The Truly Disadvantaged
William Julius Wilson

The Truly Disadvantaged

The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy

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Afterword
Reflections on Responses to
*The Truly Disadvantaged*

William Julius Wilson

The first edition of *The Truly Disadvantaged* was published twenty-five years ago. However, the economic processes emphasized in the book have continued—the loss of manufacturing jobs, the movement of jobs from cities to the suburbs and overseas, and even greater internationalization of the economy, especially through trade liberalization facilitated by free trade agreements in the 1990s. Moreover, given the expansion of low-wage jobs lacking fringe benefits, and the polarization between high-wage and low-wage occupations, higher education is even more critical for social advancement in the labor market today. Furthermore, the adverse effects of deindustrialization on inner-city black employment continue to be severe.

By and large, the conditions described in *The Truly Disadvantaged* are not qualitatively different twenty-five years later, even though when I wrote the book urban conditions had been in decline for roughly fifteen years (i.e. since the early 1970s). There are still major racial differences in concentrated poverty. Although the country experienced dramatic declines in concentrated poverty in the 1990s, including declines in urban black neighborhoods, the substantial decreases may simply have been blips of economic boom in the 1990s rather than permanent trends. Unemployment and individual poverty rates have increased since 2000, and there is every reason to assume that concentrated poverty rates are on the increase again, although complete data on concentrated poverty rates are not available.

I am enormously indebted to Jackelyn Hwang and Jeremy Levine for their excellent review of the roughly 3,500 articles, as well as a number of books, that cited or responded to *The Truly Disadvantaged*. Their systematic research on these articles provided the basis for my discussion and arguments in this afterword. I would also like to thank Anmol Chaddha, Jackelyn Hwang, Jeremy Levine, James Quane, Loïc Wacquant, and Edward Walker for their very helpful comments on a previous draft of this afterword. This afterword is original, although I have included a few partially rewritten paragraphs from my books *More than Just Race* (copyright © 2009 by William Julius Wilson and used by permission of W. W. Norton & Co.) and *When Work Disappears* (copyright © 1996 by William Julius Wilson and used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House).
The problems of joblessness have continued and have even gotten worse for low-skilled blacks. The racial employment disparities have persisted. The black/white unemployment ratio seems essentially fixed at 2.0 or greater, which means that even through economic upturns and downturns the black unemployment rate has been at least twice that of the white unemployment rate—although for the first time in five decades, except for the year 1975, the ratio dipped below 2.0 from December 2009 to March 2010 during the current economic crisis. However, at the time of this writing the ratio has once again returned to 2.0.

There have also been some important changes that should be noted. There is greater class polarization among African Americans. The out-migration of middle-class blacks from the inner city continues, but more have moved to the suburbs, including suburban black neighborhoods. And a growing number of poor blacks now live in the suburbs rather than the cities, many in older inner-ring suburbs that feature poverty rates approximating those in the inner cities. Immigration has been very consequential in reshaping cities and urban labor markets, especially low-wage labor markets. Incarceration has sharply increased in the twenty-five years since The Truly Disadvantaged was published and has had profound consequences for the urban black poor. There is of course the Great Recession and its aftermath—the current period of very high unemployment, long-term joblessness, and foreclosures. And the surprising election of a black president should certainly be noted. These changes notwithstanding, the basic arguments in The Truly Disadvantaged are as relevant and important today as they were when the book was published. I hope this will be clearly demonstrated in the following pages.

The Truly Disadvantaged is one of the most widely cited books in the last half century. Indeed, it created a paradigm that has stimulated hundreds of studies across disciplines. Some of the studies reflect the controversy The Truly Disadvantaged has generated; others are more concerned with the empirical and theoretical issues raised in the book. The purpose of this afterword is to reflect on studies that have corroborated, extended, or challenged arguments in the book in insightful ways. In the process I will discuss and reflect on The Truly Disadvantaged’s influence in shaping the fields of urban poverty, urban inequality, and race relations, as well as its influence on social policy. I welcome this opportunity to engage the large array of studies that have responded to the book. And I begin by first discussing scholarly reactions to a controversial concept that was featured in The Truly Disadvantaged—the concept underclass.
The Concept Underclass

The use of the concept *underclass* has been the subject of considerable debate among scholars of urban poverty. Many have questioned the meaning of the term and its value as a social category and have reacted critically to the way the term has been appropriated by those intellectuals and journalists whose ideological views and orientations strongly influence their perceptions of the urban poor. However, in their critical commentary many of these scholars have not addressed, in theoretical terms, the scientific import of the concept *underclass*; that is, its role in the description and explanation of social behavior. Rather they have objected to the way the term is used to label a subgroup of the urban poor whose cultural traits are thought to be different from those of the larger society. I discuss the controversy surrounding the concept *underclass* in this section. However, to help readers more clearly distinguish between my use of the concept and how others have used it, in the following section I discuss my theoretical definition of the *underclass*, emphasizing that it denotes a disadvantaged position in the labor market and a social environment of concentrated poverty and social isolation.

In *The Truly Disadvantaged* the relationship between economic restructuring, long-term joblessness, and cultural behavior previously highlighted in the writings of the liberal scholars in the 1960s was once again strongly emphasized. However, in spelling out this relationship, I also explicitly used the concept *underclass*, described as a grouping of individuals and families who are (1) outside the mainstream of the American occupational system—including those “who lack training and skills and either experience long-term unemployment or are not members of the labor force, individuals who are engaged in street crime and other forms of aberrant behavior, and families that experience long-term spells of poverty and/or welfare dependency”—and (2) share the same social milieu.

Regarding the sharing of the same social environment, I stated: “It is true that long-term welfare families and street criminals are distinct groups, but they live and interact in the same depressed community and they are part of the population that has, with the exodus of the more stable working- and middle-class segments, become increasingly isolated from mainstream patterns and norms of behavior.” I argued that the behavioral and cultural adaptations of the underclass were often a response to social structural constraints, including constraints imposed by the decreased relative demand for low-skilled labor.

I specifically addressed the controversy surrounding the use of the concept *underclass* in my presidential speech—“Studying Inner-City Social
Dislocations: The Challenge of Public Agenda Research”—at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association in 1990. I chose the theme for the 1990 annual meeting, “Sociology and the Public Agenda,” to reflect my interest in the relationship between research and public policy. I had hoped to stimulate and encourage sociological research to focus on issues that are of concern to the general public, research that would more likely attract the attention of the media and policymakers. The theme was particularly appropriate for the site of the annual meeting—Washington, DC. And there was extensive media coverage of my presidential speech, including articles in *Time* and in the *Weekend Review* section of the Sunday *New York Times*, which announced that I had abandoned the use of the term *underclass*. In the early part of my speech, I focused on the controversy that was raging over the use of the concept whereby those on the right claimed that “the underclass is a product of the unwillingness of the black poor to adhere to the American work ethic, among other cultural deficiencies, while those on the left contended that the underclass is a consequence of the developments in post-industrial society, which no longer needs the unskilled poor.”

This debate swirled around my book *The Truly Disadvantaged*, where I asserted, as Herbert Gans correctly observed, “this underclass exists mainly because of the large scale and harmful changes in the labor market, and its resulting spatial concentration as well as the isolation of such areas from the more affluent parts of the black community.” Gans argued that efforts by scholars to resolve this debate were largely unsuccessful. Meanwhile, the behavioral definition of the underclass had increased in the public discourse, especially among journalists. Reflecting on this situation in my speech, I attempted to move the debate away from the controversy over the underclass, including the simplistic either/or distinction between social structure and culture that had characterized so much of the debate, by substituting the term *ghetto poor* for the word *underclass* in the hope that I would not lose any of the subtle theoretical meaning that the latter term had in my writings.

The crucial question is whether a theoretically defined concept of *underclass*—as opposed to the nonsystematic and atheoretical usages—can be helpful in social scientific discourse. In the next section of this afterword I present a more refined concept of the *underclass*, which derives its meaning from this theory. In the process I show how a theoretically defined concept of *underclass* can be helpful in social scientific discourse, despite the ongoing controversy and debate concerning its meaning and value as a social category.
A Theory of the Social Transformation of the Inner City

In *The Truly Disadvantaged* I advanced the argument that historical discrimination combined with migration from the rural South to large metropolises kept the urban black population relatively young and created a problem of weak labor-force attachment that has made this population particularly vulnerable to the industrial and geographic changes in the economy since the early 1970s. Innovations in technology, the shift from goods-producing to service-producing industries, the relocation of manufacturing industries out of central cities, the increasing polarization of the labor market into low-wage and high-wage sectors, and periodic recessions have elevated the rate of black joblessness (unemployment and nonparticipation in the labor market), despite the passage of legislation against discrimination and the creation of affirmative action programs.

The growth in joblessness has in turn helped generate a rise in the concentration of poor blacks, with accompanying increases in single-parent families and the receipt of welfare. These problems have been particularly noticeable in the inner-city ghetto neighborhoods of large cities, not only because of the vast concentrations of impoverished minority families and individuals there, but also because these neighborhoods have become less diversified and more isolated in ways that make them more vulnerable to the impact of the continuing economic changes.

Since the early 1970s, a significant out-migration of working- and middle-class families from inner-city neighborhoods combined with rising numbers of poor residents due to escalating rates of joblessness have resulted in heavy concentrations of ghetto poverty. The number of inner-city census tracts with high poverty rates has risen precipitously. The diminishing presence of middle- and working-class families has also weakened an important social buffer that served to deflect the full impact of the prolonged high levels of neighborhood joblessness stemming from uneven economic growth and periodic recessions.

In earlier decades, most of the adults in ghetto neighborhoods were employed. And black working and middle classes provided stability in these neighborhoods. They invested their economic and social resources by patronizing neighborhood stores, banks, churches, and community organizations and by sending their children to the local public schools. In the process they reinforced societal values and norms and made it meaningful for the more disadvantaged in these segregated enclaves to envision the possibility of some upward mobility. However, the inner-city ghetto today includes a high proportion of residents whose major predicament is rising joblessness, a trend that is strengthened by growing social isolation. The contact between groups of different class and racial backgrounds has
decreased because of the out-migration of higher income families, resulting in greater adverse effects from living in impoverished neighborhoods. These concentration effects, reflected, for example, in the self-limiting social dispositions of inner-city residents, are created by inadequate access to job networks and employment, lack of access to quality schools, decreasing availability of suitable marriage partners, and lack of exposure to conventional role models and informal mainstream social networks.

Accordingly, the arguments presented in *The Truly Disadvantaged* to account for the recent increases in social dislocations in the inner-city ghetto are complex. They cannot be reduced to the easy explanations of racism advanced by those on the left or of “culture of poverty” posited by those on the right. Although historic racism created the ghetto and although contemporary discrimination has undoubtedly aggravated the economic and social woes of its residents, an adequate understanding of the sharp increase in these problems requires the specification of a complex web of additional factors, including the impact of shifts in the modern American economy.

