

Social and Cultural Theories of Poverty: Community Practices and Social Change

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In the public debate over the relative power of character, culture, and circumstance in perpetuating and concentrating poverty among communities of color in the U.S., we have sometimes faced and sometimes hidden from the reality of racism. Stand in one place, and it looks as though social and economic isolation in the urban core stem from structural forces - specifically the loss of industrial jobs - that govern an increasingly globalized economy. Stand in another place, and it seems that intractable poverty rises straight out of self-destructive social behaviors and the landscape of hopelessness against which those behaviors enact and reenact themselves. Move to a third vantage point, and you begin to see the ways in which individual life stories, grounded in particular details, not general patterns, evolve from series of choices made on the ground of urban life. Like a hologram, our picture of low-income African-American and Latino communities shimmers into new focus every time we change the line of sight. Each angle produces an image that seems sharp-edged, detailed, and complete. But there are many such sites in a hologram, none of which fully registers all the elements seared by laser onto light-sensitive film.

Politicians and policy-makers almost always station themselves outside the boundaries of poor urban neighborhoods. From their observation posts (it's tempting to say watchtowers), a young mother's reliance on welfare payments and occasional unreported wages to support herself and her children may look like surrender of responsibility, perhaps even fraud. That picture is likely to arouse indignation. Ethnographers who move into low-income communities and situate themselves within families, schools, workplaces (where they can be found), and community organizing groups see the woman's struggle to cobble together means of support for her family as proof of the power of agency, the compelling need of individuals and groups to create meaning in their lives by making their own decisions. That picture is likely to invite admiration.

All social scientists enter the urban communities they describe from a point along the periphery. That "place" of origin guides their research, dictates the tools they use and the questions they ask. William Julius Wilson (When Work Disappears), with whom we associate the Chicago social breakdown thesis (CSBT),¹ takes quantitative measures of several census tracts on Chicago's South and Near West Sides that were defined as poor in 1990, compares them with the same areas in previous census years, and concludes that job loss is the source of economic and social desolation there. Laurie Olsen (Made in America: Immigrant Students in Public Schools, 1997), locates herself inside an ethnically diverse high school in northern California to take qualitative measures of the ways in which the ideology of Americanization affects young immigrants of color. She learns from one student that "a person is their clothes in America," and from others that "to be American is to be English-speaking, white-skinned, and Christian" (55). Does race matter? Wilson and Olsen find different answers to that question.

In this paper, we will examine the "places" from which social scientists begin their examinations of low-income urban communities. By moving with urban ethnographers from one stance to another, sketching the varying pathways of research, we hope to get past familiar academic debates over definitions of culture, structure, and

¹ Based on the material prepared by the Aspen Institute Roundtable, we take the Chicago social breakdown thesis to refer primarily to the research and arguments of William Julius Wilson. It may also encompass the work of Massey and Denton.

agency, and to uncover ways in which social scientists can understand all the processes that mediate the structural elements of racism and restricted economic opportunity and shape individual decisions. The image of the hologram, a three-dimensional picture that discloses itself differently from every angle of approach, has special relevance - and resonance - for this project. We hope that it will help us identify and specify many ways to conceptualize and study the practices, sites, institutions and networks within which real people make real decisions about their lives. As we listen to the voices, sometimes hopeful, sometimes angry, of those who live in low-income communities, we hope to learn how to support them, to facilitate individual and collective agency that will transform and overcome structures of limited opportunity through creative, community based initiatives.

The first section of the paper will focus on two apparently contradictory angles of approach, one espoused by advocates of the CSBT and the other by social scientists interested in qualitative research into processes and institutions that mediate between structural forces and agency.

The second part of the paper will address the question of how race and racism affect social structures and community well-being. We will sketch a framework for understanding race, poverty, and social transformation that will guide a discussion of race in four areas of ethnographic research, three of which - family strategies, youths and the workplace, and community activism - have been studied by Carol Stack. Research on the fourth area, schooling, is also critical to understanding cultural and situational dynamics around race and poverty that shape individual choice and collective action.

The third and final section of the paper will move from the particulars of ethnography toward a general understanding of race and social transformation that can better explain and guide efforts to initiate change. We will conclude with a discussion of the implications of qualitative approaches for the work of CCIs and the Aspen Roundtable project on race, ethnicity, and community revitalization.

Part One: Urban Processes and Practices

In contemporary academic discourse about the array of "dysfunctional" behaviors associated with poverty among minorities in urban areas - joblessness, teenage pregnancy, female-headed households, welfare dependency, crime, drug use, and low educational achievement - the work of a few sociologists, especially Wilson, and Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, has drawn the lines for debate. With his description of a world of blasted opportunities, where "the consequences of high neighborhood joblessness are more devastating than those of high neighborhood poverty" (xiii), Wilson's When Work Disappears (1996) revisits and amplifies his earlier work. Basing his research in Chicago's Black Belt, he argues that structural change in the global economy has drastically altered job distribution and increased demand for skills in the U.S. labor force. Massive loss of industrial jobs in urban areas has made self-sufficiency impossible for many residents of the core cities, especially African-American men. The suburbanization of most new low-wage job growth only worsens the impact of job loss for minorities. Without a job, "which imposes disciplines and regularities," Wilson asserts, "a person lacks not only a place in which to work and the receipt of regular income but also a coherent organization of the present - that is, a system of concrete expectations and goals" (73). Joblessness, the argument continues, blocks "rational planning in daily life, the necessary condition of adaptation to an industrial

economy" (73). Thus, "the disappearance of work and the consequences of that disappearance for both social and cultural life are the central problems in the inner-city ghetto" (xix).

The loss of jobs has occurred during a time of major demographic changes in the race-, class-, and age-composition of urban centers. Massey and Denton (1993) show that government policies have supported discriminatory urban redevelopment programs and housing and credit practices, intensifying the isolation of younger African Americans in jobless ghettos. Drastic and concurrent cuts in funding for government programs have deprived poor urban communities of the resources to confront their growing needs.

These transformations have resulted in the economic and social isolation of ghetto residents, Wilson argues, and contributed to the breakdown of the community institutions, families, and schools that control and socialize young people. Concentrated poverty is familiar to minorities in the U.S., he contends, but concentrated joblessness is new, and the consequent isolation from mainstream working role models reinforces dysfunctional values and norms, producing a cultural dynamic to poverty-reinforcing behavior. Without the scaffolding that work provides, without concrete expectations and goals, without a coherent organization of the present, in the severe social isolation produced by racial and economic segregation, "ghetto dwellers evolve a set of behaviors, attitudes, and expectations sharply at variance with those common in the rest of American society" (Massey and Denton 1993:13). Thus, the cultural dimension of poverty actually becomes a force that reproduces poverty.

