CHAPTER I

From Institutional to Jobless Ghettos

An elderly woman who has lived in one inner-city neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago for more than forty years reflected:

I’ve been here since March 21, 1953. When I moved in, the neighborhood was intact. It was intact with homes, beautiful homes, mini mansions, with stores, laundromats, with cleaners, with Chinese [cleaners]. We had drugstores. We had hotels. We had doctors over on Thirty-ninth Street. We had doctors’ offices in the neighborhood. We had the middle class and upper middle class. It has gone from affluent to where it is today. And I would like to see it come back, that we can have some of things we had. Since I came in young, and I’m a senior citizen now, I would like to see some of the things come back so I can enjoy them like we did when we first came in.

An employed 35-year-old married woman from a South Side neighborhood shared some of her philosophy.

I feel that . . . that everyone who wants to work and wants to have a job should be able to walk out and get it and not take six months to do it . . . . I think, society should make a greater effort in caring for the sick, the seniors, and the peoples that’s just down and out on their luck and just don’t have, for whatever means. Another thing, one of my main top concerns, I feel that it’s just [slow and coldly outraged], it’s awful the way, throughout the city, on your South
and West Side, you see all these vacant lots, all these abandoned buildings, and peoples are living in the streets. Or living four and five and ten peoples in an apartment that was allocated for one or two peoples—you find eight or ten peoples because they have no place to go and no housing available. And throughout the city, you have those abandoned buildings, and vacant buildings, and just, just areas, blocks and blocks of vacant lots, where they could be building affordable, moderate-income houses.

A young truck driver expressed his view regarding the need for improvement in his neighborhood. "It'd be nice to see police walking around here once in a while. We need role models for the kids." A senior typist added: "Need funding to get businesses in the area. A big grocery store would generate more jobs and enable people to shop more safely and without fear."

A 91-year-old woman spoke of safety concerns: "It's not safe anymore because the streets aren't. When all the black businesses and shows closed down, the economy went to the dogs. The stores, the businesses, the shows, everywhere was lighted, the stores and businesses have disappeared."

The negative social forces triggered a decision by a concerned mother to send her son away. I have a 13-year-old. I sent him away when he was nine because the gangs was at him so tough, because he wouldn't join—he's a basketball player. That's all he ever cared about. They took his gym shoes off his feet. They took his clothes. Made him walk home from school. Jumped on him every day. Took his jacket off his back in subzero weather. You know, and we only live two blocks from the school... A boy pulled a gun to his head and told him, "If you don't join, next week you won't be here." I had to send him out of town. His father stayed out of town. He came here last week for a week. He said, "Mom, I want to come home so bad," I said no!

The social deterioration of ghetto neighborhoods is the central concern expressed in the testimony of these residents. As a representative from the media put it, the ghetto has gone "from bad to worse." Few observers of the urban scene in the late 1960s anticipated the extensive breakdown of social institutions and the sharp rise in rates of social dislocation that have since swept the ghettos and spread to other neighborhoods that were once stable. For example, in the neighborhood of Woodlawn, located on the South Side of Chicago, there were over eight hundred commercial and industrial establishments in 1950. Today, it is estimated that only about a hundred are left, many of them represented by "tiny catering places, barber shops, and thrift stores with no more than one or two employees." As Loïc Wacquant, a member of the Urban Poverty and Family Life Study research team, put it:

The once-lively streets—residents remember a time, not so long ago, when crowds were so dense at rush hour that one had to elbow one's way to the train station—now have the appearance of an empty, bombed-out war zone. The commercial strip has been reduced to a long tunnel of charred stores, vacant lots littered with broken glass and garbage, and dilapidated buildings left to rot in the shadow of the elevated train line. At the corner of Sixty-third Street and Cottage Grove Avenue, the handful of remaining establishments that struggle to survive are huddled behind wrought-iron bars... The only enterprises that seem to be thriving are liquor stores and currency exchanges, these "banks of the poor" where one can cash checks, pay bills and buy money orders for a fee.

