What remains to be addressed is the question of how the interpretation of these environmental influences by mainstream society affects hiring decisions, decisions that can reinforce or strengthen the economic marginality of inner-city blacks, including their high rate of joblessness.

The Meaning and Significance of Race: Employers and Inner-City Workers

Blacks reside in neighborhoods and are engaged in social networks and households that are less conducive to employment than those of other ethnic and racial groups in the inner city. In the eyes of employers in metropolitan Chicago, these differences render inner-city blacks less desirable as workers, and therefore many are reluctant to hire them. The degree to which this perception is based on racial bias or represents an objective assessment of worker qualifications is not easy to determine. Although empirical studies on race and employer attitudes are limited, the available research does suggest that African-Americans, more than any other major racial or ethnic group, face negative employer perceptions about their qualifications and their work ethic.

The Urban Poverty and Family Life Study's survey of a representative sample of Chicago-area employers (see Appendix B) indicates that many consider inner-city workers—especially young black males—to be uneducated, unstable, uncooperative, and dishonest. Furthermore, racial stereotyping is greater among employers with lower proportions of blacks in their workforce—especially blue-collar employers, who tend to stress the importance of qualities, such as work attitudes, that are difficult to measure in a job interview.

The survey featured face-to-face interviews with employers representing 179 firms in the city of Chicago and in surrounding Cook County that provided entry-level jobs. The sample is representative of the dis-

tribution of employment by industry and firm size in the county. The survey included a number of open-ended questions concerning employer perceptions of inner-city workers that yielded views concerning job skills, basic skills, work ethic, dependability, attitudes, and interpersonal skills. Of the 170 employers who provided comments on one or more of these traits, 126 (or 74 percent) expressed views of inner-city blacks that were coded as "negative"—that is, they expressed views (whether in terms of environmental or neighborhood influences, family influences, or personal characteristics) asserting that inner-city black workers—especially black males—bring to the workplace traits, including level of training and education, that negatively affect their job performance.

The chairman of a car transport company, when asked if there were differences in the work ethic of whites, blacks, and Hispanics, responded with great certainty:

> Definitely! I don't think, I know: I've seen it over a period of 30 years. I have it right in here. Basically, the Oriental is much more aggressive and intelligent and studious than the Hispanic. The Hispanics, except Cubans of course, they have the work ethnic [*sic*]. The Hispanics are mañana, mañana, mañana—tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow.
>
> *Interviewer:* You mentioned the case of native-born blacks.
> *Respondent:* They're the laziest of the bunch.
> *Interviewer:* That would relate to your earlier remarks about dependability. What is the reason for that?
> *Respondent:* The parents are that way so, what the hell, they didn't have a role model to copy, that's part of it.

The personnel manager of a suburban bakery stated: "We have some problems with blacks. . . . I find that the blacks aren't as hard workers as the Hispanics and—or the Italian or whatever. Their ethic is much different where they have more of the pride. The black kind of has a, you-owe-me kind of an attitude." According to another employer, the general manager of an inner-city hotel,

> I hate to admit it, yes. I see far more blacks thinking the employer has the obligation to give him a check for doing nothing. There are some whites that think that way, but, far more blacks. Not so

much the Hispanics. It even aggravates my black housekeeping supervisor. Why they think they're going to come in here and get a check for sitting around God only knows.

> *Interviewer:* Do you think the whites' work ethic has changed?
> *Respondent:* Yeah. In the last ten years, you know. I'd say some of the black attitude is rubbing off on them, that's what I'd say.

A manufacturer introduced a class distinction with this blunt assertion about the work ethic among blacks: "The black work ethic. There's no work ethic. At least at the unskilled. I'm sure with the skilled . . . as you go up, it's a lot different." A more nuanced discussion of the work ethic among blacks in terms of economic class status was provided by the director of an inner-city human resources firm:

> The question is, Is there a difference in the work ethic? . . . I see a tremendous amount of difference in the work ethics of the individuals who come out of different income groups . . . and that's where the difference is and if a black individual we're talking about comes out of an income group of, uh . . . you know, middle class, successful situation, I think the work ethic is probably exactly what it is for a white person coming out of the same kind of background. The reality, of course, is that there are many, many, many more black persons that come out of the other kind of milieu, but I don't know whether I'm begging the question or not. I really don't think it's a racial thing.

If some employers view the work ethic of inner-city poor blacks as problematic, many also express concerns about their honesty, cultural attitudes, and dependability—traits that are frequently associated with the neighborhoods in which they live. A suburban retail drugstore manager expressed his reluctance to hire someone from a poor inner-city neighborhood. "You'd be afraid they're going to steal from you," he stated. "They grow up that way [laughs]. They grow up dishonest and I guess you'd feel like, geez, how are they going to be honest here?" Concerns about theft prompted a suburban employer at an electrical services firm to offer this unique explanation of why he would not hire inner-city ghetto residents.

If you're in a white neighborhood . . . and you have a manufacturing firm and a ghetto person comes there to apply, it doesn't make any difference what color his skin is . . . if you know that's where he's from you know several things. One is that if you give him a job there, he's going to be unbelievably pressured to give information to his peer group in the ghetto . . . about the security system, the comings and goings of what's of value there that we could rip off. He's not a crook. He wants no part of it. But he lives in an area where he may be physically or in danger of his life if he doesn't provide the information to the people that live around him. As a manager, I know that. And I'm not going to hire him because of that. I'm not discriminating against him because he's black, I'm discriminating against him because he has a problem that he's going to bring to me. Now the fact that he is black and it happens that the people around him are black is only coincidental. In Warsaw they were Jews. They had the same problem.

The president of an inner-city manufacturing firm expressed a different concern about employing residents from certain inner-city neighborhoods.

If somebody gave me their address, uh, Cabrini Green, I might unavoidably have some concerns.
  Interviewer: What would your concerns be?
  Respondent: That the poor guy probably would be frequently unable to get to work and that . . . I probably would watch him more carefully even if it wasn't fair, than I would with somebody else. I know what I should do, though, is recognize that here's a guy that is trying to get out of his situation and probably will work harder than somebody else who's already out of there and he might be the best one around here. But I, I think I would have to struggle accepting that premise at the beginning.

Questions about the employment woes of blacks sometimes involved assumptions about cultural and family influences in the inner city. One employer asserted that "part of the culture that is dented in their minds [is] that the best thing to do is just go on to welfare and have the state support them"; another argued that blacks in the poorer neighborhoods are "culturally not prepared to work"; and a vice pres-

ident of an inner-city health service firm related the high jobless rate in the inner city to the disproportionate number of families that have weak employment histories:

I think it depends on previous generations . . . as to whether a family member has . . . worked, what kind of jobs they've held, how successfully they've held jobs and the like. I think that's where the difference is. . . . I think statistics will show that in your black and Hispanic areas there . . . are greater numbers who have not worked and therefore the work ethic of future generations is less.

An industrial relations manager of a Chicago water-heater firm had similar concerns.

I would think it's because . . . because of the values or the lack of values that those children grow up not having. . . . Not understanding why you come to work every day or why you have to work at all. They're in the mode . . . where they see more people not working . . . it's a way of life. It's not part of a framework. You know, I grew up . . . my father—he went to work every day. He could be half dead, you know, you don't realize those values that are instilled on you. Those children didn't have that benefit and they grew up screwed up because of that. . . . And that's a problem for us as employers, because we're . . . we're not a social agency.