It is not explicit in this summary of *The Truly Disadvantaged* that social, structural, cultural, and social-psychological variables are integrated into my theoretical framework. A more formal statement of this framework is that a structure of inequality has evolved that is linked to contemporary behavior in the ghetto by a combination of opportunities, constraints, and social psychology. The exogenous factors, representing the sources of the concentration of black ghetto poverty, include racial discrimination, changes in the economy that have restructured occupations and relocated industries away from inner-city neighborhoods, and political processes (affirmative action programs and antibias legislation) that have had the unanticipated consequence of increasing the class divisions among urban African Americans. The endogenous factors created by these exogenous determinants include demographic variables such as urban migration, age structures, and the pool of marriageable men, as well as economic factors such as employment and income distributions.

The endogenous determinants also include social isolation, which is a characteristic feature of the social environment of the urban underclass. Social isolation deprives inner-city ghetto residents not only of economic and social resources, including conventional role models whose presence buffers the impact of neighborhood joblessness, but also of cultural learning from mainstream social networks that facilitates economic and social mobility in modern society. The lack of economic and social resources in the neighborhood, the declining presence of conventional role models, and circumscribed cultural learning produce outcomes that restrict social
advancement. Some of these outcomes are structural (weak labor-force attachment and lack of access to informal job networks) and some are social-psychological (limited aspirations and problematic social dispositions).

These theoretical issues should be kept in mind as I attempt to more fully establish the role of the concept underclass in the description and explanation of social behavior. Basically, I argued in The Truly Disadvantaged that the central problem of the underclass is joblessness, a problem that is rendered even more severe by an increasing social isolation in impoverished neighborhoods, as reflected, for example, in the weakening of the informal job information network systems. In Martha Van Haitsma’s conceptual explication of my theory, the relationship between the social environment and experiences in the labor market is more sharply delineated. She distinguished those persons with weak attachment to the labor force and whose social environment “tends to maintain or further weaken this attachment.” I would like to incorporate this more explicit conception by referring to the neighborhood as the social environment.

The term weak labor-force attachment as used here does not imply a desire or willingness to work. Rather, weak labor-force attachment refers to the marginal position of people in the labor force because of restricted job opportunities—including those that result from changes in the demand for labor and from racial discrimination—and/or limited access to the informal job network systems. To understand the unique position of members of the underclass, it is important to comprehend how their neighborhood context aggravates their weak attachment to the labor force. “Environments with low opportunity for stable and legitimate employment and high opportunity for alternative income-generating activities, particularly those which are incompatible with regular employment perpetuate weak labor force attachment,” stated Van Haitsma. Poor people who reside in areas that support or foster strong labor-force attachment are in a better position to avail themselves of employment opportunities than those with similar educational training and occupational skills living in neighborhoods that reinforce or promote weak labor-force attachment.

Neighborhoods that have inadequate job information networks, few legitimate employment opportunities, and inferior schools not only feature weak labor-force attachment, but they also increase the likelihood that people will turn to deviant or illegal activities for income, resulting in further deterioration of their attachment to the legitimate labor market. The problems associated with the absence of work are most severe for a jobless family in a neighborhood with low rates of employment because they are more likely to be shared and reinforced by other families in this
neighborhood through the process of nonconscious or accidental cultural transmission.\textsuperscript{18}

Thus, in my formulation the meaning of the concept of \textit{underclass} is derived from a theoretical framework of the social transformation of the inner city, a framework that links structural, cultural, and social-psychological propositions. In this theory, what distinguishes members of the underclass from those of other economically disadvantaged groups is that their neighborhood or social milieu uniquely reinforces their marginal economic position or weak attachment to the labor force. The standard designation “lower class,” as typically used by social scientists, does not capture this distinction—the dual problems of weak attachment to the labor force or marginal economic position and social isolation in neighborhoods of highly concentrated poverty.

What the terms \textit{lower class} and \textit{underclass} have in common is that they each connote economic marginality. Where they differ is that unlike the term \textit{underclass}, as theoretically defined here and in the first edition of \textit{The Truly Disadvantaged}, the term \textit{lower class} does not signify the added dimension of neighborhood or social milieu. In America the problems this definition of the underclass connotes—economic marginality and neighborhoods of highly concentrated poverty—are more likely to be present in the inner-city ghettos. In the United States the concept will more often apply to people of color because whites seldom live in ghetto or high-poverty areas. For example, Paul Jargowsky found that in 1990 the proportion of the poor who reside in ghetto neighborhoods in metropolitan areas varied noticeably by race—of the 8 million ghetto poor, areas with poverty rates of at least 40 percent, 4.2 million were African American, 2 million were Latino, and roughly 1.8 million were white.\textsuperscript{19}

Thus to speak of the underclass in the United States today is to refer primarily to blacks and Latinos.\textsuperscript{20} However, there is nothing in my conceptual definition of the underclass that would restrict its application to people of color. In other societies the combination of weak labor-force attachment and social isolation may exist in certain inner-city neighborhoods even though the levels of concentrated poverty do not match those inherent in American ghettos. For example, there is evidence that the long-term jobless in the Dutch inner cities of Rotterdam and Amsterdam—particularly the immigrants with weak labor-force attachment from Surinam and Indonesia—have experienced sharply decreasing contact with conventional groups and institutions in Dutch society despite levels of ethnic and class segregation far below those of large inner cities in the United States. In response to this development, several Dutch social scientists have discussed the formation of an underclass in the Netherlands in precisely the theoretical terms outlined in \textit{The Truly Disadvantaged}.\textsuperscript{21}
Consequently, we need a concept that allows us to describe and highlight the important theoretical linkage between a disadvantaged group's position in the labor market and its social environment. I have shown how the term *underclass* can serve this purpose. Social scientists may choose another concept to capture this relationship. Indeed, as pointed out in the previous section, I now use the term *ghetto poor* to designate the dual problem of weak labor-force attachment and a social milieu featuring concentrated poverty and social isolation. I have made this nominal change because of a concern that even a theoretically derived concept of *underclass* will be overcrowded in the long run by nonsystematic, arbitrary, and atheoretical usages that often end up as ideological slogans or code words, particularly in journalistic descriptions of patterns of behavior in the inner city.22

**Important Empirical Studies Responding to *The Truly Disadvantaged***

In response to *The Truly Disadvantaged*, hundreds of empirical studies have been published on the effects of concentrated poverty in neighborhood environments since the late 1980s. In the first part of this section I discuss the issues raised by some researchers on whether decisions to live in poor neighborhoods are mainly a function of individual self-selection. I then focus on an important book by Robert Sampson, which reflects on arguments involving individual self-selection. This is followed by a discussion of other important issues raised in Sampson's study, which sets the stage, in the remaining parts of this section, for a systematic examination of research that addresses a number of theoretical arguments in *The Truly Disadvantaged*—economic restructuring and spatial mismatch, persistent poverty and depopulation, social isolation and concentration effects, and the male marriageable pool hypothesis. This section concludes with a discussion of major empirical challenges to *The Truly Disadvantaged*.

**Research on Neighborhood Effects: From Individual Level Outcomes to Structuralist Issues**

A particular topic that was the focus of significant attention from subsequent researchers was the concept of *neighborhood effects*, which refers to the impact of various social, structural, cultural, and demographic conditions of the neighborhood on the residents. *The Truly Disadvantaged* identified the growth of concentrated poverty as an important new phenomenon, explained how it was caused, and argued that there are "con-
centration effects” that are above and beyond the separate effects of low income, unemployment, and so on. However, it is important to note that, even though The Truly Disadvantaged highlighted a number of structural arguments that are discussed in subsequent parts of this section, much of the earlier research focused on individual-level outcomes. As Robert Sampson put it: “Rereading The Truly Disadvantaged, one is struck by its structuralist bent, though this was rather quickly translated by policy-oriented researchers into a prediction about individual outcome.”

Basically, the research on neighborhood effects suggests that concentrated poverty increases the likelihood of social isolation from mainstream institutions, joblessness, dropping out of school, lower educational achievement, involvement in crime, unsuccessful behavioral development and delinquency among adolescents, nonmarital childbirth, and unsuccessful family management. In general the research reveals that concentrated poverty adversely affects one’s chances in life beginning in infancy and lasting well into adulthood.

However, some scholars have been concerned that these studies reached conclusions about neighborhood effects based on data that do not address the problem of self-selection bias, a term used in research to describe the effect of people grouping themselves together based on common characteristics. These scholars argue that the effects we attribute to poor neighborhoods may instead be caused by the characteristics of families and individuals who end up living there. In other words, they feel that disadvantaged neighborhoods might not be the cause of poor outcomes, but rather that families with the weakest job-related skills, with the lowest awareness of and concern for the effects of the local environment on their children’s social development, with attitudes that hinder social mobility, and with the most burdensome personal problems are simply more likely to live in these types of neighborhoods.

For example, as John Quigley and Steven Raphael pointed out, “in interpreting cross-sectional data on the isolation of low-income workers from job concentrations it is likely that those with weaker attachments to the labor force will have chosen to locate in places where employment access is low [e.g., inner-city ghetto neighborhoods]. This is simply because monthly rents are lower in these places.” Indeed, some scholars have maintained that neighborhood effects disappear when researchers use appropriate statistical techniques to account for self-selection bias. Since the appropriateness of measures capturing neighborhood effects is not typically discussed as a major problem in such studies, a point that I will soon elaborate, many readers will conclude that structural explanations of concentrated poverty and related problems like discrimination, segregation, and joblessness are less persuasive than those that focus on personal attributes.
The issue of individual self-selection into neighborhoods was addressed in the publication of the research on the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) experiment, a housing pilot program, undertaken by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) between 1994 and 1998. The MTO experiment was framed as a test of the arguments presented in *The Truly Disadvantaged* about whether neighborhoods matter in the lives of poor individuals. HUD’s MTO demonstration program conducted a lottery that awarded housing vouchers to families living in public housing developments in high-poverty neighborhoods in five cities—Boston, Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. Families who entered the lottery, thus indicating their desire to move, were randomly assigned to one of three groups—one was awarded housing vouchers that could be used to rent in the private market in any area, one was awarded housing vouchers that were restricted to private rentals in low-poverty neighborhoods, and one did not receive either voucher in the lottery and was therefore treated as a control group to be compared with the other two groups.

The MTO interim evaluation studies were considered superior to other research on neighborhood effects because they were based on data from a randomized experimental design that eliminated the self-selection bias “that had made it difficult to clearly determine the association between living in poor neighborhoods and individual outcomes.” The reports and publications on the interim evaluation, which was finalized in 2003, provided mixed evidence for neighborhood effects when comparing the group whose MTO vouchers were restricted to low-poverty areas with the group that did not receive vouchers. On the one hand, during the five-year period following random assignment the MTO movers who relocated to low-poverty areas were more likely to experience improvements in mental health and less likely to be obese, and girls experienced a significant reduction in “risky behavior” (that is, drinking, taking drugs, engaging in sex, and so on). On the other hand, research investigators found no evidence of an impact on employment rates and earnings, or of any marked improvement on the educational or physical health outcomes of children and young men. These mixed results have led some, including reporters, to question whether there really are enduring negative effects of living in poor segregated neighborhoods. And they seem to reinforce the view among some scholars that when studies effectively control for self-selection bias, neighborhood effects are weak or disappear.

