

What is the underclass—and is it growing?

by Christopher Jencks

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Late in 1981 Ken Auletta published three articles in the *New Yorker* about the American underclass.¹ Auletta was not the first to use the term underclass, but he was largely responsible for making it part of middle-class America's working vocabulary.² As the Reagan years progressed and panhandlers multiplied amid the bond salesmen, a number of social critics, journalists, policy analysts, and foundation executives became convinced that this underclass was growing. The idea that the *black* underclass was growing became especially common.

If there were consensus about what the term "underclass" meant, it would be relatively easy to decide whether it was getting bigger or smaller. Since no such consensus has developed, there has been no agreement even on the size of the underclass, much less on how its size has changed over time. Our inability to agree on a definition of the underclass need not paralyze us, however. Instead, we can simply recognize that there are many different underclasses and ask whether each is growing or shrinking. I will consider three variants of the underclass, which I will call the economic underclass, the moral underclass, in which I include both a criminal and a reproductive underclass, and the educational underclass. The economic underclass seems to be growing. The moral underclass may be growing or shrinking depending on what you measure—there are fewer criminals but more unmarried mothers. The educational underclass is shrinking, at least among blacks. The absence of consensus about whether the underclass as a whole is growing or shrinking is therefore easy to understand.

Defining the underclass

The absence of general agreement about who is a member of the underclass is no accident. The term came into widespread use precisely because it was ambiguous. Auletta, for example, was a New York journalist who wanted to write about chronically jobless men, perennial welfare mothers, alcoholics, drug dealers, street criminals, deinstitutionalized schizophrenics, and all the other walking wounded who crowded New York City's sidewalks in the late 1970s.

No widely used term seemed capable of conjuring up this Dickensian range of characters. The term "underclass" served Auletta's purpose because it was both sufficiently evocative to grab the reader's attention and sufficiently vague to subsume the entire range of problems that interested him.

The word appeals to others for the same reasons that it appealed to Auletta. It focuses attention on the basement of the American social system (those who are "under" the rest of us), without specifying what the inhabitants of this dark region have in common. Once the term entered the vernacular, however, journalists and policymakers inevitably began asking social scientists how large it was and why it was growing. Since neither journalists nor policy analysts had a clear idea what they meant by the underclass, social scientists had to make up their own definitions. We now have nearly a dozen of these definitions, each yielding a different picture of how big the underclass is and who its members are.

Initially, several social scientists tried to equate the underclass with the persistently poor.³ Since the poverty rate was somewhat higher in the 1980s than in the 1970s or late 1960s, and since the annual rate of movement in and out of poverty has not changed much over the past twenty years, this definition implies that the underclass is probably growing.⁴

It soon became clear, however, that those who talked about the underclass had something more in mind than just persistent poverty. The term underclass, with its echoes of the underworld, conjures up sin, or at least unorthodox behavior. Low income may be a necessary condition for membership in such a class, but it is not sufficient. No one thinks elderly widows are members of the underclass, no matter how poor they are. Nor are farm families with six children part of the underclass, even if their income almost always falls below the poverty line.

Once it became clear that we couldn't equate the underclass with the persistently poor, several scholars tried to link membership in the underclass with living in a bad neighborhood.⁵ William Julius Wilson and others have argued that living in a very poor inner-city neighborhood isolates an individual from "mainstream" institutions and role models and thus increases the likelihood of engaging in underclass behavior.⁶ Such neighborhoods certainly have more than their share of all the social ills that the term underclass connotes. It is therefore tempting to treat living in such a neighborhood as a necessary or perhaps even sufficient condition for membership in the underclass.

Defining the underclass geographically does, however, raise several major problems. First, neighborhoods are very het-

erogeneous. American cities are highly segregated along racial lines, but except for a few large housing projects they are not highly segregated along economic or social lines.⁷ Neighborhoods in which most of the residents have incomes below the poverty line are very unusual in America. The Census Bureau, for example, divides every American city into tracts, which typically have about 4,000 residents. Less than 3 percent of these Census tracts had poverty rates above 40 percent in 1980. Visually, most of these very poor tracts looked like disaster areas. Most also had high crime rates, high rates of joblessness, and high rates of welfare dependency. Yet even in these dismal places only about half of all families reported incomes below the poverty line, and some reported incomes two, three, or four times the poverty line.

Not only are there some relatively prosperous families in poor neighborhoods, but perhaps even more important, there are a lot of very poor families in more prosperous neighborhoods. In 1980, the poverty rate in America's one hundred largest cities averaged 17 percent. The typical poor family in these cities lived in a Census tract with a poverty rate of only 25 percent—hardly a large difference. As a result, most poor families probably had next-door neighbors who were not poor.⁸

Neighborhoods look equally heterogeneous when you ask whether men have steady jobs, children live in families with male breadwinners, households depend on public assistance, or teenagers finish high school. Using these four criteria, Erol Ricketts and Isabel Sawhill identified the worst 880 Census tracts in the United States in 1980—tracts that accounted for only 1 percent of the total population. Yet even in these tracts, more than half of all working-age adults had regular jobs and only a third of all households received public assistance.⁹

A second difficulty with defining the underclass geographically is that most of us think of class as a relatively stable characteristic. We know, of course, that children born into one class often end up in another. We also know that working-class adults occasionally move up into the middle class and that middle-class adults occasionally slip into the working class, but we think of such changes as both slow and unusual. Changing your address, in contrast, is both easy and frequent. If we were to assume that a family changed its class every time it moved to a better or worse neighborhood, we would have to rethink the meaning of class itself.¹⁰

Moving to a better or worse address does, of course, play some part in movement up and down the social ladder. But a family's neighborhood, like its income, is only one factor among many in determining how we classify it. No one would try to measure the size of the middle class or the working class by counting the number of people in middle-class or working-class neighborhoods. Nor would many people measure the size of the middle class or the working class by asking how many people fell in a given income bracket. Since we invented the term underclass as an anto-

nym to the terms middle class and working class, we need to define the underclass using the same criteria we use to define these classes. Neither a family's income nor its address meets that test.

The term "middle class" has a number of distinct meanings in the United States, each of which implies a mirror-image meaning for the term underclass.

- Sometimes we use the terms middle class and working class to refer to people's occupations. In this usage the middle class is usually composed of white-collar workers and the working class of blue-collar workers. If we define the middle class and the working class this way, we should define the underclass as including all working-age men and women who cannot get or cannot keep a steady job. I will label this group the "economic underclass."
- Sometimes we use the term middle class to describe people who are committed to certain norms of behavior, such as obeying the law, getting married before they have children, and going to work every day. If we define the middle class this way, we should define the underclass as a group whose members treat these ideals as impractical or irrelevant. I will call these people the "moral underclass."
- Sometimes we use the term middle class to describe people who have certain cultural and social skills. In this usage the middle class is composed of people who talk, think, and act like professional and managerial workers, regardless of whether they actually have professional or managerial jobs. The working class is composed of people who talk, think, and act like blue-collar workers. The underclass is composed of people who lack the information and skills they would need to pass as members of the working class. For lack of a better term I will call this group the "educational underclass."