The most common belief among the employers was that the social dislocations in the inner city are mainly a function of the environment in which blacks live. As one employer, a retail caterer, put it, "You and I can grow up going to school, coming home, looking forward to coming home or looking forward to going to a movie. In the inner-city neighborhood, they don't look forward to going to school because the streets are unsafe, the schools are unsafe. They don't look forward to coming home because home for them is on the street basically. And it becomes a way of life." A plant manager at an inner-city firm added:

The neighborhood itself that they live in is a real tough place to work and there's a lot of outside pressure that causes these people not to come to work and I believe a lot of employers look at past

history and it seems like nowadays you can't really get a true background from an employee.

Concerns about certain aspects of the inner-city milieu often resulted in specific statements about why the workers from that environment would not be hired. The following statements were made by an employer at an inner-city advertising agency:

I necessarily can't tell from looking at an address whether someone's from Cabrini Green or not, but if I could tell, I don't think I'd want to hire them. Because it reflects on your credibility. If you came in here with this survey, and you were from one of those neighborhoods, I don't know if I'd want to answer your questions. I'd wonder about your credibility.

Some employers pointed out that certain areas of the inner city were to be avoided. For example, one stated:

Before I took this job there was an area of Chicago on the West Side that we'd hired, you know, some groups of employees from . . . and our black management people, who do know the areas, they'd say, "No, stay away from that area. That's a bad area. Anybody who comes from that area . . ." And then it came out, too, that sooner or later we did terminate everybody from that certain area for stealing or, you know . . . things worse than attendance, drinking . . . and uh . . . so there probably was some merit to what they were saying.

In addition to qualms about the work ethic, character, family influences, cultural predispositions, and the neighborhood milieu of inner-city residents, the employers frequently mentioned concerns about applicants' language skills and educational training. A blue-collar employer made the following observation:

My guess is that the problem is related to the level of education. I think, even for your minimal jobs, for some of those jobs you know you have to have a little bit of math backgrounds, for example, in some of our machine operations. If you're handicapped by not having some of the basic skills you need, if you're hired and

you can't make it on the job because you don't even have the basic skills, that's part of the problem.

An employer from a computer software firm in Chicago expressed the view "that in many businesses the ability to meet the public is paramount and you do not talk street talk to the buying public. Almost all your black welfare people talk street talk. And who's going to sit them down and change their speech patterns?" A Chicago real estate broker made a similar point:

A lot of times I will interview applicants who are black, who are sort of lower class. . . . They'll come to me and I cannot hire them because their language skills are so poor. Their speaking voice for one thing is poor . . . they have no verbal facility with the language . . . and these . . . you know, they just don't know how to speak and they'll say "salesmens" instead of "salesmen" and that's a problem. . . . They don't know punctuation, they don't know how to use correct grammar, and they cannot spell. And I can't hire them. And I feel bad about that and I think they're being very disadvantaged by the Chicago Public School system.

Another respondent defended his method of screening out most job applicants on the telephone on the basis of their use of "grammar and English."

I have every right to say that that's a requirement for this job. I don't care if you're pink, black, green, yellow or orange, I demand someone who speaks well. You want to tell me that I'm a bigot, fine, call me a bigot. I know blacks, you don't even know they're black. So do you.

Finally, an inner-city banker claimed that many blacks in the ghetto "simply cannot read. When you're talking our type of business, that disqualifies them immediately; we don't have a job here that doesn't require that somebody have minimum reading and writing skills."

Although many of the employers' negative comments reflected general criticisms of inner-city blacks, when specific reference was made to gender, black males bore the brunt of their criticisms. Indeed,

as we shall soon see, employers expressed a clear preference for black females over black males. A significant number of the employers stated that previous experiences had soured their opinion of inner-city black male workers. As seen in Table 5.1, a substantial percentage of the employers in each occupational category feel that a lack of basic skills and a lack of work ethic are the two main reasons why inner-city black males have difficulty finding and retaining employment.

The following explanation for the inner-city black male's employment woes was offered by an employer at a two-year suburban college.

> If they get the job, in the first couple of weeks or so, everything seems to be fine, or maybe even the first 90 days but somehow when they get past that, you see a definite, a marked difference. . . . They tend to laziness or there's something there. I've seen this pattern over and over again, you know. I think people are willing to give them a chance and then they get the chance and then it's like they really don't want to work.

The vice president of a Chicago offset-printing firm stated:

> Well, I worked with them in the military, and the first chance they get, they'll slack off, they don't want to do the job, they feel

TABLE 5.1

OBSERVATIONS AS TO WHY INNER-CITY BLACK MALES CANNOT FIND OR RETAIN JOBS EASILY

Rationale	Frequency (%) of Responses by Employers' Profession				
	Customer Service	Clerical	Craft	Blue-Collar	All Employers
Lack of job skills	9.0	7.1	12.5	17.6	11.7
Lack of basic skills	44.5	37.5	37.5	36.8	38.5
Lack of work ethic	25.0	48.0	25.0	52.9	36.9
Lack of dependability	13.6	14.3	12.5	22.0	16.8
Bad attitude	15.9	16.1	25.0	19.1	17.3
Lack of interpersonal skills	18.2	10.7	0	3.0	8.9
Racial discrimination	15.9	14.3	0	13.2	13.4
Unweighted N	44	56	8	68	179

Source: Data from the 1988 employers' survey conducted as a part of the Urban Poverty and Family Life Study, Chicago.

like they don't have to, they're a minority. They want to take the credit and shift the blame. It's like this guy who runs the elevator [a young black man operated the elevator in the buildings], he's like that. They procrastinate. Some of them try. The ones that have higher education are better than that, but a lot of them don't get an education.

A suburban employer drew upon previous experience to offer the following reasons why inner-city black men cannot find jobs:

> It's not every case but the experiences that I've had is the fact that they're not willing to set themselves straight, put 100% effort into their job and try to develop and build within a company. The experiences that I've run into with it is that they develop bad habits, I guess is the best way to put it. Not showing up to work on time. Not showing up to work. Somewhere down the road they didn't develop good work habits.

Employers at inner-city firms tended to be the most critical of inner-city black male workers. One stated: "I just personally, I've had problems with them in the past. . . . They seem to have a lot of associated problems going on at the same time, personal problems, marital problems, that made it difficult for them to get to work every day on time. . . . It's mostly a problem of just getting to work." An inner-city manufacturer at a tool, die, and metal-stamping plant cited past interviews of job seekers when discussing the reasons for his unfavorable opinion of black male workers:

> Ah, let's see, I just went through spot welder and I interviewed over 30 of them, the majority of them were black, pretty bad. Yes, I would say that the majority of them have an unstable history. And you can tell attitude just by talking to a person, you know. It's subjective, but it's me talking with 30 years experience, but yeah, I can stake my claim, my reputation, and I can do it. I can interview, and somebody comes in with cut-off shorts on and looking for a job, I just send them away.

A hotel employer in Chicago indicated that he had had some good success with black male workers but that one of the reasons so many of

them do not find employment is that their applications reveal high job turnover. He pointed out that when asked why they had left their previous job,

> they'll, on the application itself, just say something like "didn't get along with supervisor" and then the next job, reason for leaving, "didn't get along with supervisor," next job reason for leaving, "didn't like it," and they'll have gone through three or four jobs in a matter of six or eight months and then they don't understand why they don't get hired here.

A suburban employer added: "They don't know how to dress when they come to an interview. They bring fourteen other people with them."