However, while the research on the MTO experiment is rigorous, there are serious issues with the design of the experiment that limit the extent to which one can generalize about neighborhood effects. First of all, the treatment was weak. That is, the use of the housing voucher was only restricted to one year and relocation considerations were predicated
on neighborhood poverty, not racial composition. Indeed, many MTO
movers relocated to neighborhoods that were not significantly different
from the ones they left. For example, three-fifths of MTO families en-
tered highly segregated black neighborhoods. Such neighborhoods tend
to be considerably less advantaged than integrated areas. Sociologist Rob-
ert Sampson analyzed the neighborhood attainment of all Chicago MTO
families and found that after approximately seven years, although the
voucher winners resided in neighborhoods with poverty rates somewhat
lower than the neighborhoods of control families, both groups clustered
in segregated black neighborhoods that were still considerably poorer
than what an overwhelming majority of Americans will ever experience
(neighborhoods with poverty rates of roughly 30 percent).29

Also, at the time of the experiment’s interim evaluation, as many as
41 percent of the MTO families who entered low-poverty neighborhoods
subsequently moved back to more disadvantaged neighborhoods. Be-
cause of such extensive out-migration, these MTO families accumulated
relatively little time in areas of low poverty and correspondingly did not
have an extended opportunity to experience life in low-poverty neighbor-
hoods that were racially integrated.30

Moreover, nearly three-quarters of the children in the MTO experi-
ment remained in the same school district, often in the same schools, at
the time of the interim evaluation. Stefanie Deluca’s comment on these
findings, based on her interviews of MTO parents in Baltimore, reveals
that school choice was a low priority for some parents. “It is quite strik-
ing,” she stated, “how little some parents thought that school mattered for
learning, relative to what the child contributed though hard work and a
‘good attitude.’”31 Furthermore, as pointed out by Quigley and Raphael,
the experiment did not improve accessibility to employment opportuni-
ties for MTO movers, because their new neighborhoods were no closer
to areas of employment growth.32 Finally, a number of the projects that
housed many participants prior to their MTO relocation were torn down
during the time of the experiment, forcing individuals in the control
groups to also move and thus making it difficult to determine differences
between voucher families and those without vouchers. Thus, rather than
concluding that neighborhoods do not matter based on this research, it
would be prudent to simply state that although the MTO research raises
questions about the extent to which neighborhoods affect the social out-
comes of children and adults, it certainly does not resolve these questions.

I think that overall quantitative studies generate mixed or weak find-
ings about the effects of living in poor segregated neighborhoods because
of crude or inadequate measures to capture neighborhood effects.33 If a
random experiment or a nonexperimental study could be generated that
would allow researchers to capture the impact of a range of factors that distinguish different neighborhoods, including identifying factors that are cumulative overtime, there would be significantly different findings on the impact of living in inner-city ghetto neighborhoods.

Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in Robert J. Sampson’s landmark book *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect*. Sampson’s findings flow mainly from a comprehensive research endeavor called the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN), which collected longitudinal data on children, families, and neighborhoods. I will have more to say about this study shortly. Let me first focus on his powerful critique of studies that place special emphasis on self-selection bias.

Sampson did not dismiss the role of individual selection effects. Rather he pointed out that neither higher-order structures nor neighborhood mechanisms are subservient to individual selection. Indeed, argued Sampson, “individual selection is embedded in social contexts” and is itself a neighborhood effect. Neighborhoods, he contended, affect individual decisions (selection) and perceptions, which in turn influence mobility and ultimately neighborhood composition and social dynamics. Accordingly, “in a fundamental sense,” Sampson proclaimed, “individual selection is both a neighborhood effect and a process of ‘structural sorting’ bringing full circle the findings of the book that integrate individual, neighborhood, and ultimately structure.”

I find Sampson’s special emphasis on social structure in the study of neighborhood effects particularly appealing, because it resonates with much of the focus of *The Truly Disadvantaged*. In the various chapters of *Great American City*, Sampson demonstrated a flexible conception of causality, which stands in sharp contrast to the “crucial individual experiment.” Rather than a single effect, *Great American City* features a holistic “contextual causality” that captures neighborhood social processes. A family of neighborhood effects is theoretically interpreted, described, observed, and analyzed using a variety of methodologies.

*Great American City* examines two fundamentally different ways of looking at the world—one sees life in terms of independent self-maximizing individuals, the other focuses on the important collective processes in contextual settings rooted in shared understanding. The first image is powerfully reflected in contemporary America, not only in popular belief systems but also in recent developments in social science disciplines (e.g., rational choice models of human behavior). This book’s theoretical thrust elevates the second idea by revealing how the mechanisms of social causality are profoundly shaped by the spatial logic of urban life. In the process the book does not inherently begin at the top.
(social structure) or bottom (individual behavior) but rather creatively integrates individual, neighborhood, and structural dynamics.

Based on his rich and diverse data sources, which provide a basis for a clear specification of the structural and cultural dimensions of neighborhood effects, Sampson demonstrated the powerful effects of ecologically concentrated disadvantage on both individual outcomes and rates of behavior across neighborhoods. These effects—including joblessness, poverty, single-parent families with children, verbal ability, violence, incarceration, and collective efficacy—are magnified by racial segregation. Sampson carefully pointed out that historical, macroeconomic, and global forces have indeed impacted urban neighborhoods; however, they do not negate the potent “lower order” mechanisms of neighborhoods that help to account for variations in concentrated inequality. These include sociopsychological mechanisms that interact with broad cultural processes (e.g., stereotypes and shared expectations and perceptions of disorder) and have played a role in shaping the long-term identities and trajectories of neighborhoods.

Sampson's longitudinal study is the most notable of the many recent studies that have provided important empirical findings that relate to or extend the arguments advanced in The Truly Disadvantaged. I highlight Sampson's book here, because its comprehensive coverage of a range of empirical and theoretical issues relevant to The Truly Disadvantaged sets the stage for a discussion of studies dealing with more specific topics. Many of these studies also systematically incorporate longitudinal data that represent significant advances in our understanding of the factors that have shaped poor urban neighborhoods and the experiences of individuals who reside in these neighborhoods. Like Sampson's Great American City, these studies capture the impact of long-term exposure to concentrated disadvantage, studies, in other words, that provide a temporal perspective on neighborhood effects. I discuss these studies and others in the following parts of this section.

Economic Restructuring and Spatial Mismatch

One thing that was not made clear in The Truly Disadvantaged is that ten cities accounted for three-fourths of the ghetto poverty in the United States during the 1970s, and they all had two things in common—they were all industrial centers and, except for Atlanta, and they were all located in the Northeast and Midwest regions of the United States. By contrast cities in the Sun Belt regions of the country tended to experience job growth in all sectors of the economy (manufacturing, retail/wholesale, white-collar and blue-collar services) during the 1970s and 1980s.
John Kasarda’s research revealed, the cities in the Frost Belt experienced massive industrial restructuring and a loss of blue-collar jobs. These cities suffered overall employment declines, because “growth in their predominantly information processing industries could not numerically compensate for substantial losses in their more traditional industrial sectors, especially manufacturing.”

The impact of economic restructuring on inner-city neighborhoods was the focus of a number of longitudinal studies. George Galster, Ron Miny, and Mitchell Tobin drew on data from four sources and measured the impact of economic restructuring on poverty rates in census tracts in metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) from 1980 to 1990. They found that predominantly black census tracts experienced, on average, substantially higher growth in poverty rates during the 1980s. And that most of this increase of black neighborhood poverty was due to “the severe restructuring experienced in the MSAs that contained these tracts.” Moreover, MSA restructuring had stronger effects in black neighborhoods than in comparable white neighborhoods.

In another important study, John Iceland analyzed data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) and the U.S. census to gauge the impact of economic restructuring on changes in poverty rates in MSA census tracts from 1980 to 1990. His data reveal that even though deindustrialization had a “negligible impact on poor whites,” it decreased the likelihood that African Americans residing in metropolitan areas would transition out of poverty. And the impact of industrial shifts remained constant even after he controlled for racial residential segregation. Iceland’s findings support the deindustrialization hypothesis, which suggests that manufacturing employment enables poor individuals to escape poverty. “That deindustrialization has a negative impact on African Americans, but not on whites supports previous findings,” stated Iceland, “as African Americans have long been overrepresented in blue-collar jobs.”

However, as James R. Elliott pointed out in a study based on data from the 1990 decennial census and the Multi-City Survey of Urban Inequality in Atlanta, Boston, and Los Angeles, overall declines in traditional manufacturing jobs in major central cities have accompanied increases in “downgraded” production arrangements, which feature smaller firms, lower profit margins, and diminishing wages and benefits for lower-skilled workers. The results from Elliott’s study “suggest that this secondary aspect of deindustrialization, while often overlooked, plays a key role in shaping the labor market outcomes of disadvantaged inner-city workers.”

Kevin F. Gotham presented another important extension of the deindustrialization thesis, as outlined in The Truly Disadvantaged.
on Kansas City as a case study, Gotham provided both quantitative and qualitative documentation of how the Federal Housing Administration and the real estate industry interacted with the decline of blue-collar industries and the rise of a service-oriented economy to reinforce racial residential segregation and aggravate urban poverty in the city in the 1980s and 1990s. Gotham argued that the white residents of Kansas City are less likely to be impacted by the negative effects of large-scale economic change, because they tend to be located in all parts of the metropolitan area and are not restricted to geographically constrained areas by ongoing housing discrimination and segregation. In contrast, inner-city black residents have borne the brunt of the decentralization of employment not simply because they are heavily concentrated in manufacturing jobs, but also because they reside in the inner city and have been excluded from obtaining affordable housing in the suburban neighborhoods of Kansas City.

Gotham’s basic contribution is to show that changes in the national economy interact with changes in federal housing policy to shape patterns of uneven development and residential segregation. “The intersection of housing markets with the shift in both the locus of production and the nature of work concentrates the deleterious effects of residential segregation in the inner city while reducing its effects in suburban areas,” stated Gotham. “Thus, the principal dynamics shaping urban development and residential segregation are continuing racial discrimination in the housing and lending industries combined with the changes in federal housing policy in the context of large-scale shifts in the national economy.”

As argued in The Truly Disadvantaged, the decline of manufacturing in a number of cities has resulted in a gradual movement of jobs to the suburbs, creating a spatial mismatch, the geographic separation of residence from the location of employment, for inner-city residents. Although studies using data collected up to 1970 failed to demonstrate convincingly that spatial mismatch affects black employment, more recent research conducted mainly by labor and urban economists supports the following notions: that central-city blacks have less access to employment in terms of the ratio of jobs to people and of average travel time to and from work than do central-city whites; that unlike most other groups of workers, less-educated blacks receive lower wages in the central city than their counterparts in the suburbs; and that the decline in earnings of central-city blacks is positively associated with the extent of job decentralization in metropolitan areas.