Any effort at defining the underclass must also recognize that people often use the term as an antonym not just for "middle class" but for "white." When William Julius Wilson discussed the growth of the underclass in *The Truly Disadvantaged*, for example, he explicitly focused on the black underclass.¹¹ Wilson's most compelling explanations for the growth of the underclass were, moreover, based on an analysis of how living in central-city ghettos affected poor blacks' life chances. If spatial isolation has in fact played a crucial role in the growth of the underclass, this underclass should be largely black, since no other group is anything like as geographically segregated as blacks.

Many writers also think of Puerto Ricans and Mexicans as potential members of the underclass, but this only underscores the racial dimension of our thinking about the issue. Most Puerto Ricans have both European and African ancestors, while most Mexicans have both European and Native American ancestors. It is true that more than half the Hispanics living in the United States described themselves as

“white” in the 1980 Census, but this tells us only that the Census Bureau’s question about race does not offer Mexicans or Puerto Ricans alternatives that fit their traditional ways of classifying themselves. It does not suggest that most Puerto Ricans or Mexicans think themselves racially indistinguishable from Europeans.¹²

In what follows I will define the underclass by contrast with the middle class, using the three definitions sketched above. In each case I will also ask whether the underclass is primarily nonwhite, and whether the nonwhite underclass has been growing faster than the white underclass.

Is the economic underclass growing?

America has never had a generally accepted term for individuals who could not get (or could not keep) a steady job. Marx assigned such individuals to the lumpen proletariat, and American sociologists used to call them the lower class, but neither term has ever gained wide currency. One simple way of defining the underclass is to say that it includes everyone you think ought to work regularly but who is unwilling or unable to do so.¹³ Because there is no national consensus about who ought to work, this definition inevitably has some ambiguities. Are the physically and mentally disabled part of the economic underclass? What about a 55-year-old man who “retires” when he loses his job and has trouble finding another one? What about single mothers who would rather depend on welfare than leave their two-year-old with someone else? Despite the existence of these and other ambiguous cases, however, almost all Americans agree that certain people ought to work. Most now agree that working-age women should get jobs unless they can find a man willing to support them or have very young children who need full-time care. And almost everyone agrees that working-age men should get jobs unless they are in school full time.

Despite the existence of these norms, men without regular jobs have always been part of the American landscape, both rural and urban. They haunt the edges of nineteenth-century fiction and biographies. Elliot Liebow’s ethnographic description of Washington, D.C., during the early 1960s is full of them.¹⁴ So is Elijah Anderson’s description of South Side Chicago during the early 1970s.¹⁵ The question is not whether such men are a new phenomenon but whether they have become more common.

The best way to answer this question would be to count the proportion of men who worked less than some specified number of weeks in various years. In an ideal accounting system the threshold for counting men as part of the economic underclass would also vary with the business cycle. A 40-year-old man who worked less than 26 weeks in 1988, when unemployment averaged 5.5 percent, was usually incapable of getting a steady job. A 40-year-old man who worked less than 26 weeks in 1983, when unemployment averaged 9.5 percent, was often just a member of the work-

ing class whose plant had closed and who would find another steady job once the economy recovered.

The Current Population Survey collects data every March on the number of weeks adults worked during the previous year, but neither the Census Bureau nor the Bureau of Labor Statistics publishes the results by age, race, and sex. I have therefore adopted a less satisfactory but serviceable approximation. Figure 1 shows the percentage of all civilian males between the ages of 25 and 54 who were not working in a typical month. This group includes both men who were looking for work and men who were not.

Not every jobless man is a member of the underclass. Some joblessness is due to frictional unemployment of the kind that arises when people lose their jobs unexpectedly and have to look for other ones. How long it takes to find another job (or a first job) is related to the business cycle. But Figure 1 shows that there has been a steady increase in the average rate of joblessness, independent of the business cycle.

One way to assess the magnitude of the change is to compare three unusually good years: 1956, 1973, and 1988. In both 1956 and 1973, the official unemployment rate for married men averaged 2.3 percent. In 1988 it averaged 3.3 percent. In 1956, the overall rate of joblessness among men 25 to 54 years old averaged 5 percent for whites and 11 percent for nonwhites. By 1973, just before the first oil shock, the rate

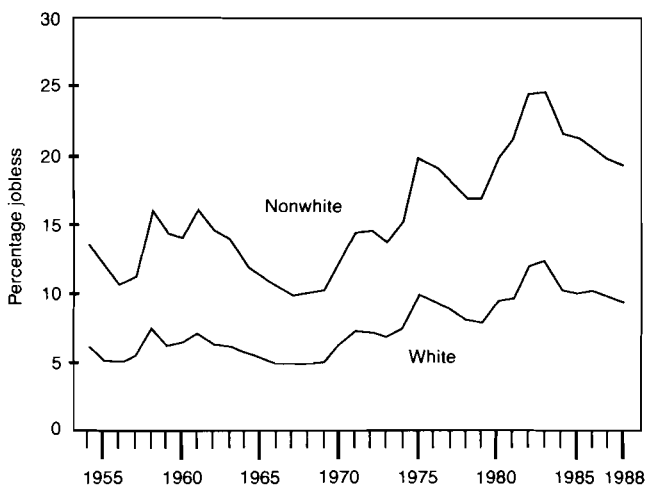


Figure 1. Percentage Jobless among Men Aged 25–54, 1954–1988.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Handbook of Labor Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985); and *Employment and Earnings*, various years.

was up to 7 percent for whites and 14 percent for nonwhites. By 1988, after six years of uninterrupted economic expansion, it was 9 percent for whites and 19 percent for nonwhites.

This increase is almost certainly attributable to changes in chronic joblessness rather than changes in frictional unemployment. The percentage increase was the same for whites and nonwhites, which meant that the absolute increase was almost twice as large for nonwhites as for whites. Data not shown here indicate that the percentage increase was also about the same for men aged 25–34, 35–44, and 45–54.

Figure 1 describes the experience of mature men, whereas many descriptions of the underclass focus on teenagers and young adults. Conventional statistics on unemployment and labor force participation can be quite misleading for men under 25, partly because such statistics include a lot of students looking for part-time jobs and partly because they exclude a lot of men in the armed forces. Since both school enrollment and the size of the armed forces have changed substantially over the past generation, these omissions can be quite serious.

Robert Mare and Christopher Winship have argued that what we really care about is the percentage of young men who were not in school, not in the armed forces, and not at work in a typical week.¹⁶ I will label these men “idle.” Mare

and Winship have compiled data on the extent of such idleness from 1964 through 1985. As Figures 2 and 3 show, the trend in idleness among men under 25 is strikingly similar to the trend in joblessness among men over 25.¹⁷ Idleness was relatively low from 1964 to 1969, climbed sharply in 1970, and then kept climbing. Idleness peaked in 1982–83, but it was still considerably higher in 1985 than it had been two to three years into previous recoveries (e.g., 1963–64 or 1977–78). Another way to make the same point is to say that if we compare the peaks or troughs of successive business cycles, idleness rises over time.