From strong, largely quantitative data, Wilson, and Massey and Denton, construct a picture of poverty that is patterned, predictable, and highly deterministic: Job loss alters the local social and cultural environment, which in turn warps behavior and values, which in turn leads to the disorganization of individual life and the destruction of institutions in high-poverty areas, where residents, by being unemployed, quickly become unemployable. Even if the transmission of behavioral norms is unconscious and unintentional, Wilson believes, patterns of behavior within a community, because they are visible and repeated, create a cultural dynamic. Although he recognizes that joblessness may have nothing to do with an individual's internalized values, he maintains that "the decision to act in ghetto-related ways . . . can nonetheless be said to be cultural."

The more often certain behavior such as the pursuit of illegal income is manifested in a community, the greater will be the readiness on the part of some residents of the community to find that behavior 'not only convenient but also morally appropriate.' They may endorse mainstream norms against this behavior in the abstract but then provide compelling reasons and justifications for this behavior, given the circumstances in their community (Wilson 1996:70).

Wilson's argument suggests that urban culture, enacted in urban space, achieves a kind of pathological autonomy to perpetuate dysfunctional behavior. But he provides no significant data to support his conclusions about the causal relationships of economic and social forces to behavior, of behavior to cultures, and of so-called cultural processes to behavior.

What has made the unsubstantiated conclusions of the social breakdown thesis so influential? In part, their currency may rest on an implicit appeal to a universal standard of human rationality. Deborah Stone, in an insightful discussion of divergent scholarly accounts of homelessness, argues that social scientists believe that "we can explain and predict people's behavior by comparing their decisions to a universal standard of rationality, and we can find that standard by looking inside ourselves at how we think" (Stone 1994:3 1). If we do not understand the behavior of urban communities, and if we do not want to attribute it to amoral economic calculations as conservatives like Murray (19 8 4) have done, then we must assume that it results from an unconscious or perversely adaptive response to a pathological environment or culture.

The ideological implications of the CSBT are alarming. Although the analysis begins with larger forces, structural change and government policies that compacted minorities into communities where jobs were lost, it ends by shifting the moral responsibility for the consequences of joblessness - patterns of dysfunctional, maladaptive behaviors - squarely onto the shoulders of inner-city residents, and thereby seriously undermines support for solutions. Although Wilson's social breakdown thesis differs from simplistic "culture of poverty" theories that pinpoint self-destructive value systems, it nevertheless dramatically combines a structural or situational analysis with a cultural argument.

A different angle of approach suggests that to understand internal thoughts and cultural processes, to bring individual and group decision-making into focus, we must situate meaning within local knowledge. As Stack has argued in the realm of welfare policy-making, "by adding or incorporating qualitative approaches to the understanding of social welfare and problems, we can ground policy [and analysis] in the reality of the particular ... Seeing the social relations of everyday life reveals subjectivity, real choices, pathways, and polarities -- the authentic dilemmas that people face" (19 8 7:140). The aim of such research is to uncover, not to assume, the relationship and mediating factors among structure, culture, and behavior.

Criticism of Wilson's situational-turned-cultural theory of urban poverty is emerging in a wide range of disciplines. But the qualitative research that has consistently challenged the conclusions of the CSBT and other cultural theories of poverty is not merely reactive. It seeks to expand the dialogue about urban poverty, to explore new lines of

sight, take up new positions, and create new paradigms for understanding race and poverty, and individual and collective agency, in the social practices and everyday lives of residents of low-income communities.

New Dimensions in the Study of Race and Urban Poverty

Historians and social scientists such as Michael Katz (1989) and Herbert Gans (1995) have documented the history of discourse about "the undeserving poor" and the evolution of contemporary debate over an African-American, and to some degree Latino, urban underclass, revealing deeply-rooted racial (as well as class and gender) ideologies that influence politics and policy and themselves act as constraints under which people live and work. Onto this old stock, contemporary power relations and social conflicts have grafted new perspectives for the discussion of poverty, some of which suggest an alternative theory of race and change within low-income communities.

The analysis of urban space is a case in point. As we have argued, proponents of the CSBT attribute to urban space the same qualities that earlier theorists attributed to the culture-of-poverty. Isolated, essential, static, and pathological, it autonomously determines behavior, and promotes dysfunctional activities. From this angle of approach, low-income neighborhoods spring into focus as sites of danger, cut off from mainstream society, where violence is inherent not only in the space itself, but also in the people who live there. Although debates about poverty-related policies have long been racially coded in the U.S., the new discourse of the war on drugs has generated racial images that affect drug prohibition policies. In The Return of the Dangerous Classes (1994), Diana Gordon argues that "drugspak" justifies the militarization of efforts to suppress the drug trade in urban communities of color. The skewed emphasis in policy-making and community level implementation has devastated many poor minority communities. The only way to explain serious paradoxes in current drug policy, she contends, is through its shadow agenda, which is fed by racial, generational, and political tensions, and itself feeds symbolic, not substantive, politics.

For Stephan Haymes (1995) and Carol Stack (1995), whose research has been influenced by geographers, and whose angle of analysis demands the use of qualitative as well as quantitative tools, urban space is linked to national social, economic, political and ideological processes that produce inequality. From their "place" or stance, it seems obvious that the loss of resources in urban communities is only one focal point in a multifaceted picture. To concentrate on the devastation of inner-city sites without examining parallel processes that transfer resources to suburbs and to other policy priorities is to miss a very important point: The norms of family, advanced schooling, and highly-paid work that are defined as "mainstream" (and used to judge urban behavior) are predicated on a level of privilege and

consumption supported by the same process that shifted resources and jobs from cities to suburbs, from blacks to whites, and from social programs to other policy priorities, via discriminatory and preferential public policy decisions about taxation, spending, suburban investment and parallel urban disinvestment.

Discourse about race and poverty that creates borders between center and periphery, between the "mainstream" and an "underclass," between "self" and "other," often negates relationships of power and difference. But reimagine the space in which race and poverty are practiced, as Carol Stack has done in recent research, and a very different picture leaps into focus. In Call to Home (1996), Stack demonstrates that the border that encloses urban space is permeable as she explores the rural South, a place which has become a site of creative political and cultural production for African Americans returning from northern cities that failed them. Prevailing urban ideologies have envisioned an African-American diaspora that leads north and leaves footprints facing one way, rendering invisible cycles of return migration and the resources carried home on people's backs, in their heads, and in their hearts. Returnees enact emancipatory politics back home in the hinterlands; multiple agendas and sites of power inform their actions. They meander through and within political agendas that transcend borders. Their narratives provide additional pieces in the puzzle of modernization and urban poverty. They tell of economic expansion and contraction, the movements of workers, and the social factors influencing communities, families, and individuals over time. They tell of the reverberation of global dilemmas in, and across, American sites, from the poorest counties in North Carolina, to middle-class white suburbs, to Mexican maquiladoras, to New York's financial district.