Inner-city black males have been especially hard hit by these changes. Data collected from the Urban Poverty and Family Life Study (UPFLS) that I directed in Chicago show that the efforts by out-of-school inner-
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city black males to obtain blue-collar jobs in the industries that had previously employed their fathers have been impeded by industrial shifts as evident in the occupational changes of successive cohorts of young men. The most common occupations mentioned shifted from manufacturing jobs (assembler and operator) among the oldest cohorts to service jobs (janitor and waiter) among the younger cohort of respondents ages nineteen to twenty-eight.47

In a related study, analyzing national data from decennial census tract tabulations from the population censuses of 1950 to 1990, Lincoln Quillian found a “marked decline in the employment of working-age men in low-income black tracts, both in absolute terms and relative to the employment rate of male residents of other types of tracts.”48 Quillian’s research reveals that the rates of working-age male labor-force nonparticipation in low-income black census tracts roughly doubled from 15 percent in 1950 to 44 percent in 1990. Part of this increase was due to the out-migration of higher income blacks from low-income census tracts, but, as I argued in my book *When Work Disappears*, a good deal of it was due to the declining rates of black male employment in manufacturing industries.

Another study by Sabino Kornrich suggests that an important factor in the occupational status of urban blacks is the variation in the quality of available jobs across time and across cities.49 Areas hardest hit by economic transformations “were often cities with large black populations, such as Detroit, St. Louis and other manufacturing centers of the Midwest.”50 Kornrich’s study reveals the importance of considering the structure of labor and job queues. In particular, the types of available jobs and the available workers to fill them in determining black-white inequality. He found that “black workers have better outcomes in queues where blacks are more numerous, though the level of wage inequality in the queue affects the strength of this relationship. Black workers experience the greatest disadvantage in highly unequal queues with low black representation.”51 He also found that the proportion of Latinos and female workers in a queue influences the black and white wage gap, which suggests that when both groups are available, employers prefer Latino and female workers over black workers. Studies show that such discriminatory hiring choices are especially harmful to low-educated black males.52

Persistent Poverty and Depopulation

In *The Truly Disadvantaged* I failed to emphasize the impact of the Second Great Migration of African-Americans from the rural South to the cities of the Northeast and Midwest, which lasted thirty years—from
1940 to 1970. This mass movement of African Americans was even larger and more sustained than the First Great Migration, which began at the turn of the twentieth century and ended during the Great Depression, and had a more profound impact on the transformation of the inner city.

As the black urban population in the North grew and precipitated greater demands for housing, pressure mounted in white communities to keep blacks out. Suburban communities, with their restrictive covenants and special zoning laws, refused to permit the construction of public housing. And the federal government acquiesced to opposition from organized white neighborhood groups to the construction of public housing in their neighborhoods in the city. Thus low-income subsidized housing was overwhelmingly concentrated in the overcrowded and deteriorating inner-city ghettos—the poorest and least powerful sections of the city and the metropolitan area. “This growing population of politically weak urban poor was unable to counteract the desires of vocal middle- and working-class whites for segregated housing,” housing that would keep blacks from white neighborhoods. In short, public housing became a federally funded institution that isolated families by race and class, resulting in high concentrations of poor black families in inner-city ghettos.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, new developments led to further changes in these neighborhoods. And one of the most significant, as emphasized in *The Truly Disadvantaged*, was the out-migration of middle-income blacks. Before the 1970s African American families had faced extremely strong barriers when they considered moving into white neighborhoods. Not only did many experience overt discrimination in the housing market, some were recipients of violent attacks. Although fair housing audits continue to reveal the existence of discrimination in the housing market, the fair housing legislation, including the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988, reduced the strength of these barriers. And middle income African Americans increased their efforts to move from concentrated black poverty areas to more desirable neighborhoods in the metropolitan area, including white neighborhoods.

In *The Truly Disadvantaged*, I argued that many working- and middle-class blacks exited ghetto neighborhoods to higher income neighborhoods. Because I failed to elaborate on this point, some writers assumed that I was referring to a movement from the inner city to white suburbs, when in fact I had in mind a movement not only to white suburbs but to nonpoor black neighborhoods in other parts of the metropolitan area—central city and suburbs—as well. And it should be pointed out, as Mary Pattillo’s subsequent research shows, even if the black middle class exited the ghetto and entered nonpoor neighborhoods, these neighborhoods
are still more likely to have a higher proportion of poor families than the neighborhoods of comparable whites. In other words, they are still more likely to be exposed to conditions of poverty and the problems associated with it. Indeed, many of these neighborhoods were former white neighborhoods that had quickly become segregated, and both middle- and lower-income blacks filled the housing vacancies created by the significant white out-migration.57

The out-migration of nonpoor blacks from inner-city ghetto neighborhoods contributed to the depopulation of these neighborhoods. This pattern represents an important change in the formation of neighborhoods. In the earlier years communities undergoing racial change from white to black tended to experience an increase in population density, as a result of the black migration from the South. Because of the housing demand, particularly in the late stages of the succession from white to black, homes and apartments in these neighborhoods were often subdivided into smaller units.58

However, 1970 marked the end of the Second Great Migration, and two developments affected the course of population movement to the inner cities after that time. Improvements in transportation made it easier for workers to live outside the central city, and industries gradually shifted to the suburbs because of the increased residential suburbanization of the labor force and the lower cost of production. Consequently, inner-city manufacturing jobs were no longer a strong factor pulling migrants to central cities.59 So with the decline of industrial employment in the inner city, the influx of southern black migration to northern cities ceased and many poor black neighborhoods, especially those in the Midwest and Northeast, changed from densely packed areas of recently arrived migrants to communities gradually abandoned by the working and middle classes.60

Several important studies have examined life experiences in these inner-city black neighborhoods since the 1970s. Using data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) from 1979 to 1990, Quillian found that many residents of poor black neighborhoods at a given point in time will still be residing in a poor black area ten years later.61 Quillian’s results reveal significant differences between whites and blacks in the duration of exposure to poor neighborhoods. Whereas 70 percent of blacks who reside in a poor or extremely poor census tract will still be living in a poor or extremely poor census tract ten years later, less than 40 percent of whites who live in such tracts will experience such prolonged exposure, and most of the racial difference cannot be accounted for by differences in household structure or poverty status. Quillian’s analysis reveals that a high rate of repeat spells in moderately and extremely poor neighborhoods is a sig-
nificant factor contributing to “entrapment” in such neighborhoods. “The difficulty of ‘escaping’ poor neighborhoods for African Americans results as much because of high rates of repeat spells among the recently exited as from low rates of exit,” stated Quillian.62

Once repeat spells are taken into account, the level of immobility for African Americans in extremely poor tracts (poverty rates of more than 40 percent) is startlingly high. Nearly 50 percent of black residents in extreme poverty tracts in 1970 and 1980 still resided in the same or a different extreme poverty tract ten years later. And much of the entrapment in poor neighborhoods “reflects the fact that persons who exit poor neighborhoods often re-enter a poor tract rather quickly after an exit. The temporal pattern that leads to entrapment in extremely poor neighborhoods then, is not the inability to move out that is most often hypothesized, but the inability to stay out.”63

In another impressive study that analyzes data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) with methods designed to measure intergenerational economic mobility, Patrick Sharkey found that “more than 70% of black children who are raised in the poorest quarter of American neighborhoods will continue to live in the poorest quarter of neighborhoods as adults.”64 He also found that since the 1970s, a majority of black families have resided in the poorest quarter of neighborhoods in consecutive generations, compared to only 7 percent of white families. Thus he concluded that the disadvantages of living in poor black neighborhoods, like the advantages of living in affluent white neighborhoods, are in large measure inherited.65

Accordingly, this persistence of neighborhood inequality raises serious questions about studies on neighborhood effects. Many of these studies substantially underestimate the racial inequality in neighborhood environments, because they use a single point in time, generation, or measure of neighborhood poverty or income.66 Whereas living in the most impoverished neighborhoods is a temporary state for white families, most black families who lived in the poorest neighborhoods in the 1970s continue to live in such neighborhoods today. Sharkey suggested therefore that the focus of the research on neighborhood effects might be shifted to an examination of how the effect of living in poor neighborhoods over two or more generations differs from short-term residence in such neighborhoods. This brings us back to another shortcoming of the MTO experiment. Sharkey stated:

The difficulty with interpreting the results from the MTO as estimates of “neighborhood effects” lies in the conceptualization of a move to a new neighborhood as a point-in-time “treatment.” This perspective ignores the
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possibility that the social environments surrounding families over generations have any lagged or cumulative influence on family members, and it ignores the complex pathways by which this influence may occur. For instance, the neighborhood may have an influence on an individual’s educational attainment in one generation, in turn influencing the individual’s occupational status and income as an adult, the quality of the home environment in which that individual raises a child, and the developmental trajectory of that child. These indirect pathways are obscured in observational studies that control for a set of covariates such as education or the quality of the home environment, and they are impossible to assess in experimental approaches such as MTO.67

We should also consider another important study that Sharkey coauthored with senior investigator Robert Sampson and another colleague, Steven Raudenbush, that examined the durable effects of concentrated poverty on black children’s verbal ability.68 They studied a representative sample of 750 African American children, ages six to twelve, who were growing up in the city of Chicago in 1995, and followed them anywhere they moved in the United States for up to seven years. The children were given a reading examination and vocabulary test at three different periods. Their study shows “that residing in a severely disadvantaged neighborhood cumulatively impedes the development of academically relevant verbal ability in children,” so much so that the effects linger on even if they leave these neighborhoods.69

Their research raises important questions “about ways in which neighborhoods may alter growth in verbal ability producing effects that linger on even if a child leaves a severely disadvantaged neighborhood.”70 They argue that if researchers were trying to determine the extent to which neighborhoods affect children’s verbal ability by randomly providing housing vouchers to black children who lived and grew up in inner-city ghetto neighborhoods and who took a test measuring verbal ability before they moved, and then compared the results of the same test a few years later after the children had resided in better neighborhoods, the conclusion would very likely be there are no neighborhood effects. Why? There would be no difference in verbal ability linked to their movement to a better neighborhood, simply because their verbal abilities had already been formed.

Children’s verbal ability certainly has consequences for school performances, including the completion of high school. Geoffrey T. Wodtke, David J. Harding, and Felix Elwert’s important recent study used the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) to examine the effects of long-term exposure to disadvantaged neighborhoods on high school gradua-
They tracked 4,154 children by measuring their neighborhood context once each year from age one to seventeen and found that continuous exposure to disadvantaged neighborhoods—featuring high rates of poverty, unemployment, female-headed households, and welfare receipt, as well as few well-educated adults—throughout “the entire childhood life course has a devastating impact on the chances of graduating from high school.” The authors stated that their findings, which reveal the cumulative impact of growing up in this country’s most disadvantaged communities, are “consistent with Wilson’s foundational arguments regarding the consequences of spatially concentrated poverty, which motivated nearly all recent studies of neighborhood effects.”