A resident of Woodlawn who had left the neighborhood as a child described how she felt upon her return about the changes that had occurred: "I was just really appalled. When I walked down Sixty-third Street when I was younger, everything that you wanted was there. But now, coming back as an adult with my child, those resources are just gone, completely... And... housing, everybody has moved, there are vacant lots everywhere." Another resident describes a similar experience when he returned to the neighborhood after living elsewhere for several years. "[There were all kinds] of stores up and down Sixty-third Street, and it was, you know, just a fun place. Then when I came back in the seventies, it was like... barren. It was totally different from what I remembered."

In 1950, almost two-thirds of Woodlawn's population was white; by 1960 the white population had declined to just 10 percent. Despite
the sudden white exodus, the number of residents in the neighborhood increased slightly during this period. After 1966, however, a sizable exodus of black residents followed, including a significant number of working- and middle-class families. The population of the neighborhood declined from over 80,000 in 1960 to 53,814 in 1970; it further slipped to 36,323 in 1980 and finally to 24,473 in 1990. The loss of residents was accompanied by a substantial reduction in the economic, social, and political resources that make a community vibrant. Woodlawn is only one of a growing number of poor black neighborhoods in Chicago plagued by depopulation and social and economic deterioration.

When the black respondents in our large UPFLS survey were asked to rate their neighborhood as a place to live, only a third said that their area was a good or very good place to live and only 18 percent of those in the ghetto poverty census tracts felt that their neighborhood was a desirable place to live. (The Bureau of the Census defines a census tract as "a relatively homogeneous area with respect to population characteristics, economic status, and living conditions with an average population of 4,000." Poverty tracts are those in which at least 20 percent of the residents are poor, and "ghetto poverty tracts are those in which at least 40 percent are poor.)

A 31-year-old employed laborer and janitor from a Near West Side public housing project described his neighborhood in these emphatic terms:

See, this is a violent neighborhood. You always hear somebody gettin' shot, just about every day or something like every night. Because you know, like I said, I see people are crowded up together, especially in the high rises. I would say it drags you down, because, you know, when people get crazy and everything, it'll drag you down. They gonna robbin' you, you know, tryin' to beat you. They don't wanna work, you know, they'd rather for you to work and then wait for you, you know, to get your paycheck so they can rob you or something.

A 39-year-old divorced schoolteacher and mother of four talked about a boy who recently had been shot in her South Side neighborhood:

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I think he was just gettin', buyin' somethin' or whatever—at the restaurant or somethin' and some kid walked up to him on the street and shot him five times. I—I don't know was it gang related or if kids—you know, just a matter of bein' in the wrong place at the wrong time, you know. Those are the kinds of things that you have to be careful about when you live in an environment like this.

Concern about violent crime was also expressed by a married mother of four children who works as a factory packer. She pointed out that the criminal elements in her South Side neighborhood often knock old ladies down and take their pension checks. Like on the El [elevated train] station there. Especially when they get their Social Security checks, they be out there, waiting for them, grab their purses and everything. Lot of that happening around here. They borrow and they pawn, breaking in and all. They broke in on me when I first moved in here so I put bars in. They got my stereo. But I haven't any trouble since I put my bars up.

Violence was also a cause for worry for a 32-year-old unemployed and unmarried black father of one child from a ghetto poverty census tract on the Near West Side:

No, I don't like this neighborhood. A lot of friends, they got killed and whatnot, you know, I saw a lot of killing in this neighborhood. It's messed up. My mother is going on sixty-six, she ain't got a chance of a young man running up on her and saying: "Hey, give me your money." She ain't got a chance. The dudes, they do a lot of ripping off around here, they do a lot of stealing, put it that way. They rip off people. Then they got the drug traffic running through in these buildings. It's all messed up, man.

Many of the respondents described the negative effects of their neighborhood on their own personal outlook. An unmarried, employed clerical worker from a ghetto poverty census tract on the West Side stated:
There is a more positive outlook if you come from an upwardly mobile neighborhood than you would here. In this type of neighborhood, all you hear is negative [things] and that can kind of bring you down when you’re trying to make it. So your neighborhood definitely has something to do with it.