Economic Sociology

Neoclassical models of economic decision-making begin with the premise that individuals value profits and are driven to avoid costs. Individual actions, therefore, can be seen as efforts to secure the rational maximization of profit, and social patterns can be understood as the aggregate of such profit-seeking choices. Countering this reductive view of human decision-making, which informs some studies of urban poverty and welfare reform (Murray 1984, and see discussion of Wilson above), Carol Stack, in All Our Kin (1974) and Call to Home (1996), elaborates broader sites of family and community decision-making and culturally defined practices within which poor people make rational, though not always profit-driven, decisions. Stack writes about the enactment of rights and responsibilities by mothers, fathers, grandparents, children, and fictive kin in family networks that confound mainstream notions of economic calculation. Additionally, the caring behavior she documents extends beyond statistical snapshots of household

composition. Her research suggests that it is more productive to study migration or child-rearing practices as sets of creative responses to conditions or constraints in the context of a repertoire of values than to compare and judge behaviors against a universal standard of "mainstream" values or rational economic calculation.

It is also crucial to examine the larger context in which family and community based decision-making plays out. In his edited collection of essays, Economic Sociology of Immigration: Essays on Networks, Ethnicity, and Entrepreneurship, Alejandro Portes (1995) investigates the ways in which local conditions, constraints, and meanings express national and global forces. Many considerations contribute to individual and collective economic and labor-market-related behavior, Portes argues, including drives for status, affirmation, power, expressiveness, and dignity, drives that are influenced both by overarching social structures and by the specific network of relations in which the individual is embedded. Remittances sent across national boundaries by immigrants who are themselves needy are but one example. The concept of embeddedness conveys that economic-related behavior is shaped by local, national, and global forces, but has its meaning within a specific context, a social network.

Recent research has focused on the role of social networks and their function of social capital. Social networks, Portes reasons, "constitute the more immediate settings influencing the goals of individuals and the means of constraints in their paths"(Portes 1995:12). Social capital, according to Robert Putnam, "refers to features of social organizations, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit," and enhance "the benefits of investment in physical and human capital" (Putnam 1993:35-36).

M. Patricia Fernandez Kelly emphasizes the dynamic and relational nature of social capital and social networks. Her research with young mothers, she contends, demonstrates that "social capital is best understood as a process that facilitates access to benefits" (1995:218). Kelly argues that one must look at the quality of information and resources available within specific relationships to understand how their social capital constrains or expands options for differently privileged groups. Because "membership in a social network is [usually] based on ascriptive criteria such as ethnicity, race, gender, national background, and social class ... the development of social capital entail[s] particularistic rather than universalistic transactions" and "depends on processes of identity formation through norms of exclusion and inclusion" (Fernandez Kelly 1995:217, our emphasis). Because women are often excluded from "masculine" jobs that typically pay more, deployment of the resources available to them through their networks - their social capital -- differs from deployment of social capital among men.

By studying *cumulative effects* and *path dependence*, which Portes defines as the "influence of past states on present conditions" (17), recent research also incorporates a temporal or historical dimension into the study of the economic biographies of individuals and groups. A history of unemployment or low-wage work, for example, will affect an individual's ability to get high-wage work, as will lack of training, or inadequate training at an inferior school. On a societal level, the well-being of ethnic and racialized groups is influenced by *modes of incorporation*, which, according to Portes, are determined by three factors: properties of government policy, whether supportive, antagonistic, or passive toward the community; attitudes of civic society, whether hostile or receptive toward the group; and properties of the ethnic community, which include and build on previous access to an economic niche, to education, and to other social resources. The interaction among government policies, societal receptivity, and community resources over time affects whether groups succeed or fail at being incorporated into the labor market. Labor markets, as our discussion in part 11 will illustrate, may involve *segmented labor forces*, divided by gender, age, and nationality as well as by race and ethnicity (See discussion of Stack (1997) in part II, Sassen 1995).

Social History

Social history tracks another line of sight into urban minority communities and challenges the CSBT's mechanistic notions of change. With their accounts of collective struggle and activism, Michael Katz (1993) and Robin Kelley (1994, 1997) counter the conception of minority communities as arenas of social pathology and passive adaptations to poverty. Their research on agency and social change argues that to understand the roots of contemporary poverty, we must study the conflicts that have transformed government policies, public institutions, and labor markets within a shifting national and global economy. Such transformations follow different regional dynamics. Joan Moore and Raquel Pinderhughes (*In the Barrios: Latinos and the Underclass Debate*, 1993) rely on qualitative research to document the diverse regional forms, and social consequences, of economic restructuring. They argue for a much more variable model of change than the monolithic view suggested by the CSBT focus on post-manufacturing, predominantly African-American cities in the Northeast. The focus on the dynamics of agency in social change among social historians is more compatible with the existence and efforts of the community initiatives the Aspen Institute Roundtable seeks to support.

Minority communities have been agents in determining the course of change, and social historians are exploring "aspects of black working-class life and politics that have been relegated to the margins," the infra-politics,

and the expressive, stylistic, and pleasure-oriented motivations behind urban cultural forms (Kelley1994:4). African-Americans working in low-wage, service-sector jobs are neither "total victims of routinization, exploitation, sexism, racism," nor exclusively 'rational' economic beings "driven by the most base utilitarian concerns." To characterize them fairly and fully, Kelley asserts, researchers must dig "deeply into the daily lives, cultures, and communities [that] make the working classes so much more than people who work"(Kelley 1994:4).

Social histories of poor and working class people challenge two assumptions on which Wilson and others base their theories about urban social breakdown. The first concerns the role of the black middle class in previous eras of poverty and segregation. Kelley's angle of approach demands that to "understand how communities are constructed and sustained," we must abandon the presumption of a lost golden age, a familiar "trope in the popular social science literature on the so-called underclass." That trope, Kelley says, has "hindered explanations of the current crisis ... by presuming a direct causal relationship between the disappearance of the middle-class role models" and increasing social disorganization (Kelley 1994:40). Katz challenges this cause-and-effect assumption as well (1993). In response to Wilson's assumption that social breakdown derives from the unprecedented isolation and concentration of the urban poor in low-income minority communities, Katz (1993) argues that particularly troubling forms of urban poverty stem from interdependent national trends of immigration, economic marginalization, and exclusion, and that the breakdown of public institutions and public life in urban ghettos is a more intense consequence of a national decline in public life and community institutions.

Anthropology

While economic and social historians revise the terms of contemporary discourse about poverty and race, anthropologists have been working to map the ways in which local contexts, institutions, and relationships mediate group and individual agency in low-income urban communities. To ground a view of culture as "a continual process of creating meaning in social and material contexts" (Levinson and Holland 1996:13), they study cultural practices, cultural production, and identity formation within informal networks and formal institutions such as families, schools, work sites, and communities. These social practices respond to, and simultaneously constitute, social structures and relations beyond their local arenas.

In Structuring Diversity (1992), Louise Lamphere documents research on multiethnic relationships in urban areas between recent immigrants and established residents, and argues that "interrelations are not just a matter of race,

ethnicity, or immigrant status but can be influenced by the organization of a workplace, apartment complex, or school" (Lamphere 1992:2). Such institutions "mediate or serve to channel larger political and economic forces into settings that have an impact on the lives of individuals ... [A]n individual workplace or school (through policies sometimes made at the level of a corporate headquarters or school system) is where macro-level forces are brought to bear on micro-level relationships"(Lamphere 1992: 4). As networks and institutions mediate macro-level forces, shaping human action, human actions shape institutions and the structure of social relations. While racial difference and hierarchies are created in social settings through practices that constitute racist institutions and sustain power inequities, individuals and communities can also challenge racist practices and alter relations of power.