The findings presented in these studies suggest that neighborhood effects are not solely structural. Among the effects of living in segregated neighborhoods over extended periods is repeated exposure to cultural traits that emanate from or are the products of racial exclusion—traits, such as verbal skills, that may impede successful maneuvering in the larger society. As Sharkey pointed out “when we consider that the vast majority of black families living in America’s poorest neighborhoods come from families that have lived in similar environments for generations . . . continuity of the neighborhood environment, in addition to continuity of individual economic status, may be especially relevant to the study of cultural patterns and social norms among disadvantaged populations.”

Steven R. Holloway and Stephen Mulherin also captured the importance of cumulative neighborhood effects in another important longitudinal study. Pointing out that The Truly Disadvantaged gave inadequate empirical attention to adolescents, Holloway and Mulherin analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) and found that living in poor neighborhoods during adolescence had long-term effects on labor market outcomes, partly caused by the limited ability to accumulate early work experience. Thus, “adolescent neighborhood poverty appears to have an independent and lasting effect on adult labor market experience—an effect that is greater for males than females, yet one that appears to be transmitted though accumulation of work experience more for females than for males.”

Finally, the effects of residence in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods on psychological well-being was the subject of a study by Catherine E. Ross, John R. Reynolds, and Karlyn J. Geis. Analyzing survey data from a representative sample of Illinois residents that was linked to census-tract information about neighborhood poverty and stability, the authors found a significant difference in the effects of neighborhood stability in affluent neighborhoods as opposed to poor neighborhoods. Whereas stability, defined as neighborhoods that “have a high percent-
age of persons who have lived in the same residence (house or apartment) for the past five years,” is associated with low levels of distress in affluent neighborhoods, the opposite is true in disadvantaged neighborhoods.78 Noting that arguments in The Truly Disadvantaged linked high rates of poverty and neighborhood stability, that is, the relative inability of poor residents to escape to safer and more affluent neighborhoods, Ross and her colleagues pointed out that residents of poor, stable neighborhoods face much higher levels of stress because of high levels of disorder. “The disorder common in poor, stable neighborhoods mediates much of the joint effect of neighborhood stability and poverty on distress because it increases resident’s perceptions that they are powerless to leave dangerous places.”79

Social Isolation and Concentration Effects

As noted above, two of the key concepts of The Truly Disadvantaged are social isolation and concentration effects. A number of studies have tested and provided support for propositions in the book that incorporate these two concepts.80 This section focuses on research that extends or advances these propositions.

In a quantitative longitudinal study, Roberto G. Quercia and George G. Galster used my concept of social isolation to test their theory on threshold effects. They defined a threshold effect as “a dynamic process in which the magnitude of the response changes significantly as the triggering stimulus exceeds threshold effects.” And they reviewed and assessed the available empirical research in which thresholds are manifested in neighborhood change to address the following question: “Is there sufficient evidence to adopt neighborhood thresholds as a working hypothesis?”81 They found evidence of threshold effects that lends support to my argument that poverty concentration effects should result “in an exponential increase in . . . forms of social dislocation,”82 and their review of the disparate empirical and theoretical literature on threshold effects related to neighborhood change “supports the contention that threshold effects should be adopted as a working hypothesis.”83

In another quantitative longitudinal study, Kenneth C. Land, Patricia L. McCall, and Lawrence E. Cohen incorporated my concepts of concentration effects and social isolation in an examination of the structural covariates of homicide rates across time and social space.84 They showed that the existing empirical studies on the structural covariates of homicide rates have yielded mixed results across different time periods and different geographical regions. Land and his colleagues used The Truly Disadvantaged’s theoretical arguments on social isolation and concentration
effects to help tease out the problems of previous studies. The authors pointed out that concentration effects and social isolation represent new ideas to explain the problems that previous studies have had in identifying causal effects involving the structural determinants of crime. The authors stated that these concepts help explain the relationship between homicide rates and the persistent covariation of the components of their index of resource-deprivation (e.g., median family income, the percentage of families living below the official poverty line, the Gini index of family income inequality, the percentage of black families in an area, and the percentage of children age eighteen or under not living with both parents).85

The impact of social isolation and concentration effects in the inner-city ghetto is clearly demonstrated in a number of qualitative studies. In the qualitative research component of our Urban Poverty and Family Life Study in Chicago, we found that, overall, the personal friendship networks of blacks (both male and female) are very limited.86 For example, the poor blacks we talked to in our fieldwork were less likely to have at least one employed close friend than were Mexican immigrants of similar income and education. Because these people lacked friends with jobs, they tended to not hear about possible job opportunities or even different types of employment. This form of social isolation handicapped the residents of inner-city black neighborhoods; as many stable working neighbors drifted away, the ties that connected the remaining residents to the world of work came undone. Analysis of our ethnographic data for the remaining poor and often unemployed residents revealed that "social contacts were a useful means of gaining informal work to help make ends meet but far less often successful in helping with steady employment in the formal economy; networks existed but largely lacked the capacity to help lift residents into the formal labor market."87

Moreover, our data on job-search behavior revealed that black men and women in the inner city were less likely than Mexican immigrants to report that they received help from a friend or relative in obtaining their current job. The job-search strategies that black inner-city residents most frequently reported using were filling out an application at a place of business and seeking assistance at an employment office. Seldom did anyone report that they had heard about a job from an acquaintance or friend.

A study by Sandra Smith provides yet another perspective to help explain why informal job networks among blacks were less useful in helping jobseekers find employment in the formal economy. She found that distrust on the part of black jobholders and the defensive individualism typical of black jobseekers profoundly affected the use of job referrals in the search for employment. She pointed out that the neighborhoods of the black poor are "characterized by chronic poverty and a history of ex-
exploitation” and tend to feed the inclination to distrust, “inhibiting the development of mutually beneficial cooperative relationships such as those that facilitate the job-matching process.” The cooperation between job-seekers and jobholders is thwarted by a lack of mutual trust. Thus, low-skilled black jobseekers are frequently unable to use their friendships, acquaintances, and family ties—their informal network—to promote employment. Black jobholders were reluctant to refer their relatives and friends for jobs, because they feared that their own reputations with employers could be jeopardized if the work of the people they recommended was substandard.

On the one hand, jobholders justified denying assistance to their relatives and friends by saying that these individuals lacked motivation and individual responsibility. On the other hand, many low-skilled jobseekers, particularly black males, “cognizant of how they are perceived by others in their social milieu” and concerned about being demeaned for their unemployment, hesitated to approach their peers for referrals. This “go it alone” approach proves to be enormously self-defeating because employers in low-skilled labor markets heavily rely on personal referrals. Smith’s analysis provides an excellent example of how cultural frames (shared visions of human behavior developed from the microlevel processes of meaning and decision making) orient action—in this case the limited use of job referrals.

Another extension of the concepts of social isolation and concentration effects was featured in Alford Young’s insightful book The Minds of Marginalized Black Men. Based on an ethnographic study of low-income urban black men’s perceptions of mobility and opportunity, Young suggested that the impact of social isolation and concentration effects goes beyond access and proximity to individual institutions that promote social advancement. He went on to argue that there are differences in how social isolation and the effects of concentrated disadvantages are experienced among these men.

These differences in turn shape men’s worldviews on mobility and structural constraints. In other words, social isolation and the concentration of disadvantaged people within bounded geographic regions facilitate serial patterns of social contact and exposure that become significant factors for how people construct interpretations of social reality. These interpretations are crucial factors for initiating (or, in some cases, inhibiting) individual action on the part of the urban poor.

Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in two notable and illuminating ethnographies by Elijah Anderson and Sudhir Venkatesh. Unlike Young in The Minds of Marginalized Black Men, Anderson and Venkatesh did not necessarily challenge or extend the social isolation con-
cept, but rather applied it respectively to the inner-city ghettos of Philadelphia and Chicago. Each author revealed the existence of informal rules in the inner-city ghetto that govern interactions and shape how people engage one another and make decisions in situations imposed by poverty and racial segregation—situations that place severe constraints on social mobility. Over time, these processes lead to the development of informal codes that regulate behavior.

Anderson talked about the “code of the street,” an informal but explicit set of rules developed to govern interpersonal public behavior and regulate violence in Philadelphia’s inner-city ghetto neighborhoods, where crime is high and police protection is low. Anderson argued that the issue of respect is at the root of the code. In a context of limited opportunities for self-actualization and success, some individuals in the community, most notably young black males, devise alternative ways to gain respect that emphasize manly pride, ranging from simply wearing brand-name clothing to have the “right look” and talking the right way to developing a predatory attitude toward neighbors. Anderson pointed out, however, that no one residing in these troubled neighborhoods is unaffected by the code of the street, especially young people, who are drawn into this negative culture both on the streets and in the schools as they must frequently adopt “street” behavior as a form of self defense. As Anderson put it, “the code of the street is actually a cultural adaptation to a profound lack of faith in the police and the judicial system—and in others who would champion one’s personal security.”

A related informal but regulated pattern of behavior is described by Sudhir Venkatesh in his study of the underground economy in a ghetto neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago. Venkatesh illustrated how social isolation lends itself to a thriving underground economy; lacking mainstream opportunities and connections to mainstream society, men and women in this neighborhood are forced to look inward to make ends meet. Venkatesh pointed out that “the underground arena is not simply a place to buy goods and services. It is also a field of social relationships that enable off-the-books trading to occur in an ordered and predictable manner.” This trading often results in disagreements or breaches because there are no laws on the books, “but the main point is that in situations ostensibly criminal and often threatening to personal security, there is still a structure in place that shapes how people make decisions and engage one another.” In other words, informal rules actually govern what would appear on the surface to be random underground activity. These rules stipulate what is expected of those involved in these informal exchanges and where they should meet. Just as Anderson described a “code of the street”, Venkatesh talked about a “code of shady dealings.”
Like Anderson in his effort to explain the emergence of the code of the street, Venkatesh argued that the code of shady dealings is a response to circumstances in inner-city ghetto neighborhoods, where joblessness is high and opportunities for advancement are severely limited. Furthermore, both Anderson and Venkatesh clearly argued that these cultural codes ultimately hinder integration into the broader society and are therefore dysfunctional. In other words, they contribute to the perpetuation of poverty.

Anderson found that for some young men the draw of the street is so powerful that they cannot avail themselves of legitimate employment opportunities even when they become available. Likewise, Venkatesh maintained that adherence to the code of shady dealings impedes social mobility. The “underground economy enables people to survive but can lead to alienation from the wider world” he stated. For example, none of the work experience accrued in the informal economy can be listed on a resume for job searches in the formal labor market, and time invested in underground work reduces time devoted to accumulating skills or contacts for legitimate employment.

Finally, Mario Small creatively engaged The Truly Disadvantaged’s concept of social isolation by adding organizational texture to the study of urban inequality. Integrating quantitative data with field research in New York City, Small concluded that an organizational perspective enhances our understanding of the different aspects of social isolation. He introduced the concept organizational isolate to describe what is perhaps the most disadvantaged individual in a poor neighborhood.