Tardiness and absenteeism was a concern expressed by several employers. "We've hired black guys before and they don't show up and they call in sick," stated the general manager of an inner-city restaurant. The chairman of a car transport service voiced a similar complaint. When asked why inner-city black men cannot find jobs, he stated:

> Number 1 . . . they're not dependable. They have never been taught that when you have a job you have to be there at a certain time and you're to stay there until the time is finished. They may not show up on time. They just disappear for an hour or two at a time. They'll call you up and say, "Ahhh, I'm not coming in today" and they don't even call you up.
> *Interviewer*: So they're undependable, that's one.
> *Respondent*: And the second thing is theft.

Another employer expressed his misgivings about inner-city black males in the course of relating his experiences with one of his previous workers. Agreeing that discrimination probably plays a role among most employers in the hiring of blacks, he went on to explain why:

> I think one of the reasons in all honesty is because we've had bad experience in that sector . . . and believe me I've tried. And as I say, if I find . . . whether he's black or white, if he's good and you know we'll hire him. We are not shutting out any black specifically. But I will say that our experience factor has been bad. We've

had more bad black employees over the years than we had good. . . . We hire a young black [as a stockman] and he just absolutely hated anybody telling him anything. I mean if you criticized him or if you gave him an order or an instruction he absolutely resented it. And after a while he started fighting with the other employees. . . . One of the women says, look, I need a case of this or this or this and he doesn't do it, doesn't get it for them and they are waiting to fill an order and he ignores them and then when they complained he would get mad and start swearing at them. You know so it's things like this that you know you can't, can't tolerate it. And he was one of the few that we have let go. And believe me I can count on one hand over the years how many employees we've actually fired. We don't do it indiscriminately. . . .
> *Interviewer*: So do you think because of experiences like that, do you think that you are a little bit more leery when a black man comes in here than a white man?
> *Respondent*: Yes, in all honesty I probably am, but . . . as I say, I hired this other one, he was a gem.

Other employers expressed reservations about inner-city black men in terms of work-related skills. They "just don't have the language skills," stated a suburban employer. The president of an inner-city advertising agency highlighted the problem of spelling.

> I needed a temporary a couple months ago, and they sent me a black man. And I dictated a letter to him, he took shorthand, which was good. Something like "Dear Mr. So and So, I am writing to ask about how your business is doing." And then he typed the letter, and a good while later, now not because he was black, I don't know why it took so long. But I read the letter, and it's "I am writing to *ax* about your business." Now you hear about them speaking a different language and all that, and they say *ax* for ask. Well, I don't care about that, but I didn't say *ax*, I said ask.

Several of the employers of blue-collar workers drew a connection between the problems of inner-city black male joblessness and the failure of some applicants to pass drug-screening tests. For example, the manager of a suburban glass-container firm pointed out:

We've got the unfortunate situation of, through our drug screening, disqualifying roughly 30 percent of those people that get through the screening process and get to the physical exam. We're losing about 30 percent of them through the drug screening process. I think it's a shame, I think it's a sin, it's a disgrace to our society, and as far as I'm concerned it's one of the number one things that we've got to attack.

The president of an inner-city trucking firm likewise stated: "You're going to find a lot of them coming through that comes in there—we've found—we drug test them as part of the physical—and there's a lot of them on drugs. We used to—we were a customs bonded carrier and we used to polygraph them all and we would find that a lot of them are thieves."

Many employers often develop negative opinions of black male workers in the absence of previous firsthand experience. A manufacturer explained that nobody wanted to hire the inner-city black male because of the stereotype that

they don't want to work, they don't want to do anything. I think that's a big part of it. I don't think anybody wants to admit it but I think that's primarily it. . . . They're ignorant, they don't work, they don't want to work . . . they got a real bad rap, and uh . . . nobody, I don't think anybody will come out and admit it, but I think that's the first thing they consider in a black applicant.

The UPFLS employer survey clearly suggests that although black women also suffer as a consequence of the negative attitudes held by employers, nonetheless, in an overwhelming majority of cases in which inner-city black males and females are compared, the employers preferred black women. When asked how the situation of inner-city black males compares with that of black females, almost one-half of the employers stated that there is a gender difference in inner-city workers' success in finding and retaining employment. Only 14 percent indicated that there was no difference between the employment experiences of inner-city black males and those of black females. A large proportion (43 percent) had no opinion, however, mainly because they had not had any direct employment-related experiences with blacks in general or with black men or black women in particular.

TABLE 5.2

EMPLOYERS' OBSERVATIONS ABOUT GENDER
DIFFERENCES IN INNER-CITY BLACKS' ABILITIES TO FIND
AND RETAIN A JOB

Observations on Blacks' Chances for Employment	Frequency (%) of Responses by Employers' Profession				
	Customer Service	Clerical	Craft	Blue-Collar	All Employers
Positive toward women	61.1	93.1	100	71.4	77.9
Negative toward women*	5.6	3.4	0	28.6	13.0
Unweighted N	18	29	2	28	77

* Employers with negative feelings about black women's chances for employment expressed concerns about child care and other family responsibilities.

Source: Data from the 1988 employers' survey conducted as a part of the Urban Poverty and Family Life Study, Chicago.

As revealed in Table 5.2, of those respondents who felt that the employment situation of inner-city black men and that of black women differ, almost 78 percent felt that black women have a better chance of finding and retaining employment because they are either more responsible and determined or have better attitudes and a better work ethic.

"I think that probably they [inner-city black females] are much more responsible in what we've found," stated the general manager of a suburban luggage retail store. "So many single-family homes right now you'll find that they're working two jobs trying to support a family. You see it all the time. In many, many cases they're the ones that are supporting their four kids and the husband's whereabouts are unknown."

The associate vice president of a health services firm in the inner city commented: "I think probably because employers' experience . . . historically, has been better with black females or minority females than with minority males in terms of the basics—attendance, productivity, work ethic and all that, there is less hesitancy to hire black women." The vice president of an interstate trucking firm offered the following opinion: "No, I think they're a little steadier in that many of them have families that they're concerned with and the job is very important to them." According to the vice president of an inner-city general hospital services firm, the image of black women differs from that of black men. He remarked:

I think there's a different perception of—generally about black women. I think the perception—whether it's right or wrong—may be that they very likely are the heads of households, very likely the ones that are assuming the responsibility for the care of children, very possibly ones that appear to be a little bit more stable in the work environment in terms of their reliability and that type of thing.

Inner-city black women "have a need to work," stated a Chicago employer, "and I think that need translates in many cases into a very responsible employee. Certainly the education can still be a problem, but the stigma of crime, of gangs, of lack of responsibility, I certainly think they don't suffer the same problems that a black male would have in terms of getting a job."

The manager of a computer technology business located in the inner city stated:

> Well, I think black women have so much responsibility at home and so many—you know, the single working mother that white women are experiencing now, the black woman has always experienced that. And she's out taking care of other people's children and nobody's home taking care of hers or, you know, she is providing for, oftentimes, several families, not just her own but her children's families, a multiple-family situation. So, because of personal problems she may have poor attendance or may not be able to concentrate on a job all the time and that—which I think a lot of is becoming a problem for white women too, but, I think it's been more prevalent for black women in the past. White women are starting to learn what those kinds of problems are.

A small number of the respondents remarked that black males were less successful than black females because they were more threatening to employers. According to one respondent who hires clerical workers:

> Black men present a particularly menacing demeanor to white men. I think they are frightened by them. I think they do not speak the same language. I don't think they use the same codes, I think the whole communication process is a very threatening one.