Liberals usually blame rising idleness on the fact that there are not enough jobs. More specifically, they argue that there are not enough jobs for unskilled and semiskilled workers. When pressed, however, most liberals concede that when the economy is near the peak of a business cycle, as it is now, almost all workers willing to accept a minimum-wage job without fringe benefits can get one. The real problem, they say, is the shortage of “good” jobs.

One way to assess the validity of the claim that good jobs are harder to find is to ask whether the jobs men do find are worse than they used to be. This poses a problem, however, because many jobs exist episodically rather than continuously. As a result, official agencies collect data on the annual earnings of individuals, not the annual pay of jobs.

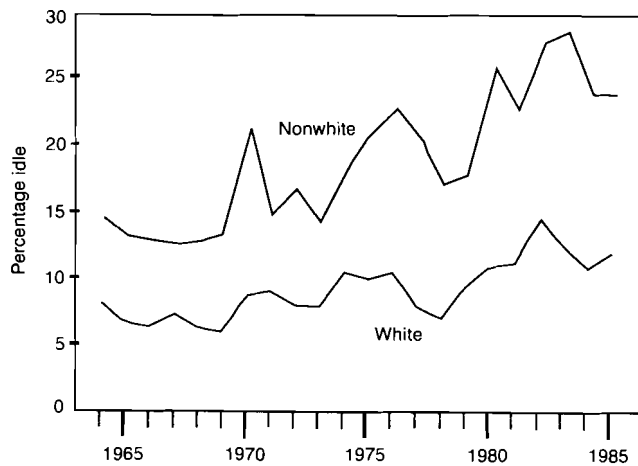


Figure 2. Percentage of Men Aged 18–19 Not Employed, Enrolled, or in Military, 1964–1985.

Source: Constructed from data supplied by Christopher Winship.

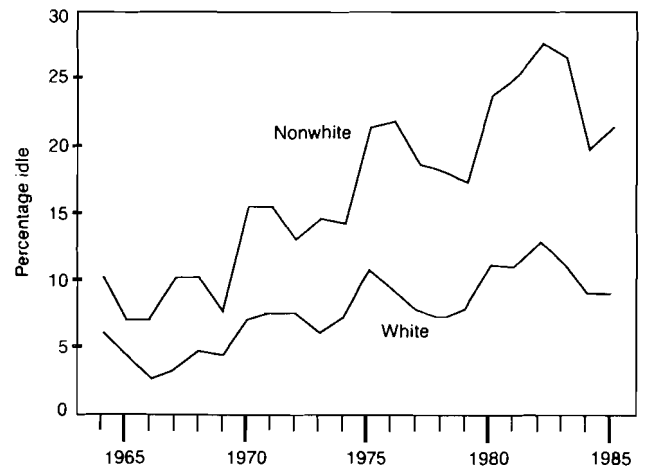


Figure 3. Percentage of Men Aged 20–24 Not Employed, Enrolled, or in Military, 1964–1985.

Source: Constructed from data supplied by Christopher Winship.

One way to estimate how good jobs are is to look at what workers with various sorts of qualifications could make if they worked full time, year round. Table 1, for example, shows the incomes of men 25 to 34 years old who worked full time, year round in 1967 and 1986.¹⁸ College graduates' real earnings rose 13 percent. Among the handful of men who had no high school education at all, real earnings fell 9 percent.¹⁹ Among men with 9 to 15 years of schooling—the vast majority of the labor force—real earnings hardly changed.

But while the earnings of full-time, year-round workers have not changed, Table 1 also shows that the proportion of men who actually work full time, year round has dropped for everyone, even, to some extent, for college graduates. This decline was largest among high school dropouts. This means that once we include men who did not work regularly in our income statistics, real income fell dramatically among all but the best educated. Among high school dropouts, for example, real income fell 23 percent.²⁰

Liberals usually blame the decline in full-time, year-round employment on the fact that firms have come to rely more heavily on part-time and short-term workers, making it harder to find steady work. Conservatives often blame supply-side factors. According to this view young workers are less inclined to stick with a job, even when they could do so. During the 1970s conservatives often argued that the

growth of public assistance, unemployment compensation, and disability benefits had made spells of idleness more attractive. This argument became less plausible during the 1980s, as public assistance benefits lagged further and further behind inflation and the proportion of jobless workers getting unemployment compensation fell. Most thoughtful conservatives have therefore stopped blaming the welfare state for rising joblessness and have begun to talk about the decline of the work ethic and reduced commitment to supporting a family.²¹ I know no evidence suitable for settling this debate.

Figures 1, 2, and 3 all show that joblessness and idleness were twice as common among nonwhites as among whites. This relationship has not changed since the 1950s, despite massive movement of blacks out of agriculture in the 1950s and 1960s and strong governmental pressure on private employers to hire more blacks during the late 1960s and 1970s. As we shall see, the educational gap between whites and nonwhites has also narrowed dramatically over the past generation. Nonwhites still enter the labor force with fewer academic skills than whites, but this disparity has also been narrowing. And while crime statistics suggest that nonwhites are less likely than whites to follow rules laid down by those in authority, the gap between black and white crime rates has been narrowing. Taken together, these considerations would lead us to expect a change in the historic rela-

Table 1
Income and Percentage Working Regularly among Men Aged 25 to 34
in 1967 and 1986, by Education

	Years of Schooling					All
	0-8	9-11	12	13-15	16 or more	
Income of full-time, year-round workers (in 1986 dollars)						
1967	15,027	18,235	21,747	24,514	29,657	22,397
1986	13,678	17,920	21,806	25,274	33,540	25,351
Percentage change	-9.0	-1.7	+0.3	+5.3	+13.1	+13.2
Percentage employed full time, year round						
1967	49.3	69.6	79.9	80.4	82.6	69.2
1986	28.4	46.9	62.3	68.4	76.5	60.7
Income of all men (in 1986 dollars)						
1967	13,246	17,026	20,401	22,368	26,971	20,535
1986	9,560	13,108	18,391	21,532	29,552	20,928
Percentage change	-27.8	-23.0	-9.9	-3.7	+9.6	+1.9

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-60, No. 60, *Income in 1967 of Persons in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), Table 4, and Series P-60, No. 159, *Money Income of Households, Families, and Persons in the United States: 1986* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988), Table 35. Estimates for all men include those without income. Price changes were estimated using the fixed-weight price index for Personal Consumption Expenditure from the National Income and Product Accounts (see *Economic Report of the President* [Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989], Table 4).

tionship between nonwhite and white joblessness, but no such change has occurred.