His research reveals that the organizational isolate is one who is disconnected from neighborhood associations, community centers, childcare centers, schools, political clubs, hobby clubs, and gyms. “This person is effectively unplugged not merely from the most reliable way to form and sustain ties in a time-sensitive society,” stated Small, “but also from the organizational apparatus through which grants, information, consumer goods, discounts, political access, and many other resources are transferred.” The organizational isolate is handicapped not simply by the lack of friends but by the “absence of contexts in which friends continue to be made.” Accordingly, this person not only lacks ties to the bureaucracy, but lacks access to the numerous resources embodied in the organizational sphere, mechanisms that friends are unable to provide. “In a society increasingly structured around formal organizations, the organizational isolate is the person increasingly guaranteed to be left out.” Small’s notion of organizational isolate could very well become a key concept in the study of urban inequality and represents an important extension of the concept social isolation.
The Male Marriageable Pool Hypothesis

*The Truly Disadvantaged* argues that the sharp increase in black male joblessness since 1970 accounts in large measure for the rise in the rate of single-parent families, and that since jobless rates are highest in the inner-city ghetto, rates of single parenthood are also highest there. However, research on the relationship between male employment and rates of marriage and single parenthood is mixed. Although there is a strong association between rates of marriage and both employment status and earnings at any given point in time, national longitudinal studies suggest that these factors account for a relatively small proportion of the overall decline in marriage among African-Americans. Harvard professor Christopher Jencks pointed out that the decline in the proportion of African-American men who were married and living with their wives was almost as large among those who had worked throughout the previous years as among black men in general.98 Also, studies have shown only modest support for the hypothesis linking the sharp rise in poor single-parent families to the declining employment status and income of young black men.99

However, most of these studies are based on national data and other highly aggregate data, not data specific to inner-city neighborhoods where many experiences relate to race and poverty. As Daniel J. Lichter, Felicia B. LeClere, and Diane K. McLaughlin pointed out, the use of national data is potentially problematic “because spatial variation in marriage and family behavior is substantial.”100 To address this problem, Lichter and his colleagues used local area data from the 1980 Public Use Microdata sample (D file). Developing measures that represent variations of *The Truly Disadvantaged*’s “male marriageable pool index,” their data clearly reinforce my argument that a shortage of economically attractive men in local markets depresses female marriage rates. “The apparent retreat from traditional family structures may be located in black men’s deteriorating economic circumstances,” they concluded, “particularly in metropolitan central cities where over half of these young African American men today are jobless, employed part time, or working at poverty-level wages.”101

Support for this conclusion is found in our study of family life and poverty in Chicago, which also used local data and addressed the question of how much of the decline in the black marriage rate in the inner city can be accounted for by the increasing joblessness among black males.102 Our study was not longitudinal, but we did collect retrospective (or life-history) marriage and employment data that helped us estimate trends over time. An analysis of respondents’ retrospective data comparing the employment experiences of different age groups (cohorts) revealed that
marriage rates dropped much more sharply among jobless black fathers than among employed black fathers. But this drop applies only to the younger cohorts. Analyzing data from our survey, Mark Testa and Marilyn Krogh found that while employment had no significant effect on the likelihood that black single fathers ages thirty-two to forty-four would eventually marry, it increased the likelihood of legitimation by eight times for those single fathers eighteen to thirty-one years old.103

Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas’s impressive book *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage* also relied on local data to address the relationship between male employment and marriage. More specifically, Edin and Kefalas collected and analyzed data on low-income black, white, and Puerto Rican single mothers in Camden, New Jersey, one of America’s poorest cities, and in eight poor neighborhoods in Philadelphia.104 The authors found that the low-income young mothers to whom they talked valued motherhood highly. Indeed, their identity, emotional fulfillment, personal success, and hope for the future were tied to motherhood. The thought of not being a parent or of postponing parenting until their thirties, a common practice for middle-class women, was anathema to the women in their study. However, their respondents also valued marriage and hoped to be married some day. Edin and Kefalas forcefully argued that poor women postpone marriage not because they value it lightly but because they feel that they cannot commit to marriage until they are confident of success.

Basically the problem they face is that the men to whom they have access tend not to be marriageable because of a range of problems—poor education, chronic joblessness, low earnings, criminal records, spells of incarceration, drug and alcohol abuse, intimate violence, and chronic infidelity—not solely male employment as argued in *The Truly Disadvantaged*. For example, as Bruce Western and Christopher Wilderman have noted, incarceration severely damages a man’s marriageability.105

Edin and Kefalas pointed out that there is a short supply of good, decent, trustworthy men in the world of the women in their study. The better-off men pair off with the better-off women. It is not surprising that the relationships these women have with the fathers of their children are plagued with physical abuse, mistrust, and infidelity. The women therefore wait until they can find a man they can trust, a man who has, over time, proven himself to be a dependable and responsible partner and father. Their dreams include financial security and having a house before getting married. And because all of these conditions are so difficult to meet, they become mothers long before they become wives, and some never marry.
Major Empirical Challenges to *The Truly Disadvantaged*

The major objective of *The Truly Disadvantaged* was to explain the deterioration of conditions in the inner-city ghetto since 1970. Accordingly, the book was not a discussion and analysis of the factors that gave rise to the formation of the ghetto, which would certainly involve a detailed discussion of the legacy of historic racism, discrimination, and segregation. Nonetheless, a number of writers failed to note this distinction and proceeded to critique the book for paying insufficient attention to the factor of race in the formation of the black ghetto. Race, of course, continues to be a major problem in exacerbating life experiences in the inner-city ghetto, but as I attempted to show in *The Truly Disadvantaged*, the most powerful factors in the increasing concentration of poverty and related social dislocations since 1970 were structural changes in the economy and the out-migration of higher income families from the inner-city ghetto. A history of racial subjection made the black inner-city poor particularly vulnerable to these changes. As the late black economist Vivian Henderson argued three decades ago, racism put African Americans in their economic place and stepped aside to watch changes in the modern economy make the place in which they find themselves even more precarious.106

If I were writing *The Truly Disadvantaged* today, I would fully elaborate and make explicit the important distinction between the legacy of racial subjugation and the more contemporary changes that aggravate the conditions created by this legacy, changes that were the focus of *The Truly Disadvantaged*.

I would also provide a more nuanced and dialectical position on the interaction effects between social structure and cultural constraints. As Loïc Wacquant, and Michèle Lamont and Mario Small, have pointed out, these two dimensions were not clearly distinguished in *The Truly Disadvantaged*, where I tended to discuss culture as if it were solely a by-product of social structural forces.107 Since the publication of *The Truly Disadvantaged* I have worked to move beyond this position with a more sophisticated discussion of culture that gives it greater analytic autonomy.108 For example in my book *More than Just Race* I discussed how some cultural patterns in the inner-city ghetto reflect informal rules that shape how individuals interact or engage one another and make decisions.

The decision-making often involves perceptions about how the world works—what we call meaning making. The meaning-making and decision-making processes evolve over time in situations imposed by poverty and racial segregation, situations that impede social mobility. To state this in formal sociological terms, culture mediates the impact of structural
forces such as poverty and racial segregation. In other words, residents of the ghetto develop ways, often quite creative, to respond and adjust to chronic racial and economic subordination, as reflected in meaning-making and decision-making processes, including those resulting in the creation of informal cultural codes that regulate behavior. My discussion of the works of Elijah Anderson and Sudhir Venkatesh in the previous section provides examples of such cultural codes in inner-city ghetto neighborhoods.

Finally, I would also give more attention to the role of political factors in producing and aggravating these conditions. Indeed, a major and justified criticism of The Truly Disadvantaged raised by authors such as Loïc Wacquant is the lack of attention given to the impact of state policies on inner-city neighborhoods. As I emphasized in my recent book More than Just Race, federal government policies, even those that are not explicitly racial, have had a profound impact on inner-city neighborhoods. Some of these policies are clearly motivated by racial bias, such as those that represent the legacy of racism, including the FHA’s redlining of black neighborhoods in the 1940s and 1950s, and the federal government’s decision to confine construction of public housing projects mainly to poor, black, inner-city neighborhoods. In other cases, including those that represent the periods covered in The Truly Disadvantaged, it seems that racial bias or concerns about race influenced but were not the sole inspiration for political decisions, such as the fiscal policies of the New Federalism, which resulted in drastic cuts in federal aid to cities whose populations had become more brown and black.

The point of conservative fiscal policy—no matter whose administration promulgated it (Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, or George W. Bush)—was ostensibly to subject government to financial discipline. Nevertheless, the enactment of these policies creates financial constraints that make it difficult to generate the political support to effectively combat problems such as joblessness, drug trafficking, AIDS, family stress, and failing schools—problems that disproportionately affect residents of the inner-city ghetto.

And other policies that range from those that clearly lack a racial agenda to those where the line between racial and nonracial is somewhat gray have had a profound impact on inner cities and their poor black residents: federal transportation and highway policy that created an infrastructure for jobs in the suburbs; mortgage-interest tax exemptions and mortgages for veterans that jointly facilitated the exodus of working- and middle-class white families from inner-city neighborhoods; urban renewal and the building of freeway and highway networks through the hearts of many cities, which led to the destruction of many viable low-income
black neighborhoods; and the absence of effective labor-market policies to safeguard the real value of the minimum wage, thereby making it more difficult for the inner-city working poor to support their families. These developments have occurred in many cities across the country, but they perhaps have been felt more in the older, central cities of the Midwest and Northeast—the traditional Rust Belt—where depopulated poverty areas have experienced even greater problems.

But there have been other major criticisms that address issues actually raised in the book. Roger Waldinger's book *Still the Promised City* has been described in a number of circles as a major challenge to *The Truly Disadvantaged*’s argument on the impact of the decline in manufacturing jobs on black employment. Analyzing data collected in the city of New York, Waldinger contended that it was the ethnic queuing process—where the more advantaged ethnic groups are pulled up the job ladder by economic growth, and the niches left vacant are filled by lower-ranking groups—and African Americans' preferences for employment in the public sector that contributed to black employment woes, not industrial restructuring/flight out of the city or technological shifts. Whereas immigrants in New York were willing to take these lower-level jobs, argued Waldinger, African Americans who arrived in the city a generation ago, and have job aspirations similar to those of whites, tended to reject such jobs.

Moreover, employers of minimum-wage jobs find immigrants more satisfactory than unskilled blacks. Waldinger contended that better-educated African Americans have carved out niches in the public sector, which requires skills that lower-educated blacks lack, thus creating an economic schism whereby public sector employees maintain good jobs, while the less educated fall further down the economic ladder.

With considerable fanfare, Waldinger used this theory to debunk the restructuring/deindustrialization thesis. However, he never raised the question of whether his analysis is applicable to cities other than New York, particularly those on the East Coast or in the Midwest, where data from studies, as discussed above, lend strong support to the restructuring/deindustrialization thesis. In this connection, Waldinger argued that blacks were never hurt by the departure of manufacturing jobs from New York, because they were never concentrated in the manufacturing sector of that city. But he neglected to mention other studies that show the disproportionate concentration of blacks in manufacturing in cities like Chicago, Pittsburgh, Detroit, and Philadelphia, just to mention a few. In short, Waldinger's theory of ethnic niches and labor-market queues as applied to New York should be viewed as an important qualification to the restructuring/deindustrialization thesis, not a refutation. At the same time
his attention to the role of immigrants in the overall job-selection and hiring process is important, a subject that was not really addressed in *The Truly Disadvantaged*.