And to the black male, whose need to assert himself is so crucial, because he feels so totally battered in his environment, his sense of manhood is very turned off or intimidated or feels the need to rail against any efforts on the part of the white male establishment to in any way emasculate him further. And I think, there's a tremendous communications block that they come to because both are in some ways frightened and intimidated by the other. Therefore I think many times, when companies hire black males, they hire the most complacent, the least aggressive, the most eunuchish type they can get because they don't want to have some crazy, who's going to become some kind of warmonger, running around the company and spatting. They hire the ones that are most acceptable, and sometimes they're not necessarily the brightest or the most capable.

The executive director of an inner-city charity had similar views:

> People are afraid of black men. If it is a choice of a black man or a woman to do the job I think that an employer would take a black woman. But, if I were going to hire for a job I would take a black woman over a black man because of this situation and then also I would be less afraid of a black woman. I would say, well, maybe he's got a criminal record, but, he's—or I would just be a little bit more apprehensive.

Of the few respondents (12.9 percent) who felt that inner-city black women had greater difficulty than black men in finding and retaining employment, most felt it was because women were burdened with family and child care responsibilities. As one employer put it:

> I think it's a little different. Um . . . I think in most cases . . . or at least in the cases we've had to deal with . . . or in the cases we've had any problems with . . . even when we've had successes with. The biggest problem is the children . . . the child care problem. I mean the inner-city women not only have all the other things they have to deal with and all these changes and all these new rules and everything else trying to learn all that crap, they also have to worry about where are their kids and who's taking care of them and is Grandma going to be there or a sister or a mom or

whoever it happens to be taking care of the kid. And I think that just adds to that burden and makes it more difficult. And I think in some cases it must look real frustrating to them . . . that no matter how they're trying to get ahead there's everything else is against them. I mean, everything is working against them to make it easier for them to stay home than it is to come here.

Finally, a categorically negative view of inner-city women was expressed by a suburban employer.

You have the circumstance where you have inner-city women who are, in effect, paid to have more children that they can't support. Doesn't make any difference whether they have a husband or not. They will have more children because the welfare check will be bigger. They will abandon them . . . the bad ones will abandon them. . . . They have no intention of looking for a job. They will make all the moves they need to make to make it look like they are, but their intention is to have enough children to support themselves. . . . Men can't decide, "Well, I'm going to have more children and support myself that way." Can't do that, but the woman can. That's an option for her. It tends to make her less aggressive in looking for a job than the men.

It is difficult to determine whether these views represent a recent shift in employers' attitudes or whether they represent a long-held pattern of negative views toward the residents of inner-city neighborhoods. The employers' strongly disapproving views of inner-city black male workers are interesting to consider in this connection. The success that black men had in obtaining manufacturing and other blue-collar jobs in previous years suggests that these views may have emerged only recently. If you examine the UPFLS survey data on the employment patterns of employed inner-city black fathers born between 1941 and 1955 (the 1941–55 birth cohort), you find that their participation in manufacturing was higher than that of employed inner-city Latino fathers and only slightly below that of employed inner-city white fathers by 1978. For the 1956–69 birth cohort, the proportion of employed black fathers in these industries was equal to that of employed inner-city Mexican fathers and only slightly behind that of employed inner-city white and Puerto Rican fathers by

1978. However, by 1987 the proportion of employed black fathers in manufacturing industries was significantly below the proportion of employed inner-city white and Latino fathers (see Appendix C).

Regardless of whether there has been a shift in attitudes among employers, race is obviously a factor in many of their current decisions; however, the issues are complex and cannot be reduced to the simple notion of employer racism. Let me pursue this point by first focusing on the way in which employers themselves perceive the issues of prejudice and discrimination and, second, examining black employers' perceptions of inner-city workers.

If discrimination is a significant factor in the employment woes of inner-city blacks, it is not recognized as such by a substantial majority of the employers in this survey. When asked the reason for the high levels of unemployment in Chicago's inner-city neighborhoods, only 4 percent of the 179 employers mentioned discrimination. Indeed, employers tend to dismiss the charge of discrimination, even though some of their statements indicate that it does exist.

When asked about the problem of discrimination in connection with the employment experiences of inner-city blacks, the director of personnel at a Chicago department store said, "I have a different view on it because I think it's used as an excuse many times. I've found that to be true in the experience here that it is a real convenient excuse for a minority to use and it's frustrating to me as an employer."

Several other employers complained about charges of racial discrimination from black employees. "If we hire a black male and for some reason he doesn't work out, or is let go during the ninety-day probationary period or shortly after," stated an employer at an inner-city discount department store, "they file a discrimination charge. Whether there's any validity to it or not. It just seems to be an automatic thing." The president of a marketing and promotion firm in the inner city pointed out that once the minority female employees are hired, " if they didn't perform, then you had a problem of great enormity, it was, you can't fire them. There's difficulty in terminating those services because now you have racial discrimination or what have you."

An inner-city employer echoed these feelings:

One thing that some of our management fears in hiring them is problems if they do have to terminate them. I probably shouldn't

say that, but that is a real fear of the management because they are a protected class.

Interviewer: So a lawsuit on the basis of discrimination?

Respondent: Yes.

The views of the director of personnel at a Chicago hospital perhaps best capture the sentiments of many employers: "People are much more aware . . . of their rights and their—a lot of them abuse it too. A lot of frivolous claims. There's a lot of unjustified filing of charges. . . . It's a big problem."

In addition to the belief that many formal claims of racial discrimination in the workplace are not justified, there was also the feeling among the respondents that if an employer avoids hiring inner-city workers, it has more to do with concerns about performance and safety than with prejudice against a person because of skin color. As an inner-city employer put it:

I do not believe that it is the result of blatant racism. I do not believe that. I think that it is the result of the experience on the part of the employer communities.

Interviewer: You said you didn't think it was blatant racism? . . .

Respondent: You're asking me how much of a problem is racial discrimination?

Interviewer: How much or what kind of a role it plays, if it does play a role at all.

Respondent: Yes, it does play a role. Yes, it does. . . . I think a related question is . . . how much of [it] . . . is the fear on the part of the majority community of the violence and the criminal activities that generally are black people acting upon black people. . . . I think the reality of that, then, is that not many white individuals understand that and therefore there is fear of security and safety. Particularly when we're talking about a population of young black males. Now, how much of it is fear and concern for your safety or your welfare, uh . . . and how much of it is real racial discrimination. . . . I'm not sure how you break those out. I certainly think that a black kid . . . a black man in a city is discriminated against. . . . I would like to believe that the issue is . . . is more one of fear than it is one of skin color.

But a few employers candidly admitted that racial prejudice is a factor in the hiring process in the Greater Chicago area. An inner-city manufacturer emphatically expressed this sentiment:

Well, I don't know about their ability to hang onto the job, or retain it, but their ability to find them is probably rooted in the fact that there's, now I'm going to go back twenty years now, I think that today there's more bias and prejudice against the black man than there was twenty years ago. I think twenty years ago, fifteen years ago, ten years ago, white male employers like myself were willing to give anybody and everybody the opportunity, not because it was the law, but because it was the right thing to do, and today I see more prejudice and more racial bias in employers than I've ever seen before. Not here, and our employees can prove that, but when we hear other employers talk, they'll go after primarily the Hispanic and Oriental first, those two, and . . . I'll qualify that even further, the Mexican Hispanic, and any Oriental, and after that, that's pretty much it, that's pretty much where they like to draw the line, right there.