As new stances in economic sociology, social history, and anthropology converge to produce dynamic, non-deterministic visions of individual agency, social processes, and change, lines of connection surface between structure, culture, and behavior in urban communities of color. We see that human actions are embedded in social and ideological processes and practices that differ significantly according to position in material and social networks. We see that human actions have social and cultural dimensions, that they involve expressive and emotional needs, the drive for dignity, in addition to economic considerations. We see that these processes, practices, and networks incorporate both global and localized meanings and resources. And we see that social struggle contributes powerfully to the course of social change.

Part Two: Grounded Theories of Race, Poverty, and Social Change

Our reconstruction of urban space as vigorous, complex, and fluid, positions us to ask a question crucial to the Aspen Institute's support of Ms: When and how can the actions of low-income minority communities become transformative? To answer that question, we need an adequate theory of race, poverty, and change, one that shines a coherent light on disparate patterns of structure, culture, and agency to produce a complete holographic image, perhaps a multi-dimensional map to follow. The theory must link the distribution of resources and power to the ideologies that justify and support that distribution. It must account for processes of change that involve collective struggle, individual and group actions. It must disclose the interdependence and varying roles of social dimensions and identities such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, language, and nationality. It must understand how and why different identities become salient. It must cross and connect such important sites as family, school, work, peer groups, community institutions, and public

space, with larger entities, such as the polity, economy, and society. It must reveal the local dynamics of national and global forces as they articulate themselves in specific urban and rural sites and practices.

That is admittedly a tall order. No study can incorporate every element of our theory of race, poverty and change. But we should try to move the program of research in the direction of amplitude and away from the structural theories of social breakdown that have dominated academic discourse in the last few decades. It is important to acknowledge that social structures are real. But they are not autonomous and they do not determine human action. Instead, their existence is constantly (re)constituted by meanings and practice.

Communities of Practice: Family, School, Work and Community Building

Recent ethnographic research in four areas (family, schooling, youth and work; and community building) presents us with an array of insights into how low-income people of color experience real life in real places. Our review of this research will enable us to comment on ways in which racialized identities and practices play out in some of the “underclass” behaviors that have transfixed the public and much of academia.

Family Strategies

Since the 1970s, discourse on poor minority women and children has focused on female-dominated family structures (particularly among African Americans), unwed teenage mothers, and extended reliance on welfare-program support. Some writers (see Murray 1984, for example) argue that calculations about welfare benefits drive family and child-rearing patterns. Advocates of the CSBT assert that situational factors and social isolation skew the norms in urban areas, making welfare more acceptable when work is scarce. Carol Stack (1974) and, more recently, Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein (1997) have argued that mothers use multiple strategies - including kin networks and public assistance - to pull together enough resources to keep the family economy going. In Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work (1997), Edin and Lein discover that although African-American and Latino mothers share mainstream values of work, they labor under material constraints as they struggle to maintain family and dignity. Findings from their impressive comparative database of 379 low-income women across four cities "directly refute ... culture-based arguments" (1997:202) that personal and social characteristics promote welfare dependency among single low-income mothers (1997:23 1).

The welfare system of the early 1990s [has not] engendered psychological dependency or encouraged the formation of a set of deviant behaviors. The real problem with the federal welfare system during these years was a labor-market problem. The mothers we interviewed had made repeated efforts to attain self-sufficiency through work, but the kind of jobs they could get paid too little, offered too little security in the short term, and provided few opportunities over time (1997:220).

Cultural theories of poverty, even those of the CSBT, are off point, Edin and Lein assert: The labor market is the problem. Although they find differences among ethnic groups in the amount of support women receive from families in their networks, they overlook both the dynamics of racism - labor markets are racialized and gendered in a way that marginalizes women and people of color in lower-paying and more vulnerable jobs' - and such larger forces as the mobility of global capital, which also constrains wages? Trends in industrialized countries towards significant downsizing of welfare and social-support programs make the reforms Lein and Edin suggest unlikely. And cultural, racial, and gender ideologies that blame poor mothers for their poverty undercut the political will needed to implement such policy changes.

Edin and Lein move beyond Wilson to study behavior and decisions as they are embedded within a network of family relations and local labor markets. Their research demonstrates that apparently dysfunctional network strategies among poor families are actually critical to the transition from welfare, because strategies based on low-wage and unstable work have proved too risky. Recent work by Stack and Burton (1993) adopts a new angle of approach to the process through which individuals and families, functioning as multi-generational collectives, work out family responsibilities in a context of restricted resources. Integrating Stack's anthropological perspectives on American kinship with Burton's sociological family-life-course analysis, they propose "kinscripts" as a framework for representing the interplay of family ideology, norms, and behaviors over the life course. The concept of kinscripts encompasses three culturally-defined

2 On this point, see Edin's and Lein's own findings on jobs available to women in their study (1997:101). See also Sassen (1995) and the discussion of Stack's (1997) research on youth in the low-wage service sector. 'Corporate decisions that affect wage levels and job availability are determined within a context of global competition, so that poor women and women of color in the U.S. frequently compete against poor women in and from the Third World.

family domains: kin-work, the labor and the tasks that families need to accomplish from generation to generation; kin-time, the temporal and sequential ordering of family transition; and kin-scription, the process of assigning kin work to family members. This new model transforms Stack's earlier work on kinship into a more dynamic and generative mode of analysis, and provides context for understanding reproductive and child-rearing decisions.

In Call to Home (1996), her study of return migration to the rural South, Stack highlights kin-work and kin-time among black families, arguing that patterns of migration and reproduction reflect a scripted family-life course of cooperative action that enables the family collective to manage extreme economic hardship. In the families with whom Stack worked, young adults usually had children before migrating north to secure work and send money home. Grandparents and older aunts and uncles cared for, and, in turn, were helped by, the young children who remained in the South. Eventually, migrating adults returned to the South, and their now-grown children repeated the cycle. This kin-work over kin-time had important meaning beyond economic survival. It marked milestones, rites of passage, and passing over of power within the family.

Ethnographic research by Fernandez Kelly (1995) tracks another line of sight into how and why young women in low-income urban communities make the decision to become mothers early. In west Baltimore, where other life pathways available to middle-class women - higher education, rewarding work, and stable marriage - are blocked, Fernandez Kelly found, family is source of pleasure, pride, status, and adulthood. Because they do not have other means for gaining adulthood or satisfaction, these young women turn "vulnerability into strength" and approximate mainstream norms through earlier motherhood. They choose motherhood because other options are not available to them. In their decisions to have children, social and cultural considerations outweigh economic calculations. They do not see early motherhood as a hardship.

