with high levels of social organization, adults are empowered to act to improve the quality of neighborhood life—for example, by breaking up congregations of youths on street corners and by supervising the leisure activities of youngsters.

Neighborhoods plagued by high levels of joblessness are more likely to experience low levels of social organization: the two go hand in hand. High rates of joblessness trigger other neighborhood problems that undermine social

³Drake and Cayton (1962), pp. 658–60.

⁴Sampson and Groves (1989), Sampson (1992b), and Sampson and Wilson (1995).

organization, ranging from crime, gang violence, and drug trafficking to family breakups and problems in the organization of family life.

Consider, for example, the problems of drug trafficking and violent crime. As many studies have revealed, the decline in legitimate employment opportunities among inner-city residents has increased incentives to sell drugs.⁵ The distribution of crack in a neighborhood attracts individuals involved in violence and lawlessness. Between 1985 and 1992, there was a sharp increase in the murder rate among men under the age of 24; for men 18 years old and younger, murder rates doubled. Black males in particular have been involved in this upsurge in violence. For example, whereas the homicide rate for white males between 14 and 17 increased from 8 per 100,000 in 1984 to 14 in 1991, the rate for black males tripled during that time (from 32 per 100,000 to 112).⁶ This sharp rise in violent crime among younger males has accompanied the widespread outbreak of addiction to crack-cocaine. The association is especially strong in inner-city ghetto neighborhoods plagued by joblessness and weak social organization.

Violent persons in the crack-cocaine marketplace have a powerful impact on the social organization of a neighborhood. Neighborhoods plagued by high levels of joblessness, insufficient economic opportunities, and high residential mobility are unable to control the volatile drug market and the violent crimes related to it. As informal controls⁹ weaken, the social processes that regulate behavior change.

As a result, the behavior and norms in the drug market are more likely to influence the action of others in the neighborhood, even those who are not involved in drug activity. Drug dealers cause the use and spread of guns in the neighborhood to escalate, which in turn raises the likelihood that others, particularly the youngsters, will come to view the possession of weapons as necessary or desirable for self-protection, settling disputes, and gaining respect from peers and other individuals.

Moreover, as Alfred Blumstein pointed out, the drug industry actively recruits teenagers in the neighborhood "partly because they will work more cheaply than adults, partly because they may be less vulnerable to the punishments imposed by the adult criminal justice system, partly because they tend to be daring and willing to take risks that more mature adults would eschew."⁷ Inner-city black youths with limited prospects for stable or attractive employment are easily lured into drug trafficking and therefore increasingly find themselves involved in the violent behavior that accompanies it.

⁹informal controls: Controls that are not formal laws but may nevertheless be effective. When an adult in a neighborhood tells a young person to behave and he or she obeys, that is a type of informal control.

⁵Fagan (1993).

⁶Blumstein (1994).

⁷Blumstein (1994), p. 18.

A more direct relationship between joblessness and violent crime is revealed in recent research by Delbert Elliott of the University of Colorado, a study based on National Longitudinal Youth Survey data collected from 1976 to 1989, covering ages 11 to 30. As Elliott points out, the transition from adolescence to adulthood usually results in a sharp drop in most crimes as individuals take on new adult roles and responsibilities. "Participation in serious violent offending behavior (aggravated assault, forcible rape, and robbery) increases [for all males] from ages 11 and 12 to ages 15 and 16, then declines dramatically with advancing age."⁸ Although black and white males reveal similar age curves,⁹ "the negative slope of the age curve for blacks after age 20 is substantially less than that of whites."

The black-white differential in the proportion of males involved in serious violent crime, although almost even at age 11, increases to 3:2 over the remaining years of adolescence, and reaches a differential of nearly 4:1 during the late twenties. However, when Elliott compared only *employed* black and white males, he found no significant differences in violent behavior patterns among the two groups by age 21. Employed black males, like white males, experienced a precipitous decline in serious violent behavior following their adolescent period. Accordingly, a major reason for the racial gap in violent behavior after adolescence is joblessness; a large proportion of jobless black males do not assume adult roles and responsibilities, and their serious violent behavior is therefore more likely to extend into adulthood. The new poverty neighborhoods feature a high concentration of jobless males and, as a result, suffer rates of violent criminal behavior that exceed those in other urban neighborhoods.

The problems of joblessness and neighborhood social organization, including crime and drug trafficking, are ... reflected in the responses to a 1993 survey ... conducted on a random sample of adult residents in Woodlawn and Oakland, two of the new poverty neighborhoods on the South Side of Chicago. In 1990, 37 percent of Woodlawn's 27,473 adults were employed and only 23 percent of Oakland's 4,935 adults were working. When asked how much of a problem unemployment was in their neighborhood, 73 percent of the residents in Woodlawn and 76 percent in Oakland identified it as a *major* problem. The responses to the survey also revealed the residents' concerns about a series of related problems, such as crime and drug abuse, that are symptomatic of severe problems of social organization. Indeed, crime was identified as a major problem by 66 percent of the residents in each neighborhood. Drug abuse was cited as a major problem by as many as 86 percent of the adult residents in Oakland and 79 percent of those in Woodlawn.