Finally, the director of a packing and assembly firm located in the inner city expressed a view that some economists would describe as a subtle form of *statistical discrimination*—that is, making judgments about an applicant's productivity, which are often too difficult or too expensive to measure, on the basis of his or her race, ethnic background, or class. "My experience has been that the competency is not present with blacks. But I'm wondering whether it's not also that you don't test in your hiring process and therefore simply worked off your perception built over time, having hired someone who later proved to be incompetent."

Conclusions about the role of prejudice and discrimination in the labor market are usually based on analyses of the interaction between white employers and minority employees. Many readers will interpret the negative comments of the employers as indicative of the larger problem of racism and racial discrimination in American society. It is therefore instructive to consider, for separate analysis, the perceptions of the African-American employers who were interviewed in our survey. Their responses suggest that it would be a mistake to characterize

the overall comments of the employers in our survey as racist, even though some clearly contain racist sentiments. Indeed, it is significant to note that of the fifteen African-American employers in our survey, twelve expressed views about inner-city black workers, in response to our open-ended questions, that were coded as negative. Only two of the black employers offered comments that could be described as positive, and one expressed views that were coded as neutral. Thus, whereas 74 percent of all the white employers who responded to the open-ended questions expressed negative views of the job-related traits of inner-city blacks, 80 percent of the black employers did so as well.

The black president and CEO of an inner-city wholesale firm described what he saw as the effects of living in a highly concentrated poverty area:

> So, you put . . . a bunch of poor people together, [rushed and emphatic] I don't give a damn whether they're white, green or grizzly, you got a bad deal. You're going to create crime and everything else that's under the sun, dope. Anytime you put all like people together—and particularly if they're on a low level—you destroy them. They not, how you going to expect . . . one's going to stand up like a flower? He don't see no reason to stand up. When he gets up in the morning he sees people laying around doing nothing. He goes to bed at night, the same damn thing. All they think of, do I get to eat and sleep?
>
> *Interviewer:* So, you understand this wariness of some employers?
>
> *Respondent:* Sure.

The black president of a business college offered a sophisticated account of the intersection of class and race:

> I think there are differences in the work ethic of people, depending on where you find them valuewise and economically and socially. You can find middle-class blacks who would parallel white American values straight up and down the line, almost you'd find a value set that's interchangeable. What's happening, you're finding fewer of those people, because of the abyss of unemployment and misery in the black community is so widespread that you're

getting people now in this lower end and that creates such bizarre kinds of behavior that it breeds a different set of values, so you get these subcultural effects that just spews out all these bizarre range of things that happen. And as long as people are going to have to live like that, then yes, we're going to have a clear distinction between [the] work ethic of that group of people and the work ethic of this other group of people who aren't dealing with those same kinds of survival phenomenon. . . . It's really an economic value rather than a racial one.

When asked why black men cannot find jobs, the black personnel manager of a retail food and drug store stated: "I think that's really the culture. I think that a lot of the black males look at some of the jobs that they feel are beneath their dignity to work and rather than accept any job, they'd rather stay out of employment rolls." A black employer in a Chicago insurance company argued that

> there is a perception that most of your kids are black and they don't have the proper skills . . . they don't know how to write. They don't know how to speak. They don't act in a business fashion or dress in a business manner . . . in a way that the business community would like. And they just don't feel that they're getting a quality employee. . . .
>
> *Interviewer:* Do you think—is that all a false perception or is something there or—?
>
> *Respondent:* I think there's some truth to it.

In answer to the same question, another black employer gave this negative response:

> Attitude. Poor attitude. I'm very vocal on that. They lazy, a lot of them. You know, when you trapped, you realize you're trapped, but if you don't try to do something about it yourself, then you'll always be trapped. If you get into a welfare mode then you becomes a slave. And if that's what you want to be, so be it as an individual but I don't want to be a slave. I'm going to work. It's an attitude problem, that's all I can tell you and I've known, I been around them. I know what's happening.

Finally, the black personnel manager of a security services firm dismissed the problem of job discrimination: "It's a myth to me and it's something that has been another part where our society constantly has pushed it in the minds of a lot of people and they lean on this as a crutch. And when you lean on this as a crutch well, then how will you ever pick up yourself or apply yourself to anything? So, no. Discrimination can be thrown out the window."

Although the criticisms of employers were directed at both inner-city black males and females, the harshest and most frequent criticisms were aimed at the black male. Employer comments about inner-city black males revealed a wide range of complaints, including assertions that they procrastinate, are lazy, belligerent, and dangerous, have high rates of tardiness and absenteeism, carry employment histories with many job turnovers, and frequently fail to pass drug screening tests. Many of their comments clearly suggest a direct link between their assessment of the quality of the black inner-city workforce and their hiring strategies. There are many ways in which employers can deny inner-city workers employment or access to employment if they are reluctant or do not want to hire them. Direct, overt discrimination in refusing to consider any black applicants at all or in not seriously reviewing their applications for employment is the most obvious, but only a handful of employers admitted to such practices. Others consider black job applicants but frequently screen them out because their applications are not considered strong, or they do not make a good impression during the interview process, or they fail to pass an employment or skills tests.

The job interview provides job applicants with an opportunity to challenge employer stereotypes. However, as Kathryn Neckerman and Joleen Kirschenman, two of the six researchers who conducted the interviews for the UPFLS employer survey, pointed out:

> Inner-city black job seekers with limited work experience and little familiarity with the white, middle-class world are also likely to have difficulty in the typical job interview. A spotty work record will have to be justified; misunderstanding and suspicion may undermine rapport and hamper communication. However qualified

they are for the job, inner-city black applicants are more likely to fail subjective "tests" of productivity during the interview.

Skills tests are less biased than the subjective assessments used in the typical interview. The data reveal that city employers—that is, those with firms within the city of Chicago—who apply skills tests have a higher average proportion of black workers in entry-level jobs than do those who do not use these tests, even when one takes into consideration the size of the firm, the occupation, and the percentage of blacks in the neighborhood.

However, many Chicago employers engage in recruitment practices that automatically eliminate or significantly reduce the number of inner-city applicants who could apply for entry-level jobs in their firms. Selective recruitment—that is, limiting the search for job candidates in various ways—is widely practiced by the Chicago employers in this survey. Although some of the employers justified this strategy in terms of practicality and efficiency, noting that they save time and money by relying on the referrals of employees instead of screening large numbers of applicants from newspaper ads, most indicated that it yields a higher-quality applicant.

Although the formal criteria of applicant quality were based on neither race nor class, the recruitment strategies designed to attract high-quality applicants were. Inner-city populations were often overlooked if employers limited their recruitment efforts to certain neighborhoods or institutions and placed ads only or mainly in ethnic or neighborhood newspapers. Indeed, the recruitment practices of the employers reflect their perceptions of the quality of the inner-city workers.

An effective way to screen the applicant pool is to avoid placing ads in the Chicago newspapers. Over 40 percent of the employers from firms within the city of Chicago did not advertise their entry-level job openings in the newspaper. And for many of those who did place ads in the local newspapers, it was often only after the informal employee referral network produced an insufficient number of applicants. Furthermore, roughly two-thirds of the city employers who placed ads in newspapers did so in ethnic, neighborhood, or suburban newspapers instead of or in addition to the metropolitan newspapers.

