

== Chapter 1 ==

The Long Shadow and Urban Disadvantage

THIS VOLUME is an account of the developmental foundation that connects children's socioeconomic well-being as young adults to family conditions growing up. It is set in Baltimore, Maryland, during the last two decades of the twentieth century into the first decade of the twenty-first, years that were not kind to the deindustrializing cities of the East Coast and Midwest. As these cities suffered economic decline, their residents suffered economic hardship.

For children, family is the launching pad and the focus of this volume. A family's resources and the doors they open cast a long shadow over children's life trajectories—personal and academic at the start, and extending later to prospects for achieving success in adulthood. This view is at odds with the popular ethos that we are makers of our own fortune. Such self-serving mythology is not easily shaken, but according to the Nobel Laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz (“Equal Opportunity, Our National Myth,” *New York Times Opinionator*, February 16, 2013), the rhetoric of equal opportunity rests on particularly shaky grounds: “the life prospects of an American is more dependent on the income and education of his parents than in almost any other advanced industrial country.”

That long shadow is the organizing theme of this book and is focused on those we call the urban disadvantaged: Baltimore's children whose parents rank low by conventional markers of socioeconomic standing (level of education, occupation, and income). In classic sociological terms, it is an inquiry into intergenerational social mobility, origins to destination, but here embedded in a life-course developmental framework that extends from early childhood into young adulthood.

Baltimore as Context

Baltimore's decades-long economic decline was well under way in the early 1980s when the children at issue in this volume set out on their journey through the city's public schools. Beginning in 1970, and continuing

through the five years they were in elementary school (1982–1987), half the city’s jobs in primary metals, shipbuilding repair, and transportation assembly disappeared (Levine 1987, 107). The historic core of Baltimore’s industrial might had relocated offshore, to the region’s rapidly expanding suburbs and low-wage parts of the country, or simply faded away in favor of the new postindustrial economy. This new economy provides lucrative careers for workers in high-end technology and the so-called FIRE industries—finance, insurance, and real estate—but mainly low-wage, low-benefit jobs for those in the expanding service sector (for example, Olson 1997). Ranked eighty-seventh among the nation’s hundred largest cities in median income, by 2000 Baltimore had become a poor city in the country’s wealthiest state (Walters and Miserendino 2008, 3).

Poor, yes, but not uniformly so. Baltimore in fact had become, and is today, “two cities—a city of developers, suburban professionals, and ‘back-to-the-city’ gentry . . . and a city of impoverished blacks and displaced manufacturing workers, who continue to suffer from shrinking economic opportunities, declining public services, and neighborhood distress” (Levine 1987, 103). This book is about the children of the second Baltimore, the one largely untouched by the much-touted renaissance redevelopment of the city’s Inner Harbor port area away from shipping and manufacturing in favor of tourism and white-collar employment (Levine 1987; Ann LoLordo, “A Smaller, Poorer City in the Future,” *Baltimore Sun*, January 18, 1987, p. 1E). They are the urban disadvantaged, as explained in the sections that follow.

The Urban Disadvantaged: Who Are They, Who Are They Not?

Who are these children? Disadvantaged families live in the poorest parts of the city. Often these are areas of concentrated poverty, where 20 percent, 40 percent, or more of the residents are poor or jobless or both. In the worst of these, when children leave home they find themselves in the midst of poverty, crime, and urban decay, and see boarded-up houses and empty businesses lining their streets. Consider Mae’s (a pseudonym) account of the West Baltimore neighborhood—low income, African American—where she grew up:

I was living . . . near like the Pratt Street area, Pratt and Baltimore Street, in between. It was bad, it was real bad. Drug, very hard drug area. Actually, I seen, like, right in my street where I lived at, I seen somebody die there. . . . That’s how it was for me, you know.

Middle-class children might catch a glimpse of this world on the way downtown for a ballgame or to visit a museum, but it is at a far

remove, in kind if not distance, from what they experience when out and about. Inviting playgrounds and parks dot their world, with ample green space and the latest equipment, and the daily rhythm to life has people doing ordinary things—going off to work in the morning, or out to shop, or into the yard to garden.