Although Edin and Lein, Stack and Burton, and Fernandez Kelly do not make race itself the focus of their research on family strategies in poor communities, race and poverty define the boundaries of the community of practice, define who participates in kin-scripts, networks, families. Race affects minority communities when racialized labor markets marginalize women and men of color into unstable low-wage work. It affects minority communities when housing and credit policies isolate people of color in neighborhoods where schools are underfunded and where crime is commonplace. And race affects minority communities when residents draw on its power to generate cooperative kinship networks that provide much-needed material and emotional support.

Schooling: New Ethnographies of Racialized Identities

Low-income minority children need schooling to secure decent jobs (and to postpone parenthood). But schooling outcomes for these children demonstrate the failure of institutional efforts to build a foundation for the "mainstream" values seen as lacking in poor communities of color. Various explanations are offered for glaring disparities in educational outcomes for low-income and middle-class children. Some focus on the characteristics of the community. John Devine (1996) suggests that a "culture of violence" prevents learning from taking place in minority communities. The CSBT infers that the absence of role models and the lure of drugs stifle achievement in inner-city schools. A few blame cultural differences and mismatch between poor minority children and schools.

Others argue that the hidden function of schools is in fact to reproduce a stratified workforce for a capitalist society (Bowles and Gintis 1976). More recent ethnographic approaches have developed theories of cultural practices and production that involve notions of agency and resistance (Levinson, Foley, and Holland 1996). Jay MacLeod's Ain't No Makin' It (1987), although it does not focus directly on race, provides a powerful assessment of how structural and cultural forces manifest themselves and shape agency across many sites in the daily lives of low-income youth. He finds that the "achievement ideology" that drives schooling conflicted with severely restricted opportunities in Clarendon Heights, a low-income housing development in a northeastern city. The achievement ideology, MacLeod maintains, holds "that individual merit and achievement are the fair and equitable sources of inequality in American society" (1987:112-113). Because public education, the argument goes on, "mitigates gender, class, and racial barriers to success, [American society] is an open one in which barriers to success are mainly personal rather than social."

But MacLeod's study of two groups of boys at Clarendon Heights who responded differently to the achievement ideology reveals that the school actively undereducated them, devaluing their intelligence by tracking them into classes where claimed opportunity was rarely real, and where success or failure would be attributed to their own ability and effort, not to the lowered expectations under which they labored.

The "Hallway Hangers," who were white, rejected the claims of the achievement ideology and chose to disinvest in school; the "Brothers," a group of minority youth, submitted to mainstream codes for studying and tried to work hard, to get ahead. "Aspirations mediate what an individual desires and what society can offer, [so] the hopes of these boys are linked inextricably with their assessment of the opportunities available to them," MacLeod argues (1987:5). Their estimate of their potential for mobility was based on what they experienced and observed through interactive learning situated within the peer group, family, work, and school, as well as what they learned

from the experiences of friends and family. The Brothers' trust that schooling would

4 For the Hallway Hangers, negative perceptions of their opportunities were linked to their experience in low-wage jobs and closed labor markets that were not meritocratic but based on personal connections. All had siblings who had done very poorly in school or had already been jailed. They believed "that the educational system cannot deliver on its promise of upward social mobility for those who perform well in school. Thus, in part, their leveled aspirations reflect their feeling that school is incapable of doing much for them." For the Hallway Hangers, "the resources and personal contacts [needed to] make promises seem real to children are simply not there" (Fernandez Kelly 1995:241). The Brothers' social environment was different. Either they were the oldest in their families, or they had older siblings who had achieved some success. MacLeod points out that they saw school "as a path yet untried or a path to achievement that can

lead to good work flowed from their having no prior work experiences or familial examples to the contrary. This trust was critical to maintaining their belief in the achievement ideology and their commitment to studying. Nevertheless, their goals were undermined by the school's lack of resources and its tracking system, both of which compromised the quality of the education they received. Although the Brothers subscribed to the achievement ideology, they were unable to secure the types of jobs that could get their families out of Clarendon Heights.

Neither of the outcomes documented in this study is positive... Unaware of the constraints (but subject to their effects) the Brothers are prone to blame themselves for their plight. The Hallway Hangers, in contrast, see through the ideology, perceive the constraints, and realize the futility of high aspirations. They salvage some self-esteem but in the process forfeit any chance for individual social advancement.

MacLeod concludes that by "obscuring the truth of conflictual relations and exploitation," the achievement ideology cloaks the biased practices of key institutions, such as labor markets and schools, that maintain inequality, thereby allowing capitalist societies to appear legitimate (1987:113). Despite their different choices, the combination of ideological and material forces in the workplace, school and among their family and friends left both groups of boys in strikingly similar positions.

In her ethnography, Made In America: Immigrant Students in Public Schools (1997), Laurie Olsen offers an explicit account of how practices surrounding racialized identities exert conflictual force in the lives of urban youth. For students at "Madison High," an ethnically diverse working- and lower-class school in Northern California, "making a place for oneself and finding one's race are central to student life" (Olsen 1997:120). Olsen explores the dilemmas surrounding language and race that quickly emerge for immigrant youth confronted with a structure of limited opportunity as well as

be followed." With less work experience than the Hallway Hangers, they could still believe in the "efficacy of schooling - the notion that academic performance is the crucial link to economic success - and the existence of equality of opportunity," the two assurances students need in order to make the decision to work hard in school.

a racial hierarchy. Immigrant teens at Madison face conflicts similar to those that challenged the Brothers and the Hallway Hangers at Clarendon Heights.

But their major dilemmas center on the ideology of "Americanization," the belief that the U.S. is an open society where one can learn English, take up what it means to be American, gain acceptance, and enjoy opportunity. Olsen found that although Madison High celebrates its diversity and "embraces the ideology and rhetoric of a 'common school' for 'all' [it sorts] children of lower classes, foreign cultures, and tongues, and darker skins into contained and marginalized programs with fewer resources and less access"(Olsen 1997:27).

Through her interviews, discussions, and direct observations, Olsen was able to identify specific practices and spatial arrangements that worked to "Americanize" immigrant youth into a racial hierarchy. She found that the process of racialized Americanization had three dimensions embedded in the school, peer groups, and broader society. These include "academic marginalization and separation" as a result of the school's curricular program; formal school and informal peer requirements "to become English-speaking (despite many odds) and to drop one's native language in order to participate in the academic and social life of the high schools;" and powerful social pressures to find and take one's place in the racial hierarchy of the United States"(1997:241).

"From the moment kindergartners enter school," Olsen argues, "the expectations of their teachers and the degree of effort and resources available to them make an enormous difference in their attachment to school and what

they learn." Immigrant children are forced to take up an American identity in a context of racial hierarchy. Many "face tremendous pressures not only related to the language they speak or the racial identity they adopt, but also in the relationship between those choices and academic success." At Madison High, Olsen observes, it's easier for Asian and white students to be placed into higher track classes than it is for Latino and black students, even when they are fully qualified.