Perhaps the most widely discussed challenge to *The Truly Disadvantaged* has been the work of Douglas Massey and his colleagues.\(^{111}\) I maintained that one of the major factors involved in the growth of ghetto poverty is the out-migration of higher-income residents from certain parts of the inner city, resulting in a higher concentration of residents in ghetto neighborhoods. Research by Massey and his colleagues found that although levels of interclass segregation among blacks increased during the period covered by *The Truly Disadvantaged*, it was not sufficient to account for the rising concentration of urban black poverty. They argued that because of persisting segregation higher income blacks “are less able to separate from the poor than the privileged of other groups.” Thus an increase in the poverty rate of a highly segregated group will automatically lead to an increase in concentrated poverty.\(^{112}\)

The conflicting findings and conclusions in *The Truly Disadvantaged* and in the work of Massey and his colleagues are associated with different measures of the growth of concentrated poverty. Massey and his colleagues use a segregation index to calculate the probability of intraclass contact among groups in metropolitan areas. Although this measure allows for the description of the overall level of concentrated poverty in Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSA), it does not identify specific ghetto and nonghetto neighborhoods. However, in a study that did indeed identify ghetto and nonghetto neighborhoods—focusing specifically on the cities of Philadelphia, Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Memphis—Paul Jargowsky and Mary Jo Bane found a significant geographical spreading of ghetto neighborhoods between 1970 and 1980. Areas that had become ghettos during that decade were mixed-income tracts in 1970 that were contiguous to areas identified as ghettos.\(^{113}\) Their findings clearly support the hypothesis that a major factor in the increase of ghetto poverty since 1970 has been the out-migration of nonpoor from mixed-income areas. The poor also departed these neighborhoods, but the nonpoor left at a faster rate leaving behind a population that was poorer in 1980 than in 1970. As the population spread out from mixed-income areas in 1970 to other areas, the next “ring” of areas that were mostly white and nonpoor became the home of a larger proportion of African Americans, including poor blacks, as nonpoor whites departed these areas, which experienced an overall decline in population.\(^{114}\)

Unfortunately, the important process involving the geographical spread of ghetto poverty is not captured in studies that focus on the concentration of poverty in SMSAs using a segregation index. Although such
studies are important for understanding the role of racial segregation in explaining changes in the level of metropolitan poverty concentration, the data they yield do not provide an appropriate test of the hypothesis that associates the increase of ghetto poverty with the higher-income black exodus from certain inner-city neighborhoods. In fact, I view the important research of Massey and his colleagues as complementary to The Truly Disadvantaged, not contradictory. Other writers such as Jeffrey Morenoff and Robert J. Sampson, Lincoln Quillian, and Kevin F. Gotham have reached similar conclusions. For example, Morenoff and Sampson, in discussing my depopulation hypothesis and Massey’s segregation hypothesis, stated: “These two viewpoints may appear to be mutually exclusive because one emphasizes the out-migration of blacks from poor neighborhoods, while the other highlights the forces that constrain middle- and upper-income blacks from moving very far away from those areas that have been overridden by poverty and crime. We argue, however, that the two perspectives can be reconciled by recognizing that both demographic mechanisms may be operating simultaneously, but in distinct spatial contexts.”

Finally, I would like to discuss the important research of David Harding who critiqued my discussion of social isolation in The Truly Disadvantaged. Based on his qualitative study of sixty adolescent boys who grew up in two very poor areas and one working-class area in Boston, Harding maintained that the social isolation of the residents from mainstream institutions and culture is overemphasized. Specifically, rather than featuring the dominance of “ghetto-specific” cultures, disadvantaged neighborhoods are instead characterized by cultural heterogeneity, which represents a variety of conflicting and competing cultural models. Accordingly, Harding stated that his research “is not built upon Wilson’s social isolation theory, which emphasizes the mainstream isolation and negative normative values of poor neighborhoods. Rather, it proposes an alternative framework for understanding the cultural context of poor neighborhoods: cultural heterogeneity.”

In considering Harding’s research, the crucial question is whether a scholar can respect a neighborhood’s diversity of cultural frames, modes, and narrative while also appreciating the value of my concept of social isolation. In other words, are the two mutually exclusive? The objective of my theory of the social transformation of the inner city, which includes arguments about the increase of social isolation, was to analyze the structural forces that produced conditions of increased concentrated poverty and joblessness and to examine the implications of these factors for inner-city residents. The arguments associated with my theory did not simply assert that people in the inner city lacked mainstream values; rather, the
arguments attempted to provide a theoretical explanation for why conditions in inner-city neighborhoods had changed over time and how social processes in those contexts resulted in increasing social isolation, as well as the behavior associated with it.

My theory of social isolation certainly does not argue that all residents of the inner-city ghetto lack mainstream values. Simply describing supposedly contrary evidence showing that, indeed, many people subscribe to mainstream values does not challenge this theory. What the theory attempts to explain is increasing social isolation, increasing poverty concentration, increasing joblessness, and the resultant changes in behavior. Does this mean that I fail to recognize that inner-city people also subscribe to mainstream values, as Harding seems to assert? Of course, it does not. Unlike The Truly Disadvantaged, Harding’s qualitative study, however theoretically interesting, cannot account for changing patterns of behavior. Nonetheless, I think that Harding’s work is important, and it certainly would have been good if I had complemented my theoretical arguments by emphasizing the heterogeneity of cultural values in the inner city as I subsequently did in publications such as When Work Disappears.118

Framing and Policies Influenced Directly and Indirectly by The Truly Disadvantaged

In The Truly Disadvantaged I argued that a combination of universal and targeted initiatives are needed to improve the life chances of the ghetto poor. However, I also argued that “the latter would be considered an offshoot of and indeed secondary to the universal programs.” In other words, “the important goal is to construct an economic-social reform program in such a way that the universal programs are seen as the dominant and most visible aspects by the general public. As the universal programs draw support from a wider population, the targeted programs would be indirectly supported and protected.”119 I thought that given American views about poverty and race, a program that appears to have a colorblind agenda would be the most realistic way to generate the broad political support that would be necessary to enact the required legislation. Harvard political scientist Theda Skocpol, who argued that the best way to combat poverty is through targeting within universalism, supported this position.120

However, this position drew criticisms from some scholars. For example, Robert Lieberman argued that “targeting within universalism” will not succeed if institutions are not in place to ensure that the right targets,
for example poor blacks, receive the benefits. I accept this criticism. Indeed since writing *The Truly Disadvantaged* my position on framing has changed. In addition to making sure that institutional mechanisms are in place to allow for an equitable distribution of resources, I also feel that in framing public policy we should not shy away from an explicit discussion of the specific issues of race and poverty; on the contrary, we should highlight them in our attempt to convince the nation that these problems should be seriously confronted and that there is an urgent need to address them. The issues of race and poverty should be framed in such a way that not only a sense of fairness and justice to combat inequality is generated, but also people are made aware that our country would be better off if these problems were seriously addressed and eradicated.

In other words, I now feel that appeals to America’s sense of fairness and justice will be more effective in the long run than attempting to neutralize the effects of racial biases by highlighting initiatives that seem to benefit all groups. This does not mean that I reject universal programs to combat poverty, such as the stimulus package, which includes programs to address the needs of the poor, including poor people of color. While I no longer support a framing that is specifically and expressly designed to appear race neutral or color blind, I fully support both race-specific and universal programs to address racial inequality, including problems of concentrated poverty in the inner city.

However, questions about the issue of framing notwithstanding, there are also questions about *The Truly Disadvantaged*’s actual impact on programs to combat concentrated black poverty. In this connection, officials in the federal government, as well as in certain municipal governments, have used arguments in *The Truly Disadvantaged* on social isolation and concentration effects to help provide the rationale for programs to address problems of concentrated poverty. One of the earliest and more notable of these initiatives is HUD’s HOPE VI—launched in the early 1990s to help overcome the adverse effects of public housing projects in blighted neighborhoods, including the revitalization of the worst public housing projects into mixed-income developments. The income mixing aspect of HOPE VI was conceived to address the problem of social isolation.

More recently, under the Obama administration, HUD adopted the Choice Neighborhood program, which in effect is designed to replace HOPE VI. The Choice Neighborhood program goes beyond the rehabilitation of physically deteriorated public housing neighborhoods, the focus of HOPE VI, and includes comprehensive neighborhood investments ranging from early childhood education to employment, safety, and transportation components. Also, as noted previously, HUD’s Moving to Op-
portunity experiment was framed as a test of *The Truly Disadvantaged*’s hypotheses on neighborhood effects. In short, as stated by Edward G. Goetz, “concentrated poverty is the organizing framework for much housing policy at the federal and local levels.”

A number of writers have been critical of this framework as applied to public policy. Indeed, some even go so far as to deny that research supports the adverse effects of concentrated poverty, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary—including the research discussed in this afterword on spatial mismatch, persistent poverty, depopulation, social isolation, and concentration effects. Indeed, one only has to read Robert Sampson’s landmark book *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect* to see that this claim lacks substance.

However, many of the criticisms of the actual policies involving efforts to confront concentrated poverty do in fact have some merit. Most notably, the criticisms of projects that are designed to promote deconcentration of public housing, projects that legitimate displacement and gentrification and often result in the displacement of inner-city residents without sufficient attention given to relocating them to more desirable neighborhoods. As Jeff R. Crump has argued, the plans to demolish public housing projects and replace them with mixed-income housing developments are designed, in many cases, to encourage middle- and upper-class people to relocate to the inner city. In the process former residents of public housing are often moved into private housing within urban ghettos. A number of the critics of this process maintain that *The Truly Disadvantaged* explicitly supports the deconcentration of public housing and is the main driver in this process.

A scholar cannot always be held responsible for how his or her work is used or misused. In *The Truly Disadvantaged* I sought to explain what causes the distinct phenomenon of concentrated poverty. My argument about the structural causes of concentrated poverty does not imply that these neighborhoods should be deconcentrated by displacing poor residents. In fact, one need not speculate about the policy implications of the research in *The Truly Disadvantaged*, since I explicitly propose a series of policy responses to the problems of concentrated poverty in *The Truly Disadvantaged*.

Nowhere do I suggest the forced relocation of the urban poor from housing projects or other centers of concentrated poverty as a policy option. On the contrary, my extended discussion of policy options, which flows from my analysis of the social transformation of the inner city, highlights macroeconomic policy to generate economic growth and tight labor markets; fiscal and monetary policies to stimulate noninflationary growth and increase the competitiveness of American goods on both the do-
mestic and international markets; and a national labor market strategy to make the labor force, including the black labor force, more adaptable to changing economic opportunities. I also advocated a family allowance program, a child support assurance program, and a child-care strategy.

These policies, I maintained, would address the problems of concentrated poverty by providing poor inner-city residents with resources that promote social mobility. I pointed out that social mobility often leads to geographic mobility. And geographic mobility would be enhanced if efforts to improve the economic and educational resources of inner-city residents were accompanied by legal action to effectively eliminate (1) the historic discriminatory government policies that routinely locate public housing for disadvantaged people of color in poor segregated neighborhoods and (2) the manipulation of zoning laws and discriminatory land use controls, or site selection policies, that thwarts the construction of affordable housing for low-income families and severely restricts their residence in communities that provide desirable services.

