Race and poverty in Baltimore: the struggle for social and economic mobility continues for young men in our cities

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The Long Shadow: Family Background, Disadvantaged Urban Youth, and the Transition to Adulthood
by Karl Alexander, Doris Entwisle, and Linda Olson
Russell Sage Foundation, 2014, $35.00; 300 pages.

How do the social contexts of family, neighborhood, and school in the early years relate to life outcomes for urban youth? Why do some rise above disadvantage to succeed at work and in life, while others do not? To explore these questions, sociologists Karl Alexander, the late Doris Entwisle, and Linda Olson launched a study of Baltimore's children as they began school in 1982, selecting a representative sample of 800 1st graders, and following them with questionnaires and interviews until the subjects reached age 28.

Baltimore was prosperous during World War II, but in the postwar period, with suburbanization and then the decline of American heavy industry and manufacturing, the city lost half its jobs in these areas, the jobs that enable those with less education to make decent lives. It also lost a good part of its white population. When this study began, the school system enrolled mostly black children, with so few whites that their presence in the sample was expanded to permit meaningful comparisons between black and white.

Heavily statistical, the book is supplemented with vivid comments from interviews with the children and young adults. (We do not hear from the teachers and parents, who were also interviewed.)

The authors are eager to correct stereotyped views of disadvantaged black areas, such as the picture presented in the widely noted 1997 book by David Simon and Edward Burns, The Corner, which was subtitled, "A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood," and made into a television miniseries in 2000. Fortunately for the authors of The Long Shadow, The Corner concentrated on a Baltimore neighborhood served by one of the schools in their sample, and they can contrast the picture shown there with their own research.

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Race and Economic Mobility. Black and Native American people in upper-income families are more likely to lose their status than white, Hispanics, or Asian American people, according to 2018 study. The study “Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States: An Intergenerational Perspective” reviewed racial disparities in income from 1989 to 2015. The disadvantage is most striking among men. Black men born into families at the 75th percentile of the income distribution wind up, on average, 12 percentiles below white men born into equally affluent families. Black and white women are more likely than men to remain in the income range they were born into. But women of both races earn less than men. As a result of all these blocks, most Americans don’t aspire to get ahead. Describe types of social mobility. Distinguish between relative and absolute poverty. Describe the economic situation of some of the world’s most impoverished areas. Examine poverty in the United States. Social Mobility. Social scientists define global poverty in different ways and take into account the complexities and the issues of relativism described above. Relative poverty is a state of living where people can afford necessities but are unable to meet their society’s average standard of living. Centuries of struggle over land ownership have meant that much useable land has been ruined or left unfarmed, while many countries with inadequate rainfall have never set up an infrastructure to irrigate. Black men enjoy much less mobility than white men, but the gap between black and white women is small. This is perhaps the most striking, and certainly the most controversial, finding of the study. Black Americans’ disadvantage on mobility relative to whites, the researchers conclude, is entirely driven by a disadvantage between black and white men: Chetty, Hendren, Jones, and Porter 2018. No matter what their parents’ income level, black men do worse than white men on average. Race and Poverty in Baltimore: The Struggle for Social and Economic Mobility Continues for Young Men in Our Cities. By Glazer, Nathan. Read preview. The two neighborhoods adjacent to “the Corner” are almost entirely black; poverty and unemployment rates are relatively high. But they defy “simple characterization as an underclass ghetto.” According to the 2000 Census, the two neighborhoods are economically diverse, with the majority of residents employed in a variety of sectors. Nine of the men were employed full-time: one as a barber, one as a corrections officer, and the rest in construction. Five earned at least $35,000 a year, and two others earned more than $50,000. Not so good, but from their own point of view, not so bad.