Peer groups share hyper-awareness of and involvement in the racialized process of Americanization. American-ness is not dependent on holding or adhering to a norm, students say. Instead, it is a dynamic that is actively demonstrated, performed, and practiced - and it is closely monitored. Young people at Madison High serve as harsh and unyielding judges of others' performances.

The markers of national and racial identity are physical (skin color); consumption oriented (styles of clothing, musical preferences); and behavioral (modes of speech, religious affiliation, friendship groups and gathering places at school). Immigrant students noted the process. "A person is their clothes in America," some believe. Others express surprise at the variety of ethnic groups: "They dress different and stay apart. I do not know how to fit in, I do not know who to dress like"(1997:46). Sanctions against the crossing of social and highly racialized lines were enforced by a painful system of verbal disciplining, accusations of "wannabe" or "whitewashed." Although elements of choice are involved in the identities students perform, they are always aware of the racialized limits imposed on that performance. Despite claims by administrators and teachers that the school was "color-blind," Olsen found a "surprising clarity and agreement [among students] that to be American is to be English speaking, white skinned and Christian"(1997:55). "How could I be American?" one student asks. "I have dark skin"(1997:55).

So practices and spatial dynamics at Madison High impose a clear hierarchy of racialized identities (at least to the students who must fit themselves into the hierarchy). But Olsen argues that peer dynamics alone

do not explain the racial imperative and separation at the school. The process of identification and separation is not solely conducted by the students acting on each other. It reflects the politics and practice in the larger community and a specific though "unseen" racial sorting of the school program. The schooling process itself segregates, excludes, [and] discriminates. This is an overt manifestation of a racial project at the school. But it is heavily denied and hidden. The newcomer students only see the social process among peers and do not seem to recognize the big picture (1997: 120).

Most students criticize the unfairness of circumstances in their own lives, but aren't inclined to challenge the quintessentially "American" ideology of individualism that attributes achievement to individual ability. At Madison

High, tension between established residents and recent immigrants stems from the sense native-born students have that they face serious barriers to achievement and mobility. Native-born students see budget cuts, rising class size, and loss of counselors in the school district as "evidence that they do not really matter to the adults in the community" (Olsen 1997:79). Often they direct their resentment at recent immigrants for not yet perceiving obstacles, for still believing in the American Dream.

Both MacLeod and Olsen make the profound observation that ideological dynamics related to restricted opportunities are extremely important, though complex. Dominant ideologies about meritocracy and Americanization obscure the relations of privilege and inequality that act as barriers to opportunity, and then legitimate the failure of urban youth to overcome those barriers. These ideologies inform the practices that shape youth behavior by engendering conformity or resistance, or an unsure path of both. Signithia Fordham addresses this problem directly in *Blacked Out* (1996). Working in a high school in Washington, D.C., Fordham focuses on the processes through which African-American students negotiate with dominant ideologies about race - specifically about racial inferiority of blacks (an idea fed by some social science research) - to reclaim positive self image and to confront the dilemmas of restricted opportunity. Underachieving students may express verbal recognition of democratic ideals but register disbelief in the reality of those ideals for themselves. Others deny that obstacles to their achievement exist, even when faced by irrefutable evidence of those obstacles (Fordham 1996:330). Students also held different beliefs about what defined being black.' "What it means to be African American is widely debated, contested, and challenged," Fordham argues. "How people behave or interact is the measure most often used in determining whether the Black Self is celebrated or denigrated"(336).

"Resistance," she observes, takes "two primary forms; conformity and avoidance" (Fordham 1996:39). But that conclusion fails to take into account a collective process of agency and resistance that has been documented in many studies of schooling, including Olsen's. Local and national movements have been pivotal in the establishment of programs that address educational inequities and influence the direction of policy (e.g. Carnoy and Levin 1985).

Explicit, formal ideologies about meritocracy and individualism, and informal but pervasive ideologies around racial differences significantly affect the lives of low-income minority young people. Contradictions between claimed and perceived opportunity alienate them, and so prevent them from challenging, and, perhaps, overcoming, the very serious barriers they confront in their neighborhoods and schools. Those who believe in and try to conform with ideologies of achievement and individualism are also hindered by the reality of unequal resources and access. The

ethnographies of schooling we have reviewed thus far show how apparently paradoxical values, norms, and behaviors are produced through local practices and sites and embedded within national and global economic and ideological forces. Students cannot and do not adhere to mainstream definitions of values and norms when they are not materially and socially able to embody and enact the markers of the associated identity, and when they cannot expect to receive the benefits that accrue to mainstream group members. Through complex processes that disclose limited opportunity and move students to limit their expectations and their aspirations, urban schools fail to prepare young people to hold rewarding places in the job

5- Fordham also observed significant gender differences. African-American girls more frequently found it possible to develop a black identity that incorporated schooling.

structure. Their fortunes in the workplace are jeopardized before they enter it. Many have already begun to seek different routes to dignity.

Youth in Workplaces

In poor neighborhoods all over America's cities, against the buzz of an increasingly mean-spirited debate about poverty, violence, jobs, education, and child-rearing practices, a new generation of young people is preparing to make lives for themselves. What is it like for teenagers nowadays to start at the bottom in America? That question forms the foundation of Carol Stack's ethnographic and survey research with minorities who work in the low-wage food service industry in Oakland (1997). Do young African Americans and Latinos possess a work ethic strong enough to support a lifetime of employment? Or have joblessness, loss of positive role models, and a perverse value system that perpetuates ghetto-related behaviors eroded ambition so radically that young people are incapable of entering labor markets, even if they want to work? From workplaces deep inside minority communities, sites of striving and struggle, Stack's *Why Work?* project elicits a troubling story about the obstacles motivated youth confront in Oakland. Instead of a breakdown in work ethic, Stack finds that many young workers possess job-related skills and want to learn more. They have a strong work ethic, but have nowhere to go with it.

The competition for minimum wage jobs in fast food establishments was fierce both in Oakland and in a related study in Harlem.⁶ Hiring, staffing, and promotion

⁶ Over the course of three years, six graduate student members of the Why Work? research team worked from, three to six months at four fast-food restaurants in some of the poorest neighborhoods in Oakland. The project surveyed 200 workers in these restaurants; one-third were Asians, one-third Latino, one-third African-American. The project also elicited extensive life histories from the young people, and from them selected 10 workers between the ages of 16 and 21 to participate in an in-depth, yearlong ethnographic study. Researchers worked with these young people at the counter and the drive-through window, hung out with them and their friends, and spent time with their families. This approach enabled the project to move back and forth between different levels of analysis, in particular between the survey findings and ethnographic data.

The Harlem study is a research project by Katharine Newman on low-wage work in the fast-food industry in Harlem (Newman and Lennon 1995). The Oakland team studied a case in which a new restaurant

practices suggest that the job gap problem not only reflected a shortage of jobs; it also revealed racial, ethnic, and age-based differences in employment practices.' Shifts, workstations, and job assignments were formed in accordance with language groupings; that policy, we speculate, may constitute a barrier to employment for African-American workers, as well as an obstacle to promotion for those who are hired. Daytime and weekday shifts were usually given to Latinos and Asians. African Americans mostly worked evenings and weekends while they were in school. With few exceptions, they were effectively excluded from daytime and weekday work even after they had graduated, and with few exceptions, they were effectively excluded from the management track. Managers hire workers. Most managers are Latino and Asian, sometimes with very limited English proficiency. They tend to hire their own. In Harlem, as in Oakland, employers seem to give preference to older workers and workers who are not black for these minimum-wage jobs.'