Advertising job vacancies in neighborhood or ethnic newspapers ("local" newspapers) facilitated the targeting of particular groups,

mainly Hispanics or white (including "ethnics") populations of recent East European immigrants. A partner with a downtown law firm indicated that his firm puts "ads in the Northwest side of the city" because the "work ethic is better" among the residents there. He stated: "It's a Polish [neighborhood], you know, it's a strong work ethic neighborhood. That's not, I'm not trying to be . . . prejudiced or anything else. It's reality I have to deal with." A few of the white-collar employers, however, placed ads in the *Defender*, a black newspaper, out of a commitment to hire blacks or to satisfy affirmative action guidelines. City employers who placed ads only in local or neighborhood papers, not likely to circulate among inner-city residents, averaged 16 percent black in their entry-level jobs, compared to an average of 32 percent black for those who placed ads in the metropolitan papers.

Determining the location or quality of the schools was another way in which employers conducted screening. A number of employers mentioned that education in the Chicago public schools, which are overwhelmingly black, has become a negative signal, and therefore many applicants from this system are passed over for those from Catholic or suburban schools. As an employer from an inner-city wholesale business put it, "Why the hell would I want to hire someone . . . from a Chicago public high school? Because I don't think they've got it. Is that a prejudice? It's not a prejudice on race, but it's a prejudice on what you think their educational background is."

An employer at a blue-collar firm offered these comments about the educational system:

We're finding that what comes out of the school is really not what we want. The educational system doesn't prepare them for this type of work.
Interviewer: How do you think it does prepare them?
Respondent: I'm not sure if it does very good at all. We only find criticisms because they're unable to do certain things that we would assume they would learn, particularly in the field of math, which is important in our business, to be able to count, read a ruler, read, actually do reading at all.

The employers who volunteered information on the schools they recruited from usually mentioned Catholic schools or those from Chicago's largely white Northwest Side communities. Although em-

ployees recruited from the Catholic schools were more likely to be white, black students from Catholic schools were also viewed more favorably than those from the public schools. For example, an employer at a suburban department store pointed out that although minority students fail the skills test more frequently than white students, "the minorities that go to parochial school test as well as the whites. They come here dressed as well, and this is a totally different act. Now this is a difference that I can spot, is between your parochial school and your public school."

If employers do not like to recruit from the overwhelmingly black Chicago public schools, they also disdain recruiting from welfare programs and state employment service programs. The UPFLS employer survey revealed that only 16 percent of the employers from city firms recruited from welfare agencies, and only one-third from state employment agencies. These programs mainly serve blacks from the inner city, and employers felt that they sent applicants who were unqualified or inappropriate. As one employer put it:

Any time I've taken any recommendation from state agencies, city agencies, or welfare agencies I really get people who are not prepared to come to work on time, not prepared to see that a new job is carried through, that it's completed. I mean there just doesn't seem to be a work ethic involved in these people.

Of the city employers, those from the inner-city neighborhoods relied most heavily on selective recruiting. They were less likely to place ads in local newspapers or recruit from schools, and they relied very heavily on the informal job networks. One inner-city hospital decided against the use of newspaper ads and recruited workers from community jobs programs and through informal employee networks. As a representative from the hospital put it, "If you are just a cold applicant, chances of you getting in are almost nil."

One inner-city retailer, who complained about young workers being disrespectful and inclined to steal and who recruited some of her employees from a youth mentoring program, put it this way: "I think I'm getting the best of what I've got to select from. . . . I know the guy at the gas station, the guy who runs the Burger King, and all of us say the same thing."

In light of what this employers' survey tells us, the selective re-

cruitment practiced by many city employers results in the systematic exclusion of numerous inner-city blacks from jobs in Chicago. And given the negative view that employers have of inner-city workers, it is reasonable to conclude that although these practices are characterized by employers as necessary to recruit a higher-quality worker, they in fact are deliberately designed to exclude inner-city blacks from the employment applicant pool.

How should we interpret the negative attitudes and actions of employers? To what extent do they represent an aversion to blacks per se and to what degree do they reflect judgments based on the job-related skills and training of inner-city blacks in a changing labor market? As pointed out earlier, the statements made by the African-American employers concerning the qualifications of inner-city black workers do not differ significantly from those of the white employers. This raises a question about the meaning and significance of race in certain situations—in other words, how race intersects with other factors. A key hypothesis is that given the recent shifts in the economy, employers are looking for workers with a broad range of abilities: "hard" skills (literacy, numeracy, basic mechanical ability, and other testable attributes) and "soft" skills (personalities suitable to the work environment, good grooming, group-oriented work behaviors, etc.). While hard skills are the product of education and training—benefits that are apparently in short supply in inner-city schools—soft skills are strongly tied to culture, and are therefore shaped by the harsh environment of the inner-city ghetto. If employers are indeed reacting to the difference in skills between white and black applicants, it becomes increasingly difficult to discern the motives of employers: are they rejecting inner-city black applicants out of overt racial discrimination or on the basis of qualifications? In this connection, one study conducted in Los Angeles found that even after education, income, family background, and place of residence were taken into account, dark-skinned black men were 52 percent less likely to be working than light-skinned black men. Although this finding strongly suggests that racial discrimination plays a significant role in the jobless rate of black men, the study did not pursue the extent to which employers associate darkness of skin color with the social and cultural environment of the inner-city ghetto.

Nonetheless, many of the selective recruitment practices do represent what economists call statistical discrimination: employers make

assumptions about the inner-city black workers *in general* and reach decisions based on those assumptions before they have had a chance to review systematically the qualifications of an individual applicant. The net effect is that many black inner-city applicants are never given the chance to prove their qualifications on an individual level because they are systematically screened out by the selective recruitment process. Statistical discrimination, although representing elements of class bias against poor workers in the inner city, is clearly a matter of race. The selective recruitment patterns effectively screen out far more black workers from the inner city than Hispanic or white workers from the same types of backgrounds. But race is also a factor, even in those decisions to deny employment to inner-city black workers on the basis of objective and thorough evaluations of their qualifications. The hard and soft skills among inner-city blacks that do not match the current needs of the labor market are products of racially segregated communities, communities that have historically featured widespread social constraints and restricted opportunities.

Many inner-city residents have a strong sense of the negative attitudes which employers tend to have toward them. A 33-year-old employed janitor from a poor South Side neighborhood had this observation: "I went to a coupla jobs where a couple of the receptionists told me in confidence: 'You know what they do with these applications from blacks as soon as the day is over?' Say 'we rip them and throw 'em in the garbage.' " In addition to concerns about being rejected because of race, the fears that some inner-city residents have of being denied employment simply because of their inner-city address or neighborhood are not unfounded. A welfare mother who lives in a large public housing project put it this way:

Honestly, I believe they look at the address and the—your attitudes, your address, your surround—you know, your environment has a lot to do with your employment status. The people with the best addresses have the best chances, I feel so, I feel so.

Another welfare mother of two children from a South Side neighborhood expressed a similar view:

I think that a lot of peoples don't get jobs over here because they lives—they live in the projects. They think that just 'cause people living in the projects they no good. Yes, yes. I think so! I think so! I think a lot of people might judge a person because you out—because they got a project address. You know, when you put it on an application, they might not even hire you because you live over here.