In an effort to resolve this puzzle, William Julius Wilson and John Kasarda have recently revived the old “spatial mismatch” hypothesis, according to which joblessness remains higher among blacks than among whites partly because blacks remain in the central city while blue-collar jobs have fled to the suburbs.²² While there may be some truth to this argument, the evidence is not currently very convincing.²³

Like many arguments about the underclass, the Wilson-Kasarda argument implies that chronic joblessness has grown faster in poor inner-city neighborhoods than elsewhere. Mark Hughes has used Census data to investigate changes in the geographic concentration of chronic joblessness in eight major American cities, including Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit. Averaging across all eight cities, the fraction of men over the age of 16 who worked less than half the year rose from 26 percent in 1969 to 39 percent in 1979. Extrapolating from Hughes’s findings, I estimate that the percentage of men working less than half the year rose from 40 to 58 percent in the worst fifth of all Census tracts and from 12 to 19 percent in the best fifth.²⁴ The absolute increase was thus larger in the worst tracts, but the proportional increase was larger in the best tracts. Such estimates do not suggest that chronic joblessness is becoming more concentrated in bad Census tracts.

If the economic underclass is composed of men who cannot get or keep regular jobs, along with the women and children who would depend on these men for support if the men had regular incomes, this underclass has clearly been growing. Its growth may reflect either changes in demand for relatively unskilled workers or changes in unskilled workers’ willingness to take and keep undesirable jobs. I see no evidence that chronic joblessness is more linked to either race or place today than it was a generation ago.

Is the moral underclass growing?

When social scientists (or college freshmen) speak of “middle-class values,” they mean a commitment to regular work habits, marrying before you have children, staying on the right side of the law, and other “square” ideals. Since blue-collar as well as white-collar families usually subscribe to these ideals, many people just describe them as “mainstream” or “American” rather than “middle class.”

When members of the middle class talk about the underclass (and nobody else does talk about it much), they usually have in mind people who make little effort to achieve these mainstream ideals: men who resort to violence when they cannot get what they want in other ways, men who are not willing to work unless they can find a “good” job, and women who have children out of wedlock if they cannot find a “good” husband. Because those who use the term underclass this way almost always think such behavior not just imprudent

but wrong, I have labeled the objects of their disapproval the “moral underclass.”

The affluent have always assumed that moral deficiencies play a major role in explaining poverty. This view pervaded nineteenth-century writing about the poor. When anthropologists began studying the American poor, however, they often argued that the moral values of the poor, like those of other exotic tribes, were just “different” from those of the American middle class, not “worse.” By the early 1960s ethnographers had accumulated a large body of descriptive material contrasting lower-class, working-class, and middle-class values.

Oscar Lewis’s widely read chronicles of the Puerto Rican and Mexican poor sharpened debate about these issues during the 1960s.²⁵ Lewis, who was something of a socialist, believed that the poor were enmeshed in what he called a “culture of poverty”—a culture that embodied much of what others had called lower-class values. He saw this culture as an inescapable by-product of competitive capitalism. He also argued that the culture of poverty was passed along from generation to generation and that those who imbibed it at an early age had great difficulty exploiting even those few economic opportunities that came their way.

The “culture question,” like almost everything else, became politicized in the late 1960s. Liberals were “against” the culture of poverty, because it implied that the poor conspired in their own misfortunes. Conservatives were “for” the culture of poverty, because it implied that the poor brought their troubles on themselves and that social reform wouldn’t work. Almost everything written about the issue since the late 1960s has been shaped by this partisan struggle.

When survey researchers ask people whether they want to work, whether they want to have children out of wedlock, or how they feel about violence, the poor give pretty much the same answers as everyone else. For liberals, such answers prove that the poor have the same values as the rest of us. But this hardly follows.

Few teenage girls say, for example, that they want to have a baby out of wedlock. But this does not prove that all teenage girls are equally anxious to avoid single motherhood. Preventing premarital births is costly, at least in the short run, and some teenagers are more willing than others to pay these costs. Some abstain from sexual intercourse when they do not have effective means of contraception available; others take chances. Some use contraception even when it seems unromantic; others hope for the best. Some get abortions or get married when they become pregnant; others do neither. When we talk about the value people assign to not having a baby out of wedlock, all these factors are relevant. The mere fact that almost all single women who contemplate motherhood say they would rather have a husband than depend on welfare or their own earnings does not suffice to prove that everyone assigns the same value to marrying before you have a baby.²⁶

Economists summarize this problem by saying that we need to know not only what people want but what they are willing to pay for it. Rather than trying to infer people's values from their ideals, economists prefer inferring values from behavior. The public seems to share this preference. When people say that values about work, extramarital childbearing, and law-abidingness have changed, they usually mean only that behavior has changed.

Inferring changes in values from changes in behavior is risky, however, because it is hard to be sure that the cost of the behavior in question has remained constant. We know, for example, that pregnant teenage girls are less likely to marry the fathers of their children today than in the past. This could mean that today's teenagers assign a lower value to legitimizing their babies. But it could just mean, as Wilson and others have argued, that staying single is less costly today than in the past, because the fathers of today's babies are less likely to be reliable breadwinners.

The behavioral changes that worry middle-class commentators the most are the apparent increases in idleness, drug abuse, crime, teenage births, and out-of-wedlock births. As we have already seen, there is no way to be sure whether the

increase in idleness reflects changes in workers' values, job opportunities, or both. Nor do we have reliable data on trends in drug or alcohol abuse. (Most observers agree that drug use is up, but it is still less common than alcohol, which has been a major problem since the early days of the Republic.) Those who argue that the moral underclass is growing must, therefore, rest their case primarily on trends in crime and reproductive behavior.

The criminal underclass

If you ask taxi drivers what has happened to the crime rate over the past decade, they will almost all tell you it has skyrocketed, especially in the ghetto. If you ask sociology graduate students the same question, they give you the same answer. Broad as this consensus is, it seems to be wrong.

The most reliable crime statistics are almost certainly those on murder. Table 2 shows that a white male or female had about the same chance of being murdered in 1985 as in 1975. A black male or female's chances of being murdered dropped by a third between 1975 and 1985. The race of murder victims is not, of course, an infallible guide to the race of their assailants, but arrest data indicate that about 90 percent of all murderers are of the same race as their victim.

Table 2

Murder, Robbery, and Aggravated Assault Victimization Rates, by Race, 1950-1985

	1950	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985
Murders (per 100,000 persons)							
White							
Male	3.8	3.6	4.4	6.7	9.1	10.9	8.2
Female	1.4	1.4	1.6	2.1	2.9	3.2	2.9
Nonwhite							
Male	44.2	34.3	40.4	61.4	62.6	57.8	40.5
Female	10.9	9.8	10.0	12.4	13.8	12.1	9.5
	1973	1974-76	1979-81	1984-86			
Robberies (per 100,000 persons over 12) ^a							
White	600	580	580	460			
Black	1,400	1,390	1,440	1,040			
Aggravated assaults with injury (per 100,000 persons over 12) ^a							
White	300	310	290	270			
Black	600	500	550	420			

Sources: For murder: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1979* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), p. 181; National Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Statistics of the United States, Vol. II, Mortality, Part A* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980, p. 32; 1985, p. 32); for robbery and assault: U.S. Department of Justice, *Criminal Victimization in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, annual).