⁹ age curves: Here, the rise of crime in adolescence and its fall with age, which resembles a bell-shaped curve on a graph.

⁸ Elliott (1992), pp. 14-15.

Although high-jobless neighborhoods also feature concentrated poverty, high rates of neighborhood poverty are less likely to trigger problems of social organization if the residents are working. This was the case in previous years when the working poor stood out in areas like Bronzeville. Today, the nonworking poor predominate in the highly segregated and impoverished neighborhoods.

The rise of new poverty neighborhoods represents a movement away from what the historian Allan Spear has called an institutional ghetto—whose structure and activities parallel those of the larger society, as portrayed in Drake and Cayton's description of Bronzeville—toward a jobless ghetto, which features a severe lack of basic opportunities and resources, and inadequate social controls.

What can account for the growing proportion of jobless adults and the corresponding increase in problems of social organization in inner-city communities such as Bronzeville? An easy answer is racial segregation. However, a race-specific argument is not sufficient to explain recent changes in neighborhoods like Bronzeville. After all, Bronzeville was *just as segregated by skin color* in 1950 as it is today, yet the level of employment was much higher then.

Nonetheless, racial segregation does matter. If large segments of the African-American population had not been historically segregated in inner-city ghettos, we would not be talking about the new urban poverty. The segregated ghetto is not the result of voluntary or positive decisions on the part of the residents who live there. As Massey and Denton have carefully documented, the segregated ghetto is the product of systematic racial practices such as restrictive covenants,[°] redlining[°] by banks and insurance companies, zoning,[°] panic peddling[°] by real estate agents, and the creation of massive public housing projects in low-income areas.

Segregated ghettos are less conducive to employment and employment preparation than are other areas of the city. Segregation in ghettos exacerbates employment problems because it leads to weak informal employment networks and contributes to the social isolation of individuals and families, thereby reducing their chances of acquiring the human capital skills, including adequate educational training, that facilitate mobility in a society. Since no other group in society experiences the degree of segregation, isolation, and poverty concentration as do African-Americans, they are far more likely to be disadvantaged when they have to compete with other groups in society, including other despised groups, for resources and privileges.

To understand the new urban poverty, one has to account for the ways in which segregation interacts with other changes in society to produce the recent escalating rates of joblessness and problems of social organization in inner-city ghetto neighborhoods.

[°]Restrictive covenants, [°]redlining, [°]zoning, [°]panic peddling: Forms of economic discrimination that have kept African Americans from moving out of the ghetto.

WORKS CITED

- Blumstein, Alfred. 1994. "Youth Violence, Guns, and the Illicit-Drug Industry." Working paper, H. John Heinz III School of Public Policy and Management.
- Drake, St. Clair, and Horace Cayton. 1945, rev. ed. 1962. *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Elliott, Delbert S. 1992. "Longitudinal Research in Criminology: Promise and Practice." Paper presented at the NATO Conference on Cross-National Longitudinal Research on Criminal Behavior, July 19-25, Frankfurt, Germany.
- Fagan, Jeffrey. 1993. "Drug Selling and Licit Income in Distressed Neighborhoods: The Economic Lives of Street-Level Drug Users and Dealers." In *Drugs, Crime, and Social Isolation*, edited by G. Peterson and Adele V. Harrell, pp. 519-35. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press.
- Kasarda, John D. 1993. "Inner-City Concentrated Poverty and Neighborhood Distress: 1970-1990." *Housing Policy Debate* 4 (3): 253-302.
- Local Community Fact Book—Chicago, 1950, 1953. Chicago Community Inventory, University of Chicago.
- Local Community Fact Book—Chicago Area, 1960, 1963. Chicago Community Inventory, University of Chicago.
- Massey, Douglas S., and Nancy A. Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Sampson, Robert J. 1986. "Crime in Cities: The Effects of Formal and Informal Social Control." In *Communities and Crime*, edited by Albert J. Reiss Jr. and Michael Tonry, pp. 271-310. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1988. "Urban Black Violence: The Effect of Male Joblessness and Family Disruption." *American Journal of Sociology* 93: 349-82.
- . 1992. "Integrating Family and Community-Level Dimensions of Social Organization: Delinquency and Crime in the Inner City of Chicago." Paper presented at the International Workshop on Integrating Individual and Ecological Aspects of Crime, August 31-September 5, Stockholm, Sweden.
- Sampson, Robert J., and Walter Groves. 1989. "Community Structure and Crime: Testing Social Disorganization Theory." *American Journal of Sociology* 94: 774-802.
- Sampson, Robert J., and William Julius Wilson. 1995. "Toward a Theory of Race, Crime, and Urban Inequality." In *Crime and Inequality*, edited by John Hagan and Ruth Peterson, pp. 37-54. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Spear, Allan. 1967. *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.