

From: William Julius Wilson, When Work Disappears: The World of the Urban Poor

I. What are ghettos? What are inner-cities? They can be identified by a census tract, where where at least 40% of the residents are defined as "poor," using federal standards.

- A. Why is there such concentration? Because working people and people with some means have moved out.
- b. The existence of hypersegregation among urban blacks - a result of de jure racial segregation and its legacy.
- c. Wilson argues, however, that the history of racial segregation cannot fully explain the concentration of poverty. He argues instead that some attention has to be paid to rapid depopulation as people left.

II. The main problem today is joblessness and a "new urban poverty," which Wilson describes as neighborhoods in which a substantial majority of individual adults are either unemployed or have dropped out of the labor force altogether. It is important to stress here that there are plenty of poor neighborhoods where people work, but which are still "poor," in some sense. Yet, the new urban poverty is characterized by substantial joblessness.

III. In the past, greater class integration w/in black communities, resulted in neighborhoods w/ higher levels of "social organization:" Meaning:

- a. The prevalence, strength, and interdependence of social networks.
- b. The extent of collective supervision that the residents exercise and the personal responsibility that they assume in neighborhood affairs.
- c. The rate of resident participation in voluntary and formal organizations and informal networks.

- 1. When social organization is poor low, there are observable adverse effects on neighborhood life.
- 2. Development of community norms that can facilitate negative behaviors. Clear connection between joblessness and violent crime.

IV. The Disappearance of Jobs

- A. Decline of Manufacturing: Good jobs, with good wages, which required a high school education and skills. These jobs also offered job mobility within the industry, thereby fostering stability.
- B. With the decline of manufacturing, growth of the service economy, which pays less, offers less security, and sometimes requires more skills, or at least, another skill set. For little education and experience, these are the jobs. Yet, these jobs are typically associated with women. Known as "pink collar jobs."
- C. The internationalization of the low-skill labor market. Flight of factories to countries where there is cheap and often non-unionized labor.
- C. In short, industrial restructuring has taken its toll on Americans, especially American males. (The losers in this

restructuring have been and will continue to be persons w/
lower levels of education.
D. The reactions of these workers? They often "drop-out" of
the labor force.

- V. The New Jobs: What are they and where are they? There is now
an evident mismatch between the suburban location of
employment and urban workers.
A. The few manufacturing jobs that remain are now in the
suburbs. Difficult to get out there.
B. Many service jobs are also out in the suburbs.

- VI. What other Factors have contributed to the creation of
ghettos?

1. Federal Government Policy : Government withheld mortgage
capital, thereby making it difficult for urban residents to
purchase their homes. FHA redlined black neighborhoods, by
not underwriting mortgage loans - seen as "high risks."
2. Growth of suburbs, with different revenue streams.
3. Lack of government efforts to combat racial
discrimination in housing markets helped lead to the
construction of massive public housing projects were heavily
minority and poor.
4. Crisis of Public Education funding. Poor neighborhoods
tend to have poor and under-resourced schools.

- VII. Ghetto-Related Behavior and the Structure of Opportunity:

A. Without sufficient opportunities to join the formal labor
market, ghetto residents join informal labor markets or are
only loosely connected to formal labor markets through odd
jobs, etc. This situation engenders:

1. A certain hopelessness and negative feelings.
2. Observable gender gap? Girls tend to stick w/
things and boys head to the streets.
3. Attractiveness of Drug-Dealing and other
illicit activities.
4. Social isolation of adults - no mutual support
networks either for the neighborhood or for finding
out about jobs. Lack of persons within the
neighborhood with resources.
5. Increase in street- crime.
6. Absence of work-related behaviors and norms -
everything from punctuality, sense of responsibility,
speech patterns, dress codes and suitable public
behaviors.

- VIII. The Fading Inter-City Family

A. Decrease in marriage-rates: Men don't have jobs.
B. A rise in children born of a mother who has never and may
not ever be married. Among black women, higher educated
women are more likely to marry than less educated women (The
opposite of white women.)
C. Many kids being raised by single mothers.
D. In policy circles, it is often asserted that welfare has
helped to foster single-parenthood. Wilson argues that it
is joblessness instead.
E. On the whole, Wilson's respondents (the women) possess
quite negative views of black men as husbands and fathers.