A 34-year-old single and unemployed black man put it this way: "If you're from a nice neighborhood I believe it's easier for you to get a job and stuff. I have been on jobs and such and gotten looks from folks and such, 'I wonder if he is the type who do those things that happen in that neighborhood.' "

Although the employers' perceptions of inner-city workers make it difficult for low-income blacks to find or retain employment, it is interesting to note that there is one area where the views of employers and those of many inner-city residents converge—namely, in their attitudes toward inner-city black males. Inner-city residents are aware of the problems of male joblessness in their neighborhoods. For example, more than half the black UPFLS survey respondents from neighborhoods with poverty rates of at least 40 percent felt that very few or none of the men in their neighborhood were working steadily. More than one-third of the respondents from neighborhoods with poverty rates of at least 30 percent expressed that view as well. Forty percent of the black respondents in all neighborhoods in the UPFLS felt that the number of men with jobs has steadily decreased over the past ten years. However, responses to the open-ended questions in our Social Opportunity Survey and data from our ethnographic field interviews reveal a consistent pattern of negative views among the respondents concerning inner-city black males, especially young black males.

Some provided explanations in which they acknowledged the constraints that black men face. An employed 25-year-old unmarried father of one child from North Lawndale stated:

I know a lot of guys that's my age, that don't work and I know some that works temporary, but wanna work, they just can't get the jobs. You know, they got a high school diploma and that . . .

but the thing is, these jobs always say: Not enough experience. How can you get some experience if you never had a chance to get any experience?

Others, however, expressed views that echoed those of the employers. For example, a 30-year-old married father of three children who lives in North Lawndale and works the night shift in a factory stated:

I say about 65 percent—of black males, I say, don't wanna work, and when I say don't wanna work I say don't wanna work hard—they want a real easy job, making big bucks—see? And, and when you start talking about hard labor and earning your money with sweat or just once in a while you gotta put out a little bit—you know, that extra effort, I don't, I don't think the guys really wanna do that. And sometimes it comes from, really, not having a, a steady job or, really, not being out in the work field and just been sittin' back, being comfortable all the time and hanging out.

A 35-year-old welfare mother of eight children from the Englewood neighborhood on the South Side agreed:

Well, I mean see you got all these dudes around here, they don't even work, they don't even try, they don't wanna work. You know what I mean, I wanna work, but I can't work. Then you got people here that, in this neighborhood, can get up and do somethin', they just don't wanna do nothin'—they really don't.

The deterioration of the socioeconomic status of black men may have led to the negative perceptions of both the employers and the inner-city residents. Are these perceptions merely stereotypical or do they have any basis in fact? Data from the UPFLS survey show that variables measuring differences in social context (neighborhoods, social networks, and households) accounted for substantially more of the gap in the employment rates of black and Mexican men than did variables measuring individual attitudes. Also, data from the survey reveal that jobless black men have a lower "reservation wage" than the jobless

men in the other ethnic groups. They were willing to work for less than $6.00 per hour, whereas Mexican and Puerto Rican jobless men expected $6.20 and $7.20, respectively, as a condition for working; white men, on the other hand, expected over $9.00 per hour. This would appear to cast some doubt on the characterization of black inner-city men as wanting "something for nothing," of holding out for high pay.

But surveys are not the best way to get at underlying attitudes and values. Accordingly, to gain a better grasp of the cultural issues, I examined the UPFLS ethnographic research that involved establishing long-term contacts and conducting interviews with residents from several neighborhoods. Richard Taub points out:

> Anybody who studies subgroups within the American population knows that there are cultural patterns which are distinctive to the subgroups and which have consequences for social outcomes. The challenge for those concerned about poverty and cultural variation is to link cultural arrangements to larger structural realities and to understand the interaction between the consequences of one's structural position on the one hand and pattern group behavior on the other. It is important to understand that the process works both ways. Cultures are forged in part on the basis of adaptation to both structural and material environments.

Analysis of the ethnographic data reveals identifiable and consistent patterns of attitudes and beliefs among inner-city ethnic groups. The data, systematically analyzed by Taub, reveal that the black men are more hostile than the Mexican men with respect to the low-paying jobs they hold, less willing to be flexible in taking assignments or tasks not considered part of their job, and less willing to work as hard for the same low wages. These contrasts in the behavior of the two groups of men are sharp because many of the Mexicans interviewed were recent immigrants.

"Immigrants, particularly Third World immigrants," will often "tolerate harsher conditions, lower pay, fewer upward trajectories, and other job related characteristics that deter native workers, and thereby exhibit a better 'work ethic' than others." The ethnographic data from the UPFLS suggest that the Mexican immigrants are harder workers

because they "come from areas of intense poverty and that even boring, hard, dead-end jobs look, by contrast, good to them." They also fear being deported if they fail to find employment.

Once again, it should be emphasized that the contrasts between blacks and Mexicans in our ethnographic sample are sharp because most of the latter in our sample were recent immigrants. Our ethnographic research was conducted mainly in black and Latino inner-city neighborhoods, and the ethnographic data that were sufficient to draw systematic comparisons concerning work attitudes were those based on intensive field interviews with Mexican men and African-American men. However, as indicated earlier, the large UPFLS survey revealed that white men in the inner city have a much higher reservation wage than either African-American or Latino inner-city men. Accordingly, there is no reason to assume that their attitude toward dead-end menial jobs is any less negative than that of black men.

Since our sample was largely drawn from poverty areas, it includes a disproportionate number of immigrants, who tend to settle initially in poverty areas. As previous research has consistently shown, migrants who leave a poorer economy for a more developed economy in the hope of improving their standard of living tend to accept, willingly, the kinds of employment that the indigenous workers detest or have come to reject. It is reasonable to hypothesize that the more "Americanized" they become, the less inclined they will be to accept menial low-wage and hazardous jobs.

In contrast to the Mexican men, the inner-city black men complained that they get assigned the heaviest or dirtiest work on the job, are overworked, and are paid less than nonblacks. They strongly feel that they are victims of discrimination. "The Mexican-American men also report that they feel exploited," states Taub, "but somehow that comes with the territory." Taub argues that the inner-city black men have a greater sense of "honor" and often see the work, pay, and treatment from bosses as insulting and degrading. Accordingly, a heightened sensitivity to exploitation fuels their anger and gives rise to a tendency to "just walk off the job."

One has to look at the growing exclusion of black men from higher-paying blue-collar jobs in manufacturing and other industries and their increasing confinement to low-paying service laboring jobs to understand these attitudes and how they developed. Many low-paying jobs

have predictably low retention rates. For example, one of the respondents in the UPFLS employer survey reported turnover rates at his firm that exceeded 50 percent. When asked if he had considered doing anything about this problem, the employer acknowledged that the company had made a rational decision to tolerate a high turnover rather than increasing the starting salary and improving working conditions to attract higher-caliber workers: "Our practice has been that we'll keep hiring and, hopefully, one or two of them are going to wind up being good."

As Kathryn Neckerman points out, "This employer, and others like him, can afford such high turnover because the work is simple and can be taught in a couple of days. On average, jobs paying under $5.00 or $6.00 an hour were characterized by high quit rates. In higher-paying jobs, by contrast, the proportion of employees resigning fell to less than 20 percent per year." Yet UPFLS data show that the proportion of inner-city black males in the higher-paying blue-collar positions has declined far more sharply than that of Latinos and whites (see Appendix C). Increasingly displaced from manufacturing industries, inner-city black males are more confined to low-paying service work. Annual turnover rates of 50 to 100 percent are common in low-skill service jobs in Chicago, regardless of the race or ethnicity of the employees.