This view was shared by a 17-year-old college student and part-time worker from an impoverished West Side neighborhood.

I'd say about 40 percent in my neighborhood ... I'd say 40 percent are alcoholics . . . And . . . only 5 percent of the alcoholics have homes. Then you got the other 35 percent who are in the street . . . They probably live somewhere, but they in street, on the corner every day, same old thing, because they don’t have no chance in life. They live based on today. [They say,] “Oh, we gonna get high today.” “Oh, whoopee!” “What you gonna do tomorrow, man?” “I don’t know, man, I don’t know.” You can ask any of ‘em: “What you gonna do tomorrow?” “I don’t know, man. I know when [it gets] here.” And I can really understand, you know, being in that state. If you around totally negative people, people who are not doing anything, that’s the way you gonna be regardless.

The state of the inner-city public schools was another major concern expressed by our respondents. The complaints ranged from overcrowded conditions to unqualified and uncaring teachers. Sharply voicing her views on these subjects, a 25-year-old married mother of two children from a South Side census tract that just recently became poor stated: “My daughter ain’t going to school here, she was going to a nursery school where I paid and of course they took the time and spent it with her, ’cause they was getting the money. But the public schools, no! They are overcrowded and the teachers don’t care.”

A 29-year-old South Side welfare mother of four children pointed out that in her “neighborhood [the kids] can’t learn much if they don’t have the proper equipment, the proper books and things, because they know that this school, they don’t have proper books that the children need to study from. That’s what holds them back a lot.”

However, a 35-year-old married black mother of two children who works as a management aide for the city of Chicago, focused mainly on student behavior.

The junior high schools [are] too infested with overcrowdedness, gang activities, high pregnancy rates. I feel they’re so infested with this type of situations, that, uh, it’s just a deterrail to childrens to want to seek higher education.

Finally, a 40-year-old welfare mother of four children who lives in a ghetto poverty tract on the West Side described how the conditions in her neighborhood could be improved:

Even this neighborhood, if they would fix it up, and keep it up, keep the drugs out, it would be much better. Take the drugs out. Give, uh, let the peoples have more jobs, you know, working. They’re sitting out on the corner, they’re doin’ nothin’. So I think if a person was workin’ ... I don’t think there, maybe it would be as bad as, you know, stickin’ up people and killin’ people. ’Cause I think they kill, stick up people ’cause they don’t have, so they figure they can go take it from someone else.

The respondents were also asked whether their neighborhoods had changed as a place to live over the years. Seventy-one percent of the African-American respondents felt that their neighborhoods had either stayed the same or had gotten worse.

An unemployed black man from a West Side housing project felt that the only thing that had changed in his neighborhood was that it was “going down instead of going back up.” He further stated, “It ain’t like it used to be. They laid off a lot of people. There used to be a time when you got a broken window, you call up housing and they send someone over to fix it, but it ain’t like that no more.”

Respondents frequently made statements about the increase in drug trafficking and drug consumption when discussing how their neighborhood had changed. “Well, OK, I realize there was drugs when I was growing up but they weren’t as open as they are now,” stated a divorced telephone dispatcher and mother of five children from a neighborhood that recently changed from a nonpoverty to a poverty area. “It’s nothing to see a 10-year-old kid strung out or a 10-
year-old kid selling drugs. I mean, when they were doing it back then they were sneaking around doing it. It's like an open thing now."

The 17-year-old black college student from the West Side that I quoted above describes how drugs created a problem for his neighborhood:

"When I first moved over here this neighborhood was quite OK. After six o'clock you wouldn't see anybody on the street in this neighborhood, you know, even if it was summertime. People might be in the park, but if you walk down the street you may see somebody sitting on their porch, and they wasn't no lot of loud noise, and—and didn't many cars pass by. But, when drugs start flowing in, people start having drugs fights and you couldn't sleep because here were cars coming up and down the street all night long. And, you know, that's bad 'cause that makes your community look bad.