The Why Work? project discovered that steady and experienced young employees of fast-food restaurants searched continually for better work. Over the course of two years, few landed jobs that paid above minimum wage, or that could be characterized as the next level in the labor market (indeed, very few researchers, including those who

study the low-wage labor market, have a vision of what constitutes the next tier of jobs.). It is plain that the young people whom we met in this study find it difficult to make their way from regular fast-food employment into the core economy. It is disturbing that

opened and hired a workforce of 46 from 209 applicants, The ratio of applicants to hires was 4.5 to 1. Although 51 percent of applicants were African American, only 26 percent of those hired were African American. Although 43 percent of job seekers were between 16 and 18 years old, 66 percent of those hired were over 18.

In the work-site surveys in Oakland, there were greater numbers of Asian and Latino, and fewer African American workers than in the surrounding community. The percentage of foreign-born workers was more than three times higher than the percentage of foreign-born workers in the city. In Oakland, 16.5 percent of the workers studied were U.S. born; the comparative figure for Harlem is 58 percent. This was evident in hiring and worker surveys in which African Americans reported having been rejected at a much higher rate than Asians and Latinos. The difference holds true even in store locations where African Americans make up 50 to 98 percent of residents in the surrounding census tract.

racialized identities seem to make it hard for African-American youth to find jobs even within low-wage labor markets.

In studying the dynamics that racialize labor markets and place African Americans in lower-paid and unstable positions, Kelley (1994) found that "location" "the social spaces of work and community, as well as black workers' position vis-a-vis existing racial and class hierarchies" - plays a pivotal role. His historical research in the South suggests that "labor processes, work spaces, interclass power relations, communities and neighborhoods - indeed class struggle itself - are all racialized" (Kelley 1994:26). To recover esteem for whites in low-wage employment sectors in the South, Kelley argues, white labor consciousness was racialized so that whites' work was better because it was not black work, a process that turned "dirty, physically difficult and potentially dangerous work into humiliating work" (Kelley 1994:31). Challenging reductionist views of black culture as centered on economic survival, Kelley contends that for the black working class, whose members daily faced the indignities of racism and low-wage jobs, "actions, thoughts, and conversations, and reflections were not always or even primarily concerned with work" but more frequently focused on issues of dignity (Kelley 1994:34).

The same dynamic may operate among young African-American employees of fast-food restaurants in Oakland. Work is meaningful for them, but not the only source of meaning. A dozen young people emerged as diarists in the *Why Work?* study, recording the days of their lives in tales of sex and love, work and play, hard times, high hopes, and self-respect. Carol Stack is currently completing a book with Ellen Stein, *Coming of Age in Oakland*, about the experiences of inner-city African-American and immigrant youth and their relatives who are working in fast-food jobs. The book will introduce needed voices to the debate over minimum-wage jobs and a non-working underclass.

Community Activism, Social Capital, and Social Change

Some voices in the dialogue about community building suggest that poverty and crime in urban neighborhoods result, at least in part, from their lack of social capital - norms, trust, and cooperative networks -- that keeps other communities vibrant. Social capital, Putnam believes, is a "precondition of economic development" (Putnam 1993):37).

Stack's research of the last few decades with community activism in the rural South tracks the ways in which poor people gather their resources to build social capital.

In a little-studied but very important shift of direction, black Americans, since about 1975, have been leaving an urban economy that failed them and returning south. The story of their return migration is one of hardship. But it is also a story of determination, of people who came home intent on applying hard lessons learned up north to build new lives in old places.

Take, for example, a group of African-American women who returned to Chestnut County, North Carolina, and established a mutual-aid organization, Holding Hands. When one of the founders began to investigate ways to strengthen their community, she found that no federal dollars for social services such as day care or Head Start came into Chestnut County, which was clearly an eligible high-poverty area. Apparently, local officials preferred not to provide services to the poor, although they could do so without spending a penny of local money.

They said that they turned back these funds year after year. One lady told me she didn't believe in government subsidies at all, even though her office manages AFDC and Food Stamps. In another office the director said it was a point of pride for him that in his county they served very few of the eligible families, much fewer than a lot of places, and he said that poor people have more dignity and self-regard for it (Stack 1996:144).

Though unemployment was high in Chestnut County, and almost 40 percent of the population lived below the poverty line, more people were working than not. Most of the jobs in Chestnut and surrounding counties paid minimum

wage and offered nothing or next to nothing in the way of employee benefits. To the organizers of Holding Hands, this meant that demand for day-care services must be high. So they formed an organization, Mothers and Children Inc. (MAC), to coordinate an effort to bring Title XX day-care funds to the county. Persistence, creativity, and the skills they had learned in their jobs up north eventually paid off, despite repeated efforts by local administrators to turn back Title XX funds.

Holding Hands was incorporated in 1981. MAC was established in 1983. And by 1986, MAC was operating three day-care centers in Chestnut County, one in Powell County, and two in nearby Harden County. Rose Towers, Sunshine Center, Toddlers Club House, Lady Bug, Children's Wonderland, Rainbow Early Learning, and Teddy Bear Town were all safe and sanitary child-care facilities, with trained staffs, developmentally oriented curricula, parent participation on the boards, and sliding fee schedules. More than three hundred children were enrolled. Fifty new full-time jobs and a couple of dozen part-time jobs were created directly to staff the centers, and the availability of the centers enabled many parents to hold jobs for the first time, bringing thousands of additional dollars into the community (Stack 1996:152).

Though as efforts in grass-roots mobilization and self-help, these cannot fail to impress, some people (who may never have been much concerned about the plight of low-income minorities) tell us that what the poor need is not government handouts but the sort of social capital that can only arise from individual and community efforts to achieve self-reliance. Ethnographies of social capital formation lay bare a dismal reality: Bureaucrats and politicians who loudly proclaim the urgency and legitimacy of personal responsibility and collective agency, when faced with actual self-help organizations in their home communities, work to thwart them. In the Southeast, in New York City, in Iowa, the same dynamic repeats itself. 10 Energetic, imaginative, and determined efforts

10 Ida Susser and Douglas Foley provide examples of research in different communities that faced similar obstacles to community building. in *Norman Street* (1982), Ida Susser offers a community study of a pivotal period of economic transformation in New York City during the 1970s. She focused on the way a community responded to the loss of manufacturing jobs during a time when social services were also facing deep cuts. Though the case is from the 1970s, it is telling; the problems that confronted the community are now national trends. While community residents mobilized around their needs, she found that they "did not have the political power of a work force necessary to the city's economy" (Susser 1982:207). The loss of jobs meant they lacked the economic relevance to gain political power that could make their mobilizing efforts work. Further, racism, stoked by politicians and present within community, divided groups within the larger effort. Douglas Foley in *The Heartland Chronicles* (1995) uncovered

by low-income communities to consolidate economic, social, and political power often, if not always, meet resistance.