Men have multiple partners and multiple children.
F. General distrust of marriage as an institution, since the norms of marriage clash with the norms that many men possess. (High value on freedom and autonomy.)
G. End result: A high tolerance for single parenthood.

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

A. Negative employer perceptions about their qualifications and work ethic are higher for black Americans than for any other group.

1. p. 113 - Discuss the employer's remarks. Also page 118 for table of employer observations on job attainment or retention.

- a. Many employers see it as a "class" thing.
- b. Weak to non-existent Work ethic
- c. Moral character (or lack thereof)
- d. Cultural predispositions
- e. Neighborhood Milieu
- f. Poor education

B. Significant Gender Gap - More positive attitudes towards black females than black males.

C. If these negative attitudes exist, what are the consequences?

1. Employers will advertise in more local papers as opposed to city dailies, thereby restricting the applicant pool.
2. Jobs will be advertised by word of mouth.
3. A screening out process begins before a black applicant enters the room. Assessment of individuals is lost.
4. Non-recruitment at black urban high schools.

D. What are the attitudes of black workers, esp. black males?

1. Knowledge that employers possess negative attitudes towards them.
2. Black males (versus Mexican males) more hostile to low-paying jobs, less flexible in assignments and less willing to work hard for low wages. Sense of being a victim of discrimination. Also, a sense of "honor" and "pride."

X. What are the solutions?

A. Analogies to the U.S. experience - The experiences of unskilled immigrant workers, who were recruited to work and are now being laid off. Joblessness there, like here, is being created by changes in the global economy.

B. Yet, the U.S. is different - An absence of comprehensive public programs to promote the *social* rights of Americans. Anti-poverty programs have been limited and fragmented. Social citizenship rights in the U.S. are less developed and less intertwined with rights of political and civil citizenship. For example, most housing programs designed to promote home ownership have been directed at the middle and working classes, not the poor. Similarly, medical care is not considered a basic collective good.

C. A huge problem or difficulty in addressing poverty in the U.S. is how the discussion is itself framed: individual responsibility vs. the collective/structural circumstance.

In the U.S., the economic origins and social significance of poverty and welfare are minimized.

D. The growth or increase of tensions b/w blacks and other minorities (mostly immigrants) how live in neighborhoods that border black ghettos (e.g. Latinos) or who work in black ghettos (e.g. Koreans). Negative stereotypes and different views towards poverty and how to get out of it.

E. Affirmative Action policies have had the effect of benefiting those in the position to take advantage of it. These policies, on the whole, did not open up vast avenues of opportunities for the masses of black people.

F. Wilson recommends "race neutral" policies: "Programs that increase employment opportunities and job skills training, improve public education, promote better child and health care, and reduce neighborhood crime and drug abuse - would, despite being race-neutral, disproportionately benefit the most disadvantaged segments of the population, especially poor minorities."

G. Wilson proposes two long-term solutions in an effort to address the issues of generating good jobs and combating the growing wage inequality among workers: 1) the relationship b/w employment and education and family support systems, and 2) in the metropolitan context, the relationship b/w the cities and suburbs. (p.208).

H. Wilson also suggests WPA-style jobs, aimed at broad segments of the U.S. population.

1. Long-term solutions: Development of a system of national performance standards in public schools, family policies to reinforce the learning system in the schools, a national system of school-to-work transition, and ways to promote city-suburban integration and cooperation.
2. Short-term solutions: Development of job information and placement centers and subsidized car pools in the ghetto to the creation of WPA-style jobs.

XI. Wilson's punchline: It is really more about class, than race. The problems about which we are concerned, and appear to be borne in greater proportion by black people, cannot be solved by race-specific policies only. As Wilson sees them, such programs have real limitations insofar as they supposedly only benefit the better off (rather than the truly disadvantaged). They are also limited because of their limited political viability. Wilson seems to think that class-specific policies have stronger "political legs." Is he right? What on the American political landscape supports his view? By contrast, Lani Guiner and Gerald Torres argue the opposite: That race is a useful way of forging class alliances.