^aThe 1973 estimates are rounded to the nearest 100 in the original and have larger sampling errors. The 1974-86 estimates are rounded to two significant digits in the source and are averaged over three years here to minimize sampling error. The sampling errors of the three-year averages are roughly ± 70 for black robbery, ± 50 for black assault, and ± 15 for white robbery and assault.

The likelihood that murders will be interracial has increased slightly since 1976, when the FBI first published such data, but not by enough to alter the basic story in Table 2.²⁷

Criminal victimization surveys carried out annually since 1973 show that robbery and aggravated assault have also declined since the mid-1970s.²⁸ Here, too, the decline has been especially marked among blacks (see Table 2). While interracial robbery and assault are relatively more common than interracial murder, their relative frequency has not increased in any consistent way since the victimization surveys began in 1973,²⁹ so trends in the race of victims provide reasonably reliable evidence regarding trends in the race of their assailants.

It is much harder to estimate trends in criminal violence prior to 1973. The FBI's Uniform Crime Reports are often cited as evidence of long-term trends, but they cover only "crimes known to the police." The number of crimes recorded by the FBI therefore depends on citizens' inclination to report crimes to the local police and on the diligence with which the local police record these reports. The Nixon administration spent large sums helping local police forces make their records more complete. As a result, the FBI recorded large increases in most crimes during the 1970s, even in years when victimization surveys showed no change. This discrepancy suggests that FBI crime statistics are not a very reliable guide to changes in the frequency of violent crime.

Murder statistics are, however, widely viewed as more reliable than other crime statistics. Not all murder victims are identified as such, but those who are identified seem to be counted quite accurately, and the proportion not identified is unlikely to have changed much over the past generation. Changes in the murder rate are therefore likely to provide the best available evidence on how the level of violence changed between 1950 and the mid-1970s.

The murder statistics in Table 2 suggest that violence declined during the 1950s, especially among nonwhite males, and that it increased dramatically between 1960 and 1975. Table 2 also suggests that there was less violence among nonwhites in 1985 than in 1950—a fact that seems hard to reconcile with the widespread perception that crime has gotten much worse in the ghetto.

Some social scientists have attributed trends in violent crime to the postwar baby boom and the subsequent baby bust, but this explanation has been oversold. There is little doubt that men between the ages of 15 and 24 are somewhat more violent than older men. The proportion of men aged 15–24 rose from 14 percent in 1960 to 18 percent in 1970 and 19 percent in 1980. By 1985 it had fallen back to 17 percent. Thus if youth aged 15–24 committed all the violent crimes in America, violent crime rates would have risen by nearly two-fifths between 1960 and 1980 and would have fallen by almost an eighth between 1980 and 1985. But since older men also commit a lot of crimes, changes in the age of the

population would actually have had far less effect than these calculations imply.

Table 2 suggests that victimization rates almost doubled during the 1960s. This increase is many times larger than we would expect if demographic change were the only factor at work. Likewise, victimization rates dropped far more after 1980, especially among nonwhites, than we would expect on the basis of demographic change alone.

The trends in Table 2 suggest that the criminal underclass has probably been shrinking, especially among blacks. We don't have trend data on the educational or economic background of violent criminals, so we cannot be sure that violence has declined as much among poor blacks as among blacks in general. But for many purposes that is irrelevant. What I have labeled the criminal underclass surely includes all repeat offenders, regardless of whether they come from poor homes or live in poor neighborhoods. A significant decline in the proportion of the population that is being murdered, mugged, or assaulted therefore suggests a decline in the size of the criminal underclass, or at least a decline in the fraction of the criminal underclass that is not behind bars. This conclusion seems valid regardless of whether the socioeconomic background of violent criminals has changed.

Table 2 does not tell us how the decline in violence was distributed geographically. The decline may have been smaller in big cities than in the rest of the country. But this view is hard to reconcile with the finding that violence declined more among blacks, who are now heavily concentrated in big cities, than among whites. The most plausible reading of Table 2, therefore, is that despite a lot of highly publicized drug-related mayhem, the criminal underclass is shrinking even in big cities.

The reproductive underclass

Middle-class Americans have always believed that adults should avoid having children until they can care for the children properly. Teenage motherhood seems irresponsible to most middle-class adults because teenagers seldom seem emotionally mature enough to become good parents and because teenagers can seldom provide for their children financially. Unwed motherhood also seems irresponsible in most cases, because single mothers have fewer economic and emotional resources than couples, and parenthood seems to demand all the economic and emotional resources one can possibly muster.

I will call those who have children they cannot care for adequately the "reproductive underclass." I use births to teenagers and to unmarried women as indicators of the size of this underclass. Readers should remember, however, that many children born to such mothers are well cared for, and that many children born in more auspicious circumstances end up economically or emotionally neglected.

Just as everyone knows that violent crime has been increasing, so too everyone knows that teenage parenthood has reached epidemic proportions, especially in the ghetto. Many adults regard this trend as evidence that middle-class values have lost their traditional sway. The epidemic of teenage parenthood that has inspired all this worry is, however, a myth. The likelihood that a girl will have a baby before her twentieth birthday has declined steadily since 1960 (see Table 3). This decline has been apparent among blacks as well as whites. By 1986, a girl's chances of having a baby before her twentieth birthday were only a little over half what they had been in 1960.

The declining proportion of teenagers who have babies does not, of course, necessarily mean that middle-class injunctions against premature motherhood carry more weight today than in the past. The decline may just reflect the fact that the pill and legalized abortion have lowered the cost of avoiding teenage motherhood. Still, there is no evidence that middle-class arguments against teenage parenthood have *less* influence today than in the past.

Table 3 shows that the decline in teenage childbearing has been accompanied by an even more precipitous decline in adult childbearing. The proportion of all children born to teenagers has therefore increased slightly. This change means that the next generation of adults will be somewhat more likely to have had a teenage mother than the present generation of adults. But the fact that older women are having fewer children certainly does not prove that middle-class norms about delaying parenthood have less influence on teenagers today than in the past.

Most middle-class Americans find unwed motherhood even more disturbing than teenage motherhood. Their feelings have many sources, including anger at men who father children for whom they take little responsibility, anger at women who think of public assistance as their God-given right, belief that children need a father at home for psychological reasons, awareness that children born out of wedlock are likely to spend much of their lives in poverty, and religious conviction that having children out of wedlock is sinful.