Finally, a 41-year-old nurse's aide, married but separated from her husband, and the mother of two, described how the situation in her neighborhood, a ghetto poverty tract on the West Side, has changed for the children:

"Before, you know, the young peoples they had this Youth Corps and all this you know, but they done cut out this all. They don't have anything for the young peoples now. All they do when they get out of school in summertime is rap up and down the street, and get into trouble 'cause they don't have anything to do. And I felt like the Youth Corps, when I was in school, I was in Youth Corps and it really helped out a lot. It taught me a lot, taught me—I learned to hold on a job when I am working it 'cause they train you. But now they don't have anything for the young kids, really you know.

The black respondents' negative feelings about their neighborhood are also reflected in their stated preference to live elsewhere. When asked if they would prefer to live in their neighborhood, another neighborhood in Chicago, in the suburbs, or somewhere else, only 35 percent of the respondents from the poverty census tracts overall stated that they would prefer to live in their own neighbor-

hood; as few as 23 percent of the respondents in the ghetto poverty tracts indicated a preference for their own neighborhood.

Describing why she chose to live in a neighborhood that she dislikes, a 27-year-old West Side welfare mother of three stated that "it's the only place I could afford to live at the time when I moved in." She further remarked: "At the time when I moved I had two children and I've been here eleven years. No, I don't like it. At the present time I can't afford to move out."

This sentiment was echoed by a 24-year-old welfare mother of four children from the same neighborhood: "The reason I moved over here is because of the rent: it's very low, and I don't have to worry about gas bills and light bills. No, I just don't like it living over here, it's too many people, living around, living on top of each other. It's much too overcrowded."

Finally, a welfare mother of three children who also lives in this neighborhood stated: "Taxis don't want to come over here to get you and bring you back either. You know, friends from other places don't want really to come here. And you yourself, you wouldn't want to invite intelligent people here: there's markings and there's writing on the wall, nasty—whatever."

The feelings of many of the respondents in our study were summed up by a 33-year-old married mother of three from a very poor West Side neighborhood:

"If you live in an area in your neighborhood where you have people that don't work, don't have no means of support, you know, don't have no jobs, who're gonna break into your house to steal what you have, to sell to get them some money, then you can't live in a neighborhood and try to concentrate on tryin' to get ahead, then you get to work and you have to worry if somebody's breakin' into your house or not. So, you know, it's best to try to move in a decent area, to live in a community with people that works."

In 1959, less than one-third of the poverty population in the United States lived in metropolitan central cities. By 1991, the central cities included close to half of the nation's poor. Many of the most rapid increases in concentrated poverty have occurred in African-American neighborhoods. For example, in the ten community areas that represent
the historic core of Chicago's Black Belt (see Figure 1.1), eight had rates of poverty in 1990 that exceeded 45 percent, including three with rates higher than 50 percent and three that surpassed 60 percent. Twenty-five years earlier, in 1970, only two of these neighborhoods had poverty rates above 40 percent.

In recent years, social scientists have paid particular attention to the increases in urban neighborhood poverty. "Defining an urban neighborhood for analytical purposes is no easy task." The community areas of Chicago referred to in Figure 1.1 include a number of adjacent census tracts. The seventy-seven community areas within the city of Chicago represent statistical units derived by urban sociologists at the University of Chicago for the 1930 census in their effort to analyze varying conditions within the city. These delineations were originally drawn up on the basis of settlement and history of the area, local identification and trade patterns, local institutions, and natural and artificial barriers. There have been major shifts in population and land use since then. But these units remain useful in tracing changes over time, and they continue to capture much of the contemporary reality of Chicago neighborhoods.