The point to be emphasized is that I proposed the creation of macroeconomic policy, labor market policy, and family policy to enable poor inner-city families to develop the resources they need to make their own mobility decisions and to remove the historic discriminatory obstacles that would curtail their social and geographic mobility. Given this comprehensive policy discussion, arguments that imply that this book supports the deconcentration of public housing as a policy option—despite the obvious benefits that accrue to poor families that participate in the successful programs involving housing vouchers and scattered-site public housing—are, to put it mildly, misplaced.

Conclusion

In many respects my review of the hundreds of studies generated by The Truly Disadvantaged has been gratifying. As the historian Thomas J. Sugrue pointed out, “The Truly Disadvantaged, published in 1987, was sweeping and synthetic, elegantly weaving together problems often considered separately from each other into an overarching theory of urban inequality.” The scope of this theory is reflected in the wide array of empirical research across disciplines to test my propositions, propositions that relate to economic restructuring, neighborhood effects, persistent and concentrated poverty, depopulation, social isolation, and family structure. Most of these studies either support or extend the hypotheses advanced in the book.

However, what is not elaborated in this afterword is the attention the
book has received outside of academia by the media, politicians, and the
general public. For example, *The Truly Disadvantaged* received front-
World*, and the *New Republic*. The book also received a featured profile in the *New York Times Week in Review* section, was selected by the edi-
tors of the *New York Times Book Review* as one of the fifteen best books of 1987, and was one of the winners of the *Washington Monthly*’s Annual
Book Award.127 Hopefully, this new edition of *The Truly Disadvantaged*, with this extended afterword, will once again engage academics, policy-
makers, and the media concerned with how sociological knowledge can shed light on some of the nation’s most important social problems.
Notes


Several empirical assessments of the size and growth of the underclass by social scientists appeared in the late 1980s, but rather than helping to draw attention to the underlying causes of chronic poverty, these studies tended to contribute to the perception that as a group the underclass was synonymous with deviant behavior. See Richard Nathan, “The Underclass—Will It Always Be with Us?” (paper presented at the New School for Social Research, New York, NY, 1996); and Earl R. Ricketts and Isabell Sawhill, “Defining and Measuring the Underclass,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 7 (1988): 316–25.


7. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
12. Social scientists tend to use census tracts as proxies for neighborhoods. Since the publication of this book, social scientists have designated high-poverty or ghetto-poverty areas as those with poverty rates of at least 40 percent. For example, in Chicago Loic Wacquant and I found that 82 percent of the residents who live in high-poverty census tracts inhabit the South and West Sides of the city in areas, most of which have been overwhelmingly black for half a century and more. These tracts make up the historic core of Chicago’s black ghetto. An additional 13 percent live in immediately adjacent tracts. Loic Wacquant and William Julius Wilson, “The Cost of Racial and Class Exclusion in the Inner City,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 501 (1990): 8–25.

Using the same rationale on a national level, Paul Jargowsky and Mary Jo Bane stated: “Based on visits to several cities, we found 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 rather closely with the judgments of city officials and local census bureau officials about which neighborhoods were ghettos.” “Ghetto Poverty in the United States, 1970–1980,” in *The Urban Underclass*, ed. C. Jencks and P. E. Peterson (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1991), 235–73.
14. The point here is that the elimination of racial barriers creates greater opportunities for the talented, more educated, and better-trained minority group members, because, as James Fishkin has pointed out, they possess the resources to compete most effectively. These resources derive from a variety of advantages made possible or provided by their families, including financial means, schooling, and peer groups. However, if the more advantaged members of minority groups profit disproportionately from policies that enhance individual opportunity, they also benefit disproportionately from policies of affirmative action based solely on their racial group membership. Minority individuals from the most advantaged families tend to be more heavily represented among those of their racial group most qualified for college admissions, higher paying jobs, and promotions. James Fishkin, *Justice, Equal Opportunity and the Family* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983).
16. Ibid., 28.
17. Ibid., 7.
19. Paul Jargowsky, Poverty and Place: Ghettoes, Barrios, and the American City (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997). Of the large cities in the United States, Boston is unique in that it includes a significant number of whites who live in high-poverty census tracts. Thus the use of the term white underclass would be more applicable to Boston than to other metropolises in this country. The term white underclass, based on my definition of underclass, could also be applied to segments of the white rural poor in the United States. See Cynthia Duncan, Worlds Apart: Why Poverty Persists in Rural America (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); and Cynthia Duncan, “Understanding Persistent Poverty: Social Class Context in Rural Communities,” Rural Sociology 61, no. 1 (1996): 103–24.
20. Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut used the term underclass to refer to those second generation Latino immigrants who have experienced the downward assimilation path, including residence in barrios, not the more stable and socially organized immigrant enclaves, and whose experiences are similar to those African Americans who reside in ghettos. See Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut, Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
21. See Kees Schuyt, “The New Emerging Underclass in Europe: The Experience of Long-Term Unemployment in Dutch Inner Cities” (paper presented at the Workshop on Social Policy and the Underclass, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, August 1990); Robert C. Kloosterman, “The Making of the Dutch Underclass? A Labour Market View” (paper presented at the Workshop on Social Policy and the Underclass, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, August 1990); Godfried Engbersen, “Modern Poverty in the Netherlands” (paper presented at the Workshop on Social Policy and the Underclass, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, August 1990); and Godfried Engbersen, Kees Schuyt, and Jaap Timmer, “Cultures of Unemployment: Long-Term Unemployment in Dutch Inner Cities” (working paper 4, Vakgroep Sociologie Rijksuniversiteit, Leiden, the Netherlands, 1990).


29. Sampson, “Moving to Inequality.”


33. It should be pointed out in this connection that a number of studies failing to support the presence of a neighborhood effect include an *operationalization* of neighborhood variables that are not theoretically driven and are therefore unable to identify causality. Several scholars have discussed the problem of arbitrary empirical measures of variables in some studies on neighborhood effects. See Jencks and Meyer, “The Social Consequences of Growing Up in a Poor Neighborhood”; Robert Sampson, Jeffrey Morenoff, and Thomas Gannon-Rowley, “Assessing Neighborhood Effects: Social Processes and New Directions in Research,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002): 443–78; and Robert J. Sampson, *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming), chap. 2 and 3.

34. Sampson, *Great American City*. 
35. Wilson, “Studying Inner-City Social Dislocations.”


38. Ibid., 817.

39. The authors pointed out: “It is tempting to argue that black residential predominance in these areas is responsible for the greater vulnerability to restructuring, because of problems faced by individual blacks in the labor market. However, the data do not support this argument, because the interaction effect between percentage black and restructuring is not statistically significant” (ibid., 815).


41. Ibid., 437. Many other studies have also gauged the adverse effects of the loss of manufacturing jobs on city residents. For example, Charles Jaret and his colleagues presented evidence that shows that the black-white income gap is less severe in metropolitan areas with a larger manufacturing base. They found that decreases in manufacturing jobs and increases in low-wage service jobs enlarge black-white income inequality. See Charles Jaret, Lesley W. Reid, and Robert M. Adelman, “Black-White Income Inequality and Metropolitan Socioeconomic Structure,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 25, no. 3 (2003): 305–34.


47. Wilson, *When Work Disappears*.


50. Ibid., 6.

51. Ibid., 32. An interesting argument, although not supported directly by empirical research, was advanced by Christopher Jencks. He maintained that economic and demographic shifts (principally declines in urban manufacturing) cannot fully account for increased black joblessness since 1965. Instead, he argued, two neglected forces contributed, in part, to the growth of the ghetto: the white middle class, in control of mass media, became more tolerant of deviant behavior, and blacks in the post–civil rights era became far less tolerant of subservient roles. See Christopher Jencks, *Rethinking Social Policy: Race, Poverty, and the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).


58. Quillian, "Migration Patterns."

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.; Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*; and Wilson, *When Work Disappears*.


62. Ibid., 244.

63. Ibid.


65. Sharkey, "Intergenerational Transmission of Context."

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid., 963.


69. Ibid., 846. Sampson and his colleagues created a composite measure of verbal ability based on results from two widely used tests given to their subjects—the Wide Range Achievement Test reading examination and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children vocabulary test.

70. Ibid., 846.


72. Ibid., 731. Wodtke, Harding, and Elwert stated, “By measuring neighborhood context throughout childhood, we are able to isolate the total effect of sustained exposure. Second, this study draws on novel methods that were specifically developed to resolve the difficult statistical problems related to dynamic selection into time-varying treatments” (ibid.).

73. Ibid., 732.


75. Steven R. Holloway and Stephen Mulherin, “The Effect of Adolescent
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76. Ibid., 448. It should be pointed out that despite the adverse effects of long-term residence in poor neighborhoods on adolescents, as reflected in labor market outcomes, one study concludes that most youths in poor neighborhoods are able to complete the developmental tasks of adolescence successfully. See Delbert Elliott, Scott Menard, Bruce Rankin, Amanda Elliott, David Huizinga, and William Julius Wilson, Good Kids from Bad Neighborhoods: Successful Development in Social Context (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).


78. Ibid., 582.

79. Ibid., 595.


It should be pointed out that the following discussion of social isolation and concentration effects focuses on studies of inner-city black neighborhoods, which were the focus of *The Truly Disadvantaged*. Based on his research in the Villa Victoria, a Puerto Rican housing project in South Boston, Mario Small critiqued the implicit assumption in *The Truly Disadvantaged* that high-poverty areas are resource poor. Small argued instead that, even though Villa Victoria is a high-poverty area, it is also rich in resources; though the presence of these resources within the Villa Victoria contributes to social isolation, because the residents have little incentive to venture outside the area. See Mario Small, Villa Victoria: The Transformation of Social Capital in a Boston Barrio (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004).


82. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, 57.


85. The authors also provided corroborating evidence for my argument “that concentration effects grew more severe from 1970 to 1980 in large cities” (ibid., 945).
86. Wilson, When Work Disappears.
89. Ibid., 23.
92. Anderson, Code of the Street, 34.
93. Venkatesh, Off the Books, 381.
94. Ibid., 377.
95. Ibid., 385.
97. Ibid., 196–97.
101. Ibid., 865.
102. Wilson, When Work Disappears.
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Science 621 (January 2009): 221–42. Also see Western, *Punishment and Inequality*.


113. Jargowsky and Bane. “Ghetto Poverty in the United States.” For a comprehensive study that used neighborhood measures instead of metropolitan averages and presented similar findings, see Claudia J. Coulton, Julian Chow, and Shanta Pandey, *An Analysis of Poverty and Related Conditions in Cleveland Area Neighborhoods* (Cleveland, OH: Center for Urban Poverty and Social Change, Case Western Reserve University, 1990).


114. Jargowsky and Bane, “Ghetto Poverty in the United States.”


118. See Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, chap. 3.
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