People outside poor neighborhoods seem to say, "be doing for yourselves," as if no one had thought of, or was, in fact, already doing. By throwing up barricades against efforts at empowerment, they can pretend, if those efforts fail, that they never existed in the first place. They can blame the poor for not doing what they are doing. They can legitimate the forces that engender failure. They can give the cultural theory of poverty a new face.

extensive evidence of racial conflict between the Mesquaki Indians, and the local white community and representatives of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The local government and white community repeatedly hindered efforts by the Mesquaki to revitalize their tribe.

[REMAINING SECTION STILL VERY ROUGH AND INCOMPLETE]

Part III. Implications of 'Race as Practice' in Theories of Social Transformation

Having re-imagined the spaces in which poor people enact the practice and struggle of race, followed different pathways from the margins of low-income communities into their many sites, we can now make a more credible claim to have explored the landscapes of urban and rural poverty. Ethnography has served as the engine of our exploration, helped us visualize places in those landscapes. As ethnographers, we frequently stand a little closer to people and events over time, see individuals, family members, and neighborhoods continuously, in connection. In long-term research we even see lives unfold: An event - birth, death, illness, debt - can create a chain reaction dramatizing both the poverty and plenty of resources across communities, counties, generations, and families.

Through these lenses, we see that human agency is embedded in meaning-laden practices that play out in specific spaces and institutions, where one's experience may differ significantly according to their place in material and social networks. This suggests that there is a need to study the meso-level of analysis, the practices within formal and informal networks and institutions. These practices mediate larger forces - in effect they are the 'brick and mortar' that form social monoliths such as structural racism. When we reveal the brick, we see more clearly the work that goes into making barriers seem as solid as stone, and can more clearly visualize the struggle that is required to tear them down.

We will briefly articulate six domains in which we envision some of the on-the-ground implications of "race as practice" theory, and in turn, some implications for the everyday work of CCIs.

For Researchers and Policy-Makers

1. A static and deterministic view of race and poverty that obscures the activities and actions that create inequalities within institutions and communities (whether intentional or not) is profoundly disempowering. Likewise, theories that privilege the role of pathology (social breakdown/ghetto culture) and ignore efforts at agency leave little room for the likelihood of collective action through CCIs. The approach we articulate can identify sources of racism and poverty in the practices of local institutions that community groups can then manageably organize to change.

2. "Problems" can look very different from various lines of vision. Qualitative research and "triangulation" provide novel ways of asking "what are social problems?" and integrating various approaches to understand multi-dimensional wholes. Aspen is attempting to incorporate different approaches through its effort to bring practitioners and academics together. We call this "triangulation." For complex social problems, many perspectives are needed to build an understanding of what is happening.

3. Critical policy studies have the power to have the power to transform rationalist policy paradigms. If our goal is to support change by creating social policies and community actions grounded in the sensibilities of cultures, ethnicities, class, race, and gender, we must build a network of researchers engaged in critical policy studies through ethnography. Critical policy studies are part of an effort to move policy-makers from seeing people as part of the problem (or as deeply ignorant) to seeing them as necessary and informed participants in the policy-making process. Such research may re-orient policy-makers who believe that professionals and their view of rational actors can provide a sufficient analysis. The notion that community members might actively and wisely participate in the identification of problems, in policy development, and in program evaluation, is not new. However, the notions are not yet in the primers, or even in the case studies, of most apprentice policy-makers.

For CCIs

4. Qualitative research and critical policy studies may be most powerful when they are undertaken with or by community members and CCIs. When communities identify social ills, their causes, the obstacles to change, and their own strengths and resources, they empower themselves to overcome those obstacles and develop an agenda that best serves their interests. Their research brings together key actors, including members of the community, local, regional and national institutions, politicians, agencies, and funding bodies; it becomes a practice and a process of change.

5. The language of race that dominates policy debates has become simplistic in a way that renders most practices of racism fuzzy quandaries that defy intervention unless we can prove intention to discriminate. Courts, policy-makers and the public no longer seem to accept unequal outcomes as sufficient evidence of injustice or discrimination, and increasingly oppose policies that seek to equalize opportunities for minorities and the poor. For example, in the area of educational inequality, courts deciding on school finance and desegregation have begun to shift towards a standard that involves a notion of intent to discriminate, as opposed to a standard that shows unequal patterns of educational opportunity.

Overall, these trends place greater pressure on poor minority communities to identify how specific practices and norms within specific institutions create unequal outcomes on the basis of "race". Qualitative research may be essential to this endeavor. Being able to identify how practices and identities are racialized and how they mediate larger forces can empower CCIs considerably. By breaking down the notion of "structural racism", by revealing how a bias against certain groups is created by decisions and activities within institutions (whether intentional or not), CCIs may improve their ability to make a case to courts, policy-makers, and the public. Structural racism, per se, is not easily translated into the language of policy-making. But specific practices in the areas of child custody, schools, workplaces, and social service agencies, such as those discussed below and in the ethnographies, are clearly in the realm of policy decisions.

6. Prevailing social ideologies about meritocracy, Americanization, and racial differences, that underestimate the obstacles to mobility and implicitly blame minority communities for their poverty do not just affect public opinion and policy decisions. They can also act as powerful forces in the lives of those communities. Common beliefs about opportunity, inequality, and racial difference can hinder constructive agency at the individual and collective levels. As the ethnographies by MacLeod, Olsen, and Fordham revealed, while poor and minority youth may feel that they do not

have a fair opportunity to achieve in school, the pervasiveness of beliefs about meritocracy and racial differences lead them to blame themselves when they fail, or to preempt failure by never trying to achieve.

On a collective level, to act together to improve their communities, residents must not only believe that circumstances in their neighborhoods are unacceptable or unjust, but also that they can be changed. To the degree that pervasive social ideologies can undermine confidence in either, they present a problem for the work of CCIs. Thus, we believe it is important for CCIs to acknowledge the ideological barriers to individual empowerment and collective change. CCIs can facilitate this process by creating situations where people can critically reflect on the causes of the problems in their communities. Identifying the practices and decisions within institutions that create unequal outcomes can help overcome ideological barriers to social action. It is more likely that communities will take action if local problems are attributed to specific practices and institutional decisions, as opposed to widespread deviant behavior or a static and structural racism. By challenging problematic beliefs about meritocracy and racial difference through specific examples, as we will suggest below, CCIs can remove the negative influence some social ideologies have over individual lives, and become more empowered to end the practices that create structural inequality.

7. The ethnographies of family, school, work and community building we reviewed illustrate how research into the ways that "race" influences practices within institutions, networks, and neighborhoods, can help to identify objectives for the work of CCIs.

We are working on specific suggestions for CCIs and hope to benefit from discussions at the conference to frame our thoughts.

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