Thus, the attitudes that many inner-city black males express about their jobs and job prospects reflect their plummeting position in a changing labor market. The more they complain and manifest their dissatisfaction, the less desirable they seem to employers. They therefore experience greater rejection when they seek employment and clash more often with supervisors when they secure employment.

Residence in highly concentrated poverty neighborhoods aggravates the weak labor-force attachment of black males. The absence of effective informal job networks and the frequency of many illegal activities increases nonmainstream behavior such as hustling. As Sharon Hicks-Bartlett, another member of the UPFLS research team, points out, "Hustling is making money by doing whatever is necessary to survive or simply make ends meet. It can be legal or extra-legal work and may transpire in the formal or informal economy. While both men and women hustle, men are more conspicuous in the illegal arena of hustling."

In a review of the research literature on the experiences of black men in the labor market, Philip Moss and Christopher Tilly point out

that criminal activity in urban areas has become more attractive because of the disappearance of legitimate jobs. They refer to a recent study in Boston that showed that while "black youth in Boston were evenly split on whether they could make more money in a straight job or on the street, by 1989 a three-to-one majority of young black people expressed the opinion that they could make more on the street."

The restructuring of the economy will continue to compound the negative effects of the prevailing perceptions of inner-city black males. Because of the increasing shift away from manufacturing and toward service industries, employers have a greater need for workers who can effectively serve and relate to the consumer. Inner-city black men are not perceived as having these qualities.

The restructuring of the urban economy could also have long-term consequences for inner-city black women. Neckerman argues that a change in work cultures accompanied the transformation of the economy, resulting in a mismatch between the old and new ways of succeeding in the labor market. In other words, there is a growing difference between the practices of blue-collar and service employers and the practices of white-collar employers. This mismatch is important in assessing the labor-market success of inner-city workers.

Low-skilled individuals from the inner city tend to be the children of blue-collar workers or service workers, and their work experience is thus largely confined to blue-collar or service jobs. What happens "when employees socialized to approach jobs and careers in ways that make sense in a blue-collar or service context enter the white-collar world?" The employer interviews suggest that workers from blue-collar or service settings seek positions that carry high entry-level salaries that provide all the necessary training on the job and that grant privileges and promotion in accordance with both seniority and performance. But in a white-collar setting, inner-city workers face entry-level positions that require more and continuous training and employers who are looking for people who are energetic, intelligent, and possess good language skills. Promotions in this environment seldom depend on seniority. Accordingly, "their advancement may depend on fairly subtle standards of evaluation, and on behavior that is irrelevant or even negatively sanctioned in the blue-collar and service settings." Interviews with inner-city workers revealed that most recognize the changing nature of the labor market and that a greater premium is placed on education and training for

success, but many "did indeed espouse blue-collar ways of getting ahead."

In summary, the issue of race in the labor market cannot simply be reduced to the presence of discrimination. Although our data suggest that inner-city blacks, especially African-American males, are experiencing increasing problems in the labor market, the reasons for those problems are seen in a complex web of interrelated factors, including those that are race-neutral.

The loss of traditional manufacturing and other blue-collar jobs in Chicago resulted in increased joblessness among inner-city black males and a concentration in low-wage, high-turnover laborer and service-sector jobs. Embedded in ghetto neighborhoods, social networks, and households that are not conducive to employment, inner-city black males fall further behind their white and Hispanic counterparts, especially when the labor market is slack. Hispanics "continue to funnel into manufacturing because employers prefer Hispanics over blacks and they like to hire by referrals from current employees, which Hispanics can readily furnish, being already embedded in migration networks." Inner-city black men grow bitter and resentful in the face of their employment prospects and often manifest or express these feelings in their harsh, often dehumanizing, low-wage work settings.

Their attitudes and actions, combined with erratic work histories in high-turnover jobs, create the widely shared perception that they are undesirable workers. The perception in turn becomes the basis for employers' negative hiring decisions, which sharply increase when the economy is weak. The rejection of inner-city black male workers gradually grows over the long term not only because employers are turning more to the expanding immigrant and female labor force, but also because the number of jobs that require contact with the public continues to climb.

The position of inner-city black women in the labor market is also problematic. Their high degree of social isolation in impoverished neighborhoods reduces their employment prospects. Although Chicago employers consider them more acceptable as workers than the inner-city black men, their social isolation is likely to strengthen involvement in a work culture that has few supports allowing a move into white-collar employment. Also, impoverished neighborhoods, weak networks, and weak household supports decrease their ability to

develop language and other job-related skills necessary in an economy that increasingly rewards employees who can work and communicate effectively with the public.

Despite the attitudes of employers, joblessness in inner-city ghetto neighborhoods would decline if the U.S. economy could sustain high levels of employment over a long period of time. In a slack labor market—a labor market with high unemployment—employers are—and indeed, can afford to be—more selective in recruiting and in granting promotions. They overemphasize job prerequisites and exaggerate the value of experience. In such an economic climate, disadvantaged minorities suffer disproportionately and the level of employer discrimination rises. In a tight labor market, job vacancies are numerous, unemployment is of short duration, and wages are higher. Moreover, in a tight labor market the labor force expands because increased job opportunities not only reduce unemployment but also draw into the labor force those workers who, in periods when the labor market is slack, respond to fading job prospects by dropping out of the labor force altogether. Conversely, in a tight labor market the status of all workers—including disadvantaged minorities—improves because of lower unemployment, higher wages, and better jobs.

The economic recovery during the first half of the 1990s lowered the unemployment rates among blacks in general. For the first time in more than two decades, the unemployment rate for African-Americans dipped below 10 percent in December 1994. Indeed, "the unemployment rate for black adults dropped faster in 1994 than it did for white adults." This was in part due to a brief expansion of manufacturing jobs. By contrast, the economy saw a slight decrease in manufacturing jobs during the economic recovery period in the late 1980s and more than 1.5 million positions were eliminated from January 1989 to September 1993. However, 301,000 manufacturing jobs were created during the next sixteen months, significantly benefiting black workers who are heavily concentrated in manufacturing.

Nonetheless, the unemployment rate represents only the percentage of workers in the labor force—that is, those who are actively looking for work. A more significant measure is the employment-to-population ratio, which corresponds to the percentage of adults 16 and older who are working. For example, whereas the unemployment rate

for black youths 16 years old and older was 34.6 percent in December of 1994, compared with a white youth unemployment rate of 14.7 percent, only 23.9 percent of all black youths were actually working, compared with 48.5 percent of white youths. In previous years, labor-market demand stimulated by fiscal or monetary policy not only absorbed the technically unemployed (that is, those jobless workers who are in the official labor force) but also enlarged the employment ranks by drawing back workers who were not in or had dropped out of the labor force. Today, it appears that inner-city residents who are not in the labor force tend to be beyond the reach of monetary or fiscal policy. The problem is that in recent years tight labor markets have been of relatively short duration, frequently followed by a recession which either wiped out previous gains for many workers or did not allow others to fully recover from a previous period of economic stagnation. It would take sustained tight labor markets over many years to draw back those discouraged inner-city workers who have dropped out of the labor market altogether, some for very long periods of time. The disappearance of work in the inner-city ghetto presents a serious challenge to society. The consequences of such joblessness are not restricted to the inner-city ghettos, they affect the quality of life and race relations in the larger city as well.

PART 2

THE SOCIAL POLICY CHALLENGE

WHEN WORK DISAPPEARS

The World of the New Urban Poor

WILLIAM JULIUS WILSON

To Beverly

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