But the ordinary in one setting can be quite extraordinary in another. Adults are visible throughout the day in high-poverty neighborhoods too, but often just hanging out, sometimes sipping from bottles in brown paper bags. Gangs, public drug-dealing, and prostitution can make the playgrounds not all that inviting. Often they are covered with concrete, not grass, with broken bottles and used needles strewn about. William Julius Wilson (1978) tells us that life in low-income urban America was not always this way, but the exodus of jobs, the middle class (whites initially, later followed by African Americans), and stabilizing institutions has left many of them bereft of employment opportunities and good role models for children.

Despite a large scholarly literature on these “ghetto poor,” to use Wilson’s now preferred characterization (2006), in the popular mind they are still the urban underclass, pejorative connotations and all. Consider Myron Magnet’s (1987) characterization from around the time at issue: “What primarily defines them is not so much their poverty or race as their behavior—their chronic lawlessness, drug use, out-of-wedlock births, non-work, welfare dependency and school failure. ‘Underclass’ describes a state of mind and a way of life.”¹

We think we know who these people are: angry black men caught up in the swirl of crime and drugs and poorly educated young black women with babies out of wedlock, images that dominate media portrayals of communities like Mae’s. The area of West Baltimore where Mae grew up achieved unwelcome notoriety in the book *The Corner* (Simon and Burns 1997) and then, in 2000, a made-for-television movie based on it.² A look at the urban underclass as portrayed in *The Corner* will prove instructive, as its geographic focus and time frame take in some of the children whose lives are chronicled in this volume. Instructive as a negative example, it advances a view of the urban disadvantaged that is widely held, but badly mistaken.

The Face of Urban Disadvantage in The Corner

Subtitled *A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood*, *The Corner* is a journalistic account of two neighborhoods on Baltimore’s west side brought down by an open-air drug market. It is a truly horrific portrayal of life on the mean streets of the city, a tale of families decimated and lives destroyed by drugs and the drug trade. The publisher, Random House, tells us online that *The Corner* “examines the sinister realities of

inner cities across the country.”³ No doubt it does, but the “realities” it portrays are one-sided and incomplete. Two other urban ethnographies from around the same time, Elijah Anderson’s *Code of the Street* (2000) in Philadelphia and Mary Pattillo-McCoy’s *Black Picket Fences* (2000) in Chicago, provide a stark contrast.

All three books have much to say about the tangled web of drugs, crime, and urban decay, but *The Corner* offers little more: in a book of 535 pages, one is hard pressed to find more than a handful of sympathetic characters. In its rendering of life in the big city, there are no caring teachers or social workers or ministers or store owners or cops or parents or neighbors. The ties that bind, rather, are utterly and unremittingly destructive.

Missed in their account is that these communities are not just drug dens; they also are home to many “decent folk” (Anderson 2000), the poor, near-poor, and nonpoor who struggle mightily to forge respectable lives free of fear. *The Long Shadow* also is about those living in “inner cities across the country,” but our experience offers a different view of these neighborhoods. To correct the distortions perpetrated in popular accounts like *The Corner*, we turn to two sources: census data on the section of Baltimore profiled in *The Corner* and our own sampling of children who grew up there.

A Census Profile of The Corner

The Corner is a real place—a map in the front of the book locates it at the intersection of West Fayette and North Monroe Streets in West Baltimore. This intersection straddles two of the 266 Baltimore Neighborhood Statistical Areas developed by the City Housing Authority from census blocks to approximate authentic neighborhoods, which census tracts do not quite do because their boundaries can be quite arbitrary. They are Penrose-Fayette Street Outreach (PF) on the west side of North Monroe (3,810 residents in 2000) and Franklin Square (FS) on the east side (3,550 residents). Most of *The Corner*’s drama takes place in Franklin Square, the more economically depressed of the two. So who lives in these two neighborhoods, and is *The Corner*’s rendering faithful to their reality?

Using the 2000 Census because it is closest in time to the book’s 1997 publication, we find that both neighborhoods are racially segregated and include many female-headed, single-parent households. Against Baltimore City overall and relative to Penrose-Fayette, conditions in Franklin Square are much harsher. Franklin Square has the kind of neighborhood profile one might expect from *The Corner*, but even that neighborhood defies simple characterization as an underclass ghetto.