Unlike teenage motherhood, unwed motherhood really has increased over the past generation. The best (though not the most common) way to estimate the increase is to calculate the number of children a woman is likely to have over her lifetime while she is single. Table 3 shows that in 1960 the typical white woman could expect to have .08 illegitimate births over her lifetime.³⁰ By 1986 the figure had risen to .27. This is not a large absolute increase, but it is a huge percentage increase. Among blacks, the increase was from 1.05 illegitimate children in 1960 to 1.36 in 1986—a larger absolute increase but a much smaller percentage increase than among whites.

Viewed in isolation, these increases in out-of-wedlock childbearing hardly suggest a dramatic increase in public acceptance of illegitimacy. Read alongside the decline in births to married women, however, the increase in births to unmarried women does suggest a change in attitudes. In 1960, both

Table 3

Expected Fertility per Woman,
by Race and Marital Status, 1960–1986

	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1986
Expected lifetime births						
White	3.53	2.78	2.39	1.69	1.75	1.74
Black	4.54	4.83	3.10	2.24	2.27	2.23
Expected births prior to age 20						
White	.40	.30	.29	.24	.23	.21
Black	.80	.74	.73	.58	.52	.51
Percentage of children born to women under 20						
White	11.3	10.8	12.1	14.2	13.1	12.1
Black	17.6	19.3	23.5	25.9	22.9	22.9
Expected lifetime births while married						
White	3.45	2.67	2.25	1.56	1.57	1.47
Black	3.49	2.75	1.93	1.15	1.01	.86
Expected lifetime births while unmarried						
White	.08	.11	.14	.12	.18	.27
Black	1.05	1.08	1.16	1.09	1.09	1.36
Percentage of children born to unmarried women						
White	2.3	4.0	5.7	7.3	10.2	15.7
Black	23.2	28.2	37.6	48.8	55.5	61.2

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Statistics of the United States, 1986, Vol. 1, Natality* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988), Tables 1–6 and 1–31.

black and white women could expect to have 3.5 legitimate children before they reached menopause. By 1986 white women could only expect to have 1.5 legitimate children, and black women could only expect to have .9. Because of this precipitous decline in marital births, the proportion of all children born to unmarried mothers rose from 2 to 16 percent among whites and from 23 to 61 percent among blacks.

The pill and *Roe v. Wade* have clearly reduced the cost of preventing unwanted births. Most births to unmarried women were unwanted in 1960. All else equal, therefore, we would have expected illegitimate births to have fallen even more than legitimate births since 1960. Since no reduction occurred, we must infer that illegitimate births are not as unwanted as they used to be. This change could reflect either a change in the subjective value parents assign to legitimating their children or a change in the objective costs and benefits of doing so.

William Julius Wilson and Kathryn Neckerman have argued, for example, that as black fathers' chances of having a regular job declined, black mothers had less reason to marry the fathers of their children.³¹ This argument appears to be correct, but it explains only a small fraction of the overall decline in black marriage rates.

The easiest way to illustrate this point is to look at changes in black men's marital status. For simplicity, let us concentrate on men aged 35 to 44. The facts are as follows:

- Not working is a strong predictor of not being married. In 1960, for example, 84 percent of black men between the ages of 35 and 44 who had worked throughout the previous year were living with a wife, compared to only 49 percent of men who had not worked.
- Not working is also becoming more common. In 1960, 95 percent of black males aged 35–44 had worked for pay at some time during the previous year. By 1980 the figure was only 88 percent.³²

The increase in black male joblessness must have contributed to the declining proportion of black men who were married. But the increase in joblessness was nothing like large enough to account for the overall decline in black marriage rates. This becomes clear when we look at trends in marriage among black men in general and among black men who worked regularly:

- Between 1960 and 1980 the percentage of black males aged 35–44 who were married and living with their wives fell from 80 to 66 percent.
- During this same period the percentage of black male year-round, full-time workers who were married and living with their wives fell from 84 to 71 percent.

The decline in marriage among black male year-round workers was, in other words, almost as large as the decline among black men in general.³³ This pattern persists when we control for real earnings. It also persists among younger blacks and among whites.³⁴

The declining rate of marriage among regularly employed men may mean, as Barbara Ehrenreich has argued, that males have become more reluctant to take on family responsibilities even when they can afford to do so.³⁵ It may also reflect the fact that as women earn more they become less willing to marry and more willing to divorce men who are hard to live with.

The increase in out-of-wedlock childbearing may or may not mean that people are more willing to have babies they cannot care for properly. Not all illegitimate babies end up poor or neglected, and having such babies is not confined to the underclass. The practice has been spreading at all levels of American society. We may, in other words, be seeing a change in the content of middle-class morality rather than the growth of an underclass that repudiates or ignores that morality.

If we consider the evidence on childbearing and crime together, it is hard to make a strong case that middle-class values are losing their sway. The criminal underclass seems to have grown between 1960 and 1975, but it seems to have shrunk somewhat since 1980. Teenage births have declined. Out-of-wedlock births are increasing, but this increase seems to reflect a change in attitudes towards illegitimacy among the middle class as well as among the underclass.

It is also hard to make a strong case for lumping together the criminal underclass and the reproductive underclass. Both violate traditional middle-class norms of behavior, but that does not give them much in common. The criminal underclass is largely composed of violent men and their dependents. The reproductive underclass is composed of parents who have children they cannot support economically or emotionally. While there is surely some overlap between these two groups, I know of no evidence that the overlap is substantial.

Is the educational underclass growing?

A third common approach to defining the middle class emphasizes education rather than occupation or income. We often say that someone is middle class simply because he or she talks and acts in a certain way. Such judgments are especially common when we deal with women and children. Despite the widespread belief that class accents do not matter much in America, at least as compared to Britain, college freshmen can identify people's class background with extraordinary accuracy simply by hearing them talk.³⁶

If you talk like someone who has been to college and know a lot of the things college graduates typically know, others will usually call you middle class no matter what you do for a living. If you do not talk as if you were well educated but you are white, the white middle class will usually think of you as "working class." If you are black, the white middle class may see you as part of the underclass.

While I have labeled this group the "educational underclass," few people identify its members on the basis of educational credentials alone. Members of the underclass lack the social and cultural skills that middle-class employers take for granted in designing most blue-collar jobs, that middle-class civil servants take for granted in dealing with citizens, and that most firms take for granted in dealing with customers. Some of these skills are cognitive, some social. When employers say that job applicants lack "basic skills," for example, they may mean that the applicants cannot read instructions, spell correctly, or make change, but they may just mean that the applicants cannot understand oral instructions given in middle-class English, cannot figure out what middle-class customers want, or do not know how to project good will toward their fellow workers.

Some workers don't do these things because they don't want to. But some don't know how to do these things even when

they do want to do them. People who lack such skills are culturally and socially handicapped in the same sense that people who lack an arm are physically handicapped.³⁷ They cannot participate effectively in a society that takes such skills for granted. Such incapacities, when sufficiently extreme, make people dependent on the state for survival. Auletta's underclass was filled with such people.