Other cities, however, do not have such convenient classifications of neighborhoods, which means that comparison across cities cannot be drawn using community areas. The measurable unit considered most appropriate to represent urban neighborhoods is the census tract. In attempts to examine this problem of ghetto poverty across the nation empirically, social scientists have tended to define ghetto neighborhoods as those located in the ghetto poverty census tracts. As indicated earlier, ghetto poverty census tracts are those in which at least 40 percent of the residents are poor. For example, Paul Jargowsky and Mary Jo Bane state: "Visits to various cities confirmed that the 40 percent criterion came very close to identifying areas that looked like ghettos in terms of their housing conditions. Moreover, the areas selected by the 40 percent criterion corresponded closely with the neighborhoods that city officials and local Census Bureau officials considered ghettos.” The ghetto poor in Jargowsky and Bane's study are therefore designated as those among the poor who live in these ghetto poverty areas. Three-quarters of all the ghetto poor in metropolitan areas reside in one hundred of the nation's largest central cities; however, it is important to remember that the ghetto areas in these central cities also include a good many families and individuals who are not poor.

**Figure 1.1**

**Community Areas in Chicago’s Black Belt**

1. West Garfield Park
2. East Garfield Park
3. North Lawndale
4. Near West Side
5. Near South Side
6. Douglas
7. Oakland
8. Grand Boulevard
9. Washington Park
10. Englewood
In the nation's one hundred largest central cities, nearly one in seven census tracts is at least 40 percent poor. The number of such tracts has more than doubled since 1970. Indeed, it is alarming that 579 tracts fell to ghetto poverty level in these cities between 1970 and 1980, and 614 additional tracts joined these ranks in the following decade.

Paul Jargowsky's research reveals that a vast majority of people (almost seven out of eight) living in metropolitan-area ghettos in 1990 were minority group members. The number of African-Americans in these ghettos grew by more than one-third from 1980 to 1990, reaching nearly 6 million. Most of this growth involved poor people. The proportion of metropolitan blacks who live in ghetto areas climbed from more than a third (37 percent) to almost half (45 percent). Indeed, the metropolitan black poor are becoming increasingly isolated. The poverty rate among metropolitan blacks who reside in ghettos increased while the rate among those who live in nonghettos decreased.

The increase in the number of ghetto blacks is related to the geographical spread of the ghetto. Jargowsky and Bane found that in the cities they studied (Philadelphia, Cleveland, Milwaukee, and Memphis) areas that had become ghettos by 1980 had been mixed-income tracts in 1970—but tracts have that were contiguous to areas identified as ghettos. The exodus of the nonpoor from mixed-income areas was a major factor in the spread of ghettos in these cities in the 1970s. Since 1980, ghetto census tracts have increased in a substantial majority of the metropolitan areas in the country, including those with fewer people living in them. Nine new ghetto census tracts were added in Philadelphia, even though it experienced one of the largest declines in the proportion of people living in ghetto tracts. In a number of other cities, including Baltimore, Boston, and Washington, D.C., a smaller percentage of poor blacks live in a larger number of ghetto census tracts. Chicago had a 61.5 percent increase in the number of ghetto census tracts from 1980 to 1990, even though the number of poor residing in those areas increased only slightly.

Jargowsky reflects on the significance of the substantial spread of ghetto areas:

The geographic size of a city's ghetto has a large effect on the perception of the magnitude of the problem associated with ghetto poverty. How big an area of the city do you consider off limits? How far out of your way will you drive not to go through a dangerous area? Indeed, the lower density exacerbated the problem. More abandoned buildings mean more places for crack dens and criminal enterprises. Police trying to protect a given number of citizens have to be stretched over a wider number of square miles, making it less likely that criminals will be caught. Lower density also makes it harder for a sense of community to develop, or for people to feel that they can find safety in numbers. From the point of view of local political officials, the increase in the size of the ghetto is a disaster. Many of those leaving the ghetto settle in non-ghetto areas outside the political jurisdiction of the central city. Thus, geographic size of the ghetto is expanding, cutting a wider swath through the hearts of our metropolitan areas.

In sum, the 1970s and 1980s witnessed a sharp growth in the number of census tracts classified as ghetto poverty areas, an increased concentration of the poor in these areas, and sharply divergent patterns of poverty concentration between racial minorities and whites. One of the legacies of historic racial and class subjugation in America is a unique and growing concentration of minority residents in the most impoverished areas of the nation's metropolises.