Table 1.1 The Corner in 2000 Census Data

Census Characteristics	Franklin Square	Penrose-Fayette	Baltimore City
Number of residents	3,550	3,810	651,154
Black residents	95.9	97.8	64.3
Poverty rate			
All families	33.7	12.5	18.8
Families, children under eighteen	40.2	20.5	26.2
Female-headed households, children under eighteen	44.6	30.4	38.3
Households with married couples	14.7	23.0	26.7
Households female headed, children under eighteen	23.0	17.2	13.3
Households, householder living alone	34.2	24.5	34.9
Residents twenty-five and over with:			
No high school diploma	44.4	42.7	31.6
High school graduate	35.8	30.5	28.2
Some college and above	19.8	26.9	40.2
Bachelor's and above	3.6	5.6	19.1
In labor force	52.4	45.7	56.5
Employed	42.8	37.9	50.4
Unemployed	9.2	7.9	6.0
Income below \$10,000	36.4	13.5	18.7
Income \$25,000 and above	41.7	55.8	57.2
Income \$35,000 and above	25.4	38.7	43.4

Source: Authors' compilation based on data from the 2000 Census for Baltimore (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000).

Note: All numbers except total residents in percentages.

In it, as well as in Penrose-Fayette, the vast majority of residents are not poor, nor are they unmarried mothers with dependent children (see table 1.1).

These neighborhoods are diverse in other respects as well. In both PF and FS, many residents age twenty-five and older do not have high school degrees, but the majority do—some by way of the general educational development certificate (GED)—and many attended college: 20 percent in FS and 26.9 percent PF, of whom 3.6 percent and 5.6 percent, respectively, completed a bachelor's degree.

As would be expected, unemployment rates in these communities are high, but roughly half their residents are in the labor force.⁴ Most are employed, and in a perhaps surprising array of jobs. In Franklin Square in 2000, 15 percent are in management and professional positions and another 25 percent in sales and office occupations, categories

of employment outside the service sector and laborer categories (not reported in table 1.1, but from the same source). Additionally, Franklin Square is not unusual in that these two occupational sectors account for 47 percent of all jobs in Penrose-Fayette.

In 2000, the poverty cutoff nationally for a family of four was \$17,050. Many residents of FS and PF had incomes that low or lower, but 42 percent of FS households had incomes over \$25,000 and 25 percent were over \$35,000; PF incomes were higher still, 56 percent over \$25,000 and 39 percent over \$35,000. So while these two communities indeed are home to many poor and near-poor residents, the people who live there are not all destitute. Some are in fact comfortably well off.

Too often, journalistic accounts of the urban poor portray them in stereotyped, monolithic terms, and this is especially true of the black poor. The problems in these communities are real and severe and *The Corner* no doubt faithfully captures one facet of life in them. But one facet is not the whole.

The Corner Through the Lived Experience of Its Children

We now consider these two communities from a rather different vantage point. For almost twenty-five years, we tracked the life progress of 790 children who began first grade in the fall of 1982 in twenty Baltimore public elementary schools. This book is about their journey from childhood into young adulthood. It happens that one of these schools, the poorest of the twenty, is located in a neighborhood that borders the two depicted in *The Corner*. To characterize that school as high need would be an understatement—90 percent of its children received reduced price or free meals at school, marking them low income.⁵ Our random sample of first graders from that school includes twenty-two African American males, almost all of whom as first graders lived in Franklin Square. We last spoke with eighteen of the twenty-two in 2005. Their average age at the time was twenty-eight—first graders no longer. Though but a small sampling of the area's residents, their numbers are ample to establish that not all *The Corner's* children follow the path anticipated for them in that volume. By extension, the same can be said of children in Baltimore's other low-income communities.