In trying to decide whether the educational underclass is growing, we need to bear in mind that there is no absolute standard dictating what people need to know in order to get along in society. There is, however, an absolute rule that you get along better if you know what the elite knows than if you do not. The magnitude of the cultural gap between the top and the bottom of a society determines whether that society has something that can plausibly be labeled an educational underclass.

Unfortunately, we have no data on the distribution of social skills or on people's ability to communicate verbally with members of the professional and managerial elite. In the absence of such data we must settle for measures of educational attainment and academic skill to assess trends in the size of the educational underclass. These measures suggest that the white educational underclass has remained roughly constant in size since 1970, while the black educational underclass has shrunk dramatically.

Among whites, high school graduation rates leveled off in the late 1960s. As a result, the percentage of whites aged 25–29 without high school diplomas stopped its century-long decline in the late 1970s (see Table 4). One young white adult in seven has neither completed high school nor earned a high school equivalency certificate. This fraction shows no sign of declining in the near future. The proportion of young whites completing college has also leveled off at around 24 percent, so the gap between the best- and worst-educated whites appears to be roughly constant.

High school graduation does not, of course, require a fixed level of cultural or social competence. In trying to assess trends in the size of the educational underclass, we must also ask how much young people know and what they can do when they finish school. Table 4 also shows the proportion of 17-year-old high school students who could read at various levels in various years. The data come from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). For simplicity, I will refer to these 17-year-olds as graduating seniors, although a few are in fact in lower grades.

White seniors read marginally better in 1985 than in 1970, but the change was modest. Thus if we use a combination of cognitive skills and educational credentials to measure the size of the white underclass, Table 4 suggests that its size has been relatively constant in recent years.

The table tells us only about the young. Whites now reaching retirement age got far less education than the baby-boom generation. As these elderly whites die off, the percentage of

white adults without high school diplomas will keep falling. This process will continue well into the twenty-first century even if whites born this year get no more schooling than those born forty years ago.

The passing of these elderly dropouts does not mean, however, that the educational underclass is getting smaller. Elderly white dropouts grew up at a time when only half their generation finished high school and only a tenth finished college. The educated elite of their time therefore made fewer assumptions about what people could be expected to know and what they could do. As a result, elderly dropouts were not forced to pay the same social price for their limited knowledge and skills that today's dropouts

Table 4

High School Dropout Rates, College Graduation Rates, and Reading Scores of 17-Year-Olds Who Were Enrolled in School, by Race and Age, 1960–1985

	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985
Percentage of persons who had not completed high school						
Aged 25–29						
White	43.7	36.3	22.2	15.6	13.1	13.2
Nonwhite	76.4	61.4	41.6	26.2	23.0	17.6
Aged 20–24						
White	—	—	19.2	14.1	14.9	14.0
Black	—	—	38.2	29.5	25.7	19.2
Percentage of persons who had completed college						
Aged 25–29						
White	8.2	11.8	17.3	22.8	23.7	23.2
Black	2.8	5.4	10.0	15.4	15.2	16.7
Percentage of 17-year-old students who read at or above specified level						
“Basic”						
White	—	—	98.4	99.1	99.3	99.2
Black	—	—	83.6	86.0	88.8	96.5
“Intermediate”						
White	—	—	85.4	87.5	88.9	88.9
Black	—	—	41.1	45.0	45.8	65.8
“Adept”						
White	—	—	41.4	40.6	39.9	45.1
Black	—	—	6.9	7.1	6.1	15.5

Sources: Rows 1–2, 5–6: National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 1988* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988), Table 8; rows 3–4: National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986), p. 42, and U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population: 1970, United States Summary*, Detailed Characteristics, PC(1)-DI (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), Table 199; rows 7–12: National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 1988*, Table 88 (data cover 1970–71, 1974–75, 1979–80, and 1983–84).

must pay. This means that elderly dropouts should probably not be considered part of the educational underclass.

When we turn to nonwhites the story is very different and much more encouraging than the story for whites. High school graduation rates were much lower among nonwhites than among whites in 1970, but the nonwhite graduation rate has risen steadily since 1970. By 1985 young nonwhite adults were almost as likely as their white counterparts to have completed high school or earned an equivalency certificate.

Black high school seniors also did far better on reading tests in 1985 than in 1970. Since the proportion of blacks who were still in school was also higher in 1985 than in 1970, the overall increase in reading skill among all 17-year-old blacks was presumably even greater than Table 4 implies. The table suggests, therefore, that the black educational underclass is shrinking, not growing.

The improvement in black high school graduation rates and test scores chronicled in Table 4 is, no doubt, partly due to the desegregation of black schools in the rural South, which had barely begun in 1970. But the improvement is too large for rural blacks to account for it all. The improvement among urban blacks may have been less than that shown in Table 4, but it must still have been substantial.

The improvement in young blacks' high school graduation rates and test performance also reflects the fact that today's black teenagers have better-educated parents than black teenagers had in 1970. But this explanation does not in any way vitiate the conclusion that the black educational underclass has gotten smaller. It just helps explain why that has happened.

Can we generalize about the underclass?

The moral of this complex chronicle should by now be obvious. Whether the underclass is growing depends on what you mean by the underclass.

What I have called the economic underclass, defined by chronic joblessness, is probably growing. The big question is why. There is good reason to suspect that demand for unskilled workers has declined, but native-born workers may also have grown choosier about the jobs at which they are willing to work steadily.

The moral underclass, defined by its lack of commitment to traditional middle-class values, is composed of diverse groups that have little in common. The criminal underclass seems to be shrinking, especially among blacks. The reproductive underclass is shrinking by one measure (teenage motherhood) but growing by another (unwed motherhood).

The educational underclass, defined by its ignorance and its dearth of social skills, is not growing. Among whites, its size seems to be roughly constant. Among blacks, it is shrinking.

The second moral of my story is that the term underclass, like the term middle class, combines so many different meanings that social scientists must use it with extreme care. Indeed, they should probably avoid the word altogether unless they are prepared to make clear which of its many meanings they have in mind. My distinctions between the economic, criminal, reproductive, and educational underclasses were meant to give such discussions a bit more precision, but even with these adjectival modifiers the term remains full of ambiguities.

While the underclass requires adjectival modifiers if it is to be useful to social scientists, its unmodified variant is likely to remain useful in public discourse. By merging social problems as diverse as poverty, idleness, illiteracy, crime, illegitimacy, and drug abuse into a single "meta-problem," the term underclass encourages us to think about "meta-solutions." The search for meta-solutions appeals to many conservatives, liberals, and radicals who have little else in common but who all agree that we should stop treating social problems "piecemeal" and attack their "underlying causes."

Lumping diverse problems together and assuming that they have common causes is seldom a formula for making sound public policy. It does, however, seem to be a good formula for drawing attention to problems that American society has largely ignored since the mid-1970s. If the term underclass helps put the problems of America's have-nots back on the political agenda, it will have served an extraordinarily useful purpose. ■

¹The original articles were published November 16–30, 1981. They are available in book form: *The Underclass* (New York: Random House, 1982).