Some have argued that this concentration of poverty is not new but mirrors conditions prevalent in the 1930s. According to Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, during the Depression poverty was just as concentrated in the ghettos of the 1930s as in those of the 1970s. The black communities of the 1930s and those of the 1970s shared a common experience: a high degree of racial segregation from the larger society. Massey and Denton argue that "concentrated poverty is created by a pernicious interaction between a group's overall rate of poverty and its degree of segregation in society. When a highly segregated group experiences a high or rising rate of poverty, geographically concentrated poverty is the inevitable result." However, convincing the logic of that argument, it does not explain the following: In the ten neighborhoods that make up Chicago's Black Belt, the poverty rate increased almost 20 percent between 1970 and 1990 (from 31.5 to 50.4 percent) despite the fact that the overall black
poverty rate for the city of Chicago increased only 7.5 percent during this same period (from 25.1 to 32.6 percent).

Concentrated poverty may be the inevitable result when a highly segregated group experiences an increase in its overall rate of poverty. But segregation does not explain why the concentration of poverty in certain neighborhoods of this segregated group should increase to nearly three times the group's overall rate of poverty increase. There is no doubt that the disproportionate concentration of poverty among African-Americans is one of the legacies of historic racial segregation. It is also true that segregation often compounds black vulnerability in the face of other changes in the society, including, as we shall soon see, economic changes. Nonetheless, to focus mainly on segregation to account for the growth of concentrated poverty is to overlook some of the dynamic aspects of the social and demographic changes occurring in cities like Chicago. Given the existence of segregation, we must consider the way in which other changes in society have interacted with segregation to produce the dramatic social transformation of inner-city neighborhoods, especially since 1970.

For example, the communities that make up the Black Belt in Chicago have been overwhelmingly black for the last four decades, yet they lost almost half their residents between 1970 and 1990. This rapid depopulation has had profound consequences for the social and economic deterioration of segregated Black Belt neighborhoods, including increases in concentrated poverty and joblessness. If comparisons are made strictly between the Depression years of the 1930s and the 1980s, rates of ghetto poverty and joblessness in these neighborhoods will indeed be similar. But such a comparison obscures significant changes that have occurred in these neighborhoods across the fifty-year span between those two points.

In *The Truly Disadvantaged*, I focused mainly on changes in ghetto neighborhoods that began around 1970. Many of the gains made in inner-city neighborhoods following the Depression were wiped out after 1970. To maintain that concentrated black poverty in the 1970s or in the 1980s is equivalent in severity and pervasiveness to that which occurred during the Depression does not explain its dramatic rise since 1970; nor does it address a far more fundamental problem that is at the heart of the extraordinary increases in and spread of concentrated poverty—namely, the rapid growth of joblessness, which accelerated through these two decades. The problems reported by the residents of poor Chicago neighborhoods are not a consequence of poverty alone. Something far more devastating has happened that can only be attributed to the emergence of concentrated and persistent joblessness and its crippling effects on neighborhoods, families, and individuals. The city of Chicago epitomizes these changes.

Since the early twentieth century, Chicago has been a laboratory for the scientific investigation of the social, economic, and historical forces that create and perpetuate economically depressed and isolated urban communities. The most distinctive phase of this research, referred to as the Chicago School of urban sociology, was completed before 1950 and was conducted by social scientists at the University of Chicago. Immediately following World War I, the Chicago School produced several classic studies, many of which were conducted under the guidance of Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess over the next three decades. These studies often combined statistical and observational analyses in making distinctive empirical and theoretical contributions to our understanding of urban processes, social problems and urban growth, and, commencing in the late 1930s, the nature of race and class subjugation in urban areas.

The Chicago social scientists recognized and legitimized the neighborhood—including the ghetto neighborhood—as a subject for scientific analysis. Chicago, a community of neighborhoods, was considered a laboratory from which generalizations about broader urban conditions could be made.

The perspectives on urban processes that guided the Chicago School's approach to the study of race and class have undergone subtle changes through the years. In the 1920s, Park and Burgess argued that the immigrant slums, and the social problems that characterized them, were temporary conditions on the pathway toward inevitable progress. They further maintained that blacks represented the latest group of migrants involved in the "interaction cycle" that "led from conflict to accommodation to assimilation."

The view that blacks fit the pattern of immigrant assimilation appeared in subsequent studies by E. Franklin Frazier in the 1930s. But Frazier, an African-American sociologist trained at the University of Chicago, also recognized and emphasized a problem ignored in the earlier work of Park and Burgess—the important link between the
black family structure and the industrial economy. Frazier believed that the availability of employment opportunities in the industrial sector would largely determine the upward mobility of African-Americans and their eventual assimilation into American life.

In 1945, a fundamental revision in the Chicago framework came with the publication of St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton’s classic study, Black Metropolis. Drake and Cayton first examined black progress in employment, housing, and social integration using census, survey, and archival data. Their analysis clearly revealed the existence of a color line that effectively blocked black occupational, residential, and social mobility. They demonstrated that any assumption about urban blacks duplicating the immigrant experience had to confront the issue of race. Moreover, as the historian Alice O’Connor puts it, “Drake and Cayton recognized that the racial configuration of Chicago was not the expression of an organic process of city growth, but the product of human behavior, institutional practices and political decisions.”

Black Metropolis also deviated from the earlier Chicago School studies in its inclusion of an ethnographic study. Using W. Lloyd Warner’s anthropological techniques, Drake and Cayton studied patterns of daily life in three of Chicago’s South Side community areas (Washington Park, Grand Boulevard, and Douglas). They labeled these three areas “Bronzeville,” a term that was used by the local residents themselves to describe their community. Combining data based on the Chicago School-style research and anthropological methods, Black Metropolis presented a much less encouraging view of the prospects for black progress.

In the revised and enlarged edition of Black Metropolis published in 1962, Drake and Cayton examined the changes that had occurred in Bronzeville since the publication of the first edition with a sense of optimism. They felt that America in the 1960s was “experiencing a period of prosperity” and that African-Americans were “living in the era of integration.” Of course, they had no way of anticipating the rapid social and economic deterioration of communities like Bronzeville that would begin in the next decade.

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 me-

tropolis 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. 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. 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, 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 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.” Though they may have lived on different streets, blocks 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. 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 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. 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). 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 controls 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 ac-
tively 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.” 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. 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.” Although black and white males reveal similar age curves, “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 prominently reflected in the concerns expressed by the respondents interviewed in the Urban Poverty and Family Life Study. They are also reflected in the responses to a 1993 survey (see Appendix B) conducted on a random sample of adult residents in Woodlaw and Oakland, two of the new poverty neighborhoods on the South Side of Chicago. In 1990, 37 percent of Woodlaw’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 Woodlaw 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 Woodlaw. 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 exacer-bates 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.

**CHAPTER 2**

**Societal Changes and Vulnerable Neighborhoods**

The disappearance of work in many inner-city neighborhoods is partly related to the nationwide decline in the fortunes of low-skilled workers. Although the growing wage inequality has hurt both low-skilled men and women, the problem of declining employment has been concentrated among low-skilled men. In 1987–89, a low-skilled male worker was jobless eight and a half weeks longer than he would have been in 1967–69. Moreover, the proportion of men who “permanently” dropped out of the labor force was more than twice as high in the late 1980s than it had been in the late 1960s. A precipitous drop in real wages—that is, wages adjusted for inflation—has accompanied the increases in joblessness among low-income workers. If you arrange all wages into five groups according to wage percentile (from highest to lowest), you see that men in the bottom fifth of this income distribution experienced more than a 30 percent drop in real wages between 1970 and 1989.

Even the low-skilled workers who are consistently employed face problems of economic advancement. Job ladders—opportunities for promotion within firms—have eroded, and many less-skilled workers stagnate in dead-end, low-paying positions. This suggests that the chances of improving one’s earnings by changing jobs have declined: if jobs inside a firm have become less available to the experienced workers in that firm, they are probably even more difficult for outsiders to obtain.

But there is a paradox here. Despite the increasing economic marginality of low-wage workers, unemployment dipped below 6 percent