Seven of the eighteen interviews were conducted in lockups and seventeen of the eighteen had been arrested at some point in their lives, all but one leading to a conviction. Their arrests mostly were drug related (using and distributing), often paired with other offenses, including possession of a firearm, assault, domestic violence, and attempted murder. Fifteen of the eighteen acknowledged using drugs, mainly marijuana,

but cocaine as well in one instance and in two others another substance not identified.⁶ Ten told of other users in the family, six mentioning their fathers, three their mothers, and two each brothers and sisters.⁷

The book seems a lot like *The Corner* to this point, but the young people whose lives are chronicled in *The Corner* blur together. They are individuals, of course, but in matters of consequence, the unfolding scripts of their lives are much the same. Not so for the youth in *The Long Shadow*. Seven had dropped out of high school (one later completed the GED). The rest graduated and six went on to obtain postsecondary certification: one an associate's degree, one a bachelor's degree, and four technical school certificates. That kind of educational distribution might not be expected of young people growing up in the shadow of *The Corner's* drug markets and drug culture.

Their work histories also are instructive. When interviewed at age twenty-eight, of the eleven not incarcerated, nine were employed full time, mostly in the construction trades, but one was a barber and one a correctional officer. Over the longer term, five of the eighteen were employed full time for the entire preceding twenty-four months and two worked full time more than 90 percent of the time since high school. Their earnings on the whole were modest, but the exceptions are noteworthy: two earned above \$50,000, and five others between \$25,000 and \$35,000. These are young black men from *The Corner* working steadily and drawing a decent paycheck.

Here is how one young man who survived *The Corner* reflects on his experience as a young adult. When we spoke with him, Floyd was employed, and though he had attended community college for two years, family obligations kept him from finishing:

It was a lot of drugs, drug activity, lot of, you know, shooting and homicide, stuff like that going on. I made up my mind, though, that I wasn't going to let myself be subjected to, you know, all the negativity around me. You know, I felt for myself, you know, I had things in mind. I became a father at a young age, so that helped me to, you know, want more for myself, to try to do better.

I mean, to me, success coming out of the neighborhood that I came out of, and doing what I'm doing, I think I've succeeded in what I wanted to do. To not become a statistic. To not be on a corner selling drugs, not be out there getting high. To be able to live, say that I have things that are mine. I think I will be completely successful, like I said, . . . once I become comfortable with living.

This reflection on the meaning of *success* is not an account one likely would hear from someone a half dozen years out of college who grew

Table 1.2 The Corner in 1980 Census Data

	Black in Neighborhood	Below 75% Poverty Level	Below Poverty Level	Below 200% Poverty Level	Women Head with Child in Poverty
Four black neighborhoods	96.9	28.0	40.2	67.9	60.8
Two white neighborhoods	12.3	28.3	39.9	67.3	74.0
Baltimore City	55.6	17.0	22.9	45.9	49.7

Source: Baltimore City Department of Planning 1983.

Note: All numbers except median family income in percentages.

^aEquivalent to \$28,271 in 2013 dollars.

^bEquivalent to \$26,010 in 2013 dollars.

^cEquivalent to \$44,386 in 2013 dollars.

up in one of the city's wealthier neighborhoods, or from one of The Corner's urban underclass, for that matter. This young man never did drugs growing up. Although he did have a problem encounter with the law, he was not convicted and never served time. His story has no high-paying job or fancy car; his standard of success is more substantial.

Floyd's account is one departure from *The Corner's* negative portrayal of the urban disadvantaged. Another is that they are not all African American. This particular school drew from six surrounding neighborhoods. Two were low-income white, but apart from their racial makeup (95 percent and 80 percent white, according to the 1980 Census) are practically interchangeable with the five African American communities: for example, 40.2 percent poverty in the African American and 39.9 percent in the white, both well above the 22.9 percent citywide rate (table 1.2). In terms of deep poverty (below 75 percent of the poverty level) and near poverty (below 200 percent of the poverty level), the figures likewise are similar. Although occupational profiles in the white communities are somewhat more favorable, the picture in fact is mixed: white median family income is lower and the white poverty rate for children living in female-headed households is higher (see table 1.2).⁸

That poor whites live side by side with poor blacks in one of the most distressed sections of Baltimore would not be anticipated from *The Corner*, nor, for that matter, from most academic accounts of urban disadvantage (for example, Anderson 2008). Partly, it is because we tend to think of black and white poverty differently. Sandra Barnes (2005, 17), citing census data from 2000, notes that "75 percent of all impoverished are white," but also that (taken from Flanagan 1999): "poverty among

Women Head with Child	High School Graduate Age Twenty-Five Plus	Men Unemployed	Employed