²For a history of the term see Robert Aponte, "Conceptualizing the Underclass: An Alternative Perspective," Urban Poverty Project, University of Chicago, 5811 S. Kenwood Ave., Chicago, Ill., offset, 1988.

³The first such study, which predated Auletta's popularization of the term, was Frank Levy, "How Big Is the American Underclass?" Urban Institute Working Paper 0090-1, Washington, D.C., 1977. For a more recent count that focuses on income, see Patricia Ruggles and William Marton, "Measuring the Size and Characteristics of the Underclass: How Much Do We Know?" Urban Institute, Washington, D.C., 1986.

⁴My conclusion that annual rates of movement in and out of poverty have been roughly stable over time is based on unpublished tabulations by Greg Duncan, using data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics.

⁵Richard Nathan, "The Underclass—Will It Always Be with Us?" Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University, 1986; Peter Gottschalk and Sheldon Danziger, "Poverty and the Underclass," testimony before the Select Committee on Hunger, U.S. Congress, August 1986.

⁶For an assessment of the evidence for and against this assumption, see Christopher Jencks and Susan Mayer, "The Social Consequences of Growing Up in a Poor Neighborhood: A Review," Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill. (forthcoming in Michael McGeary and Laurence Lynn, eds., *Concentrated Urban Poverty in America* [Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press]).

⁷For evidence on the extent of economic segregation see Douglas Massey and Mitchell Eggers, "The Ecology of Inequality: Minorities and the Concentration of Poverty, 1970-1980," *American Journal of Sociology*, forthcoming.

⁸I estimated the poverty rate of the median poor family's Census tract from data presented in Mary Jo Bane and Paul Jargowsky, "Urban Poverty Areas: Basic Questions Concerning Prevalence, Growth, and Dynamics," in McGeary and Lynn, eds., *Concentrated Urban Poverty*. The likelihood that a poor family has poor neighbors is, of course, dependent on block-level rather than tract-level segregation.

⁹Ricketts and Sawhill, "Defining and Measuring the Underclass," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 7 (Winter 1988), 316-325.

¹⁰Every year, one American family in five moves. We do not currently know how many of these moves lead to major changes in the demographic characteristics of the migrant's neighbors. We will be able to say more about this once the Panel Study of Income Dynamics makes available data on the characteristics of the Census tracts in which its respondents have lived.

¹¹Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Douglas Glasgow's *The Black Underclass: Poverty, Unemployment, and Entrapment of Ghetto Youth* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980) also concentrates on blacks. The only statistical study of the white underclass is Ronald Mincy's "Is There a White Underclass?" Urban Institute, Washington, D.C., 1988. But Auletta spent time in West Virginia, where he found what he regarded as a white underclass.

¹²Most Hispanics who did not classify themselves as "white" classified themselves as "other."

¹³Van Haitsma discusses a variant of this definition in this issue of *Focus*.

¹⁴Liebow, *Tally's Corner* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967).

¹⁵Anderson, *A Place on the Corner* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

¹⁶See Mare and Winship, "The Paradox of Lessening Racial Inequality and Joblessness among Black Youth: Enrollment, Enlistment, and Employment, 1964-1981," *American Sociological Review*, 49 (February 1984), 39-55.

¹⁷Readers should not overinterpret the year-to-year fluctuations in idleness among nonwhites, since the sampling errors of the estimates are quite large, especially for those aged 18-19.

¹⁸I have focused on 1967 and 1986 because they are the first and last years for which the Census Bureau has published the relevant data, and because they appear to represent roughly comparable points in the business cycle.

¹⁹These men constituted 11.6 percent of all men aged 25-34 in 1967 and 4.4 percent in 1986.

²⁰The changes among 25-34-year-old men shown in Table 1 recur when we look at all men over the age of 25, but the magnitude of the change is generally smaller.

²¹See Lawrence Mead, "The Hidden Jobs Debate," *The Public Interest*, No. 91 (Spring 1988), pp. 40-58.

²²See Wilson's *The Truly Disadvantaged* and Kasarda, "Urban Industrial Transition and the Underclass," *The Annals*, 501 (January 1989), 26-47.

²³For a review of the evidence on the "spatial mismatch" hypothesis, see Christopher Jencks and Susan Mayer, "Residential Segregation, Job Proximity, and Black Job Opportunities: The Empirical Status of the Spatial Mismatch Hypothesis," Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill. (forthcoming in McGeary and Lynn, eds., *Concentrated Urban Poverty*).

²⁴All the percentages in the text are unweighted means for all eight cities. My estimates for the best and worst fifth of all Census tracts assume that these tracts average 1.4 standard deviations above and below the citywide mean.

²⁵See especially *The Children of Sanchez* (New York: Random House, 1961) and *La Vida* (New York: Random House, 1965).

²⁶David Ellwood discusses this issue in more detail in this issue of *Focus*.

²⁷Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976 and 1986).

²⁸Estimates of violent crime should also cover rape, but trends in reported rape reflect trends in willingness to report having been raped as well as trends in actual victimization. The small number of rape reports in victimization surveys also leads to a lot of random year-to-year fluctuation in the estimated frequency of rape.

²⁹Victims' reports of their assailant's race are available annually in U.S. Department of Justice, *Criminal Victimization in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office).

³⁰Expected lifetime fertility for any given year was estimated by asking what would have happened if the age-specific birthrates for that year had applied throughout a woman's lifetime. I then estimated marital and non-marital fertility by assuming that lifetime fertility would be divided between marital and nonmarital births in the same way that actual births were divided in the relevant year.

³¹See Wilson and Neckerman, "Poverty and Family Structure: The Widening Gap between Evidence and Public Policy Issues," in Sheldon H. Danziger and Daniel H. Weinberg, eds., *Fighting Poverty: What Works and What Doesn't* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 232-259, or Wilson's *The Truly Disadvantaged*.

³²While the proportion of blacks aged 35-44 who did not work at all rose, the proportion working more than 50 weeks also rose slightly (from 57 percent in 1960 to 61 percent in 1980). The same pattern recurs among blacks aged 25-34. Thus, one cannot argue that marriage rates fell because those who worked were working less regularly.

³³Erol Ricketts discusses this decline in this issue of *Focus*.

³⁴All the estimates of marital and employment status in the text are based on 1/1000 samples of 1960 and 1980 Census records. Gary McClelland did the tabulations.

³⁵Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men* (New York: Doubleday, 1983). See also the critique in Irwin Garfinkel and Sara S. McLanahan, *Single Mothers and Their Children* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1986).

³⁶Dean Ellis, "Speech and Social Status in America," *Social Forces*, 45 (1967), 431-437.

³⁷Because the handicaps I am discussing are cultural and social, I initially labeled this group the "cultural underclass." Unfortunately, this term conjures up the "culture of poverty" and leads to confusion between this group and what I have called the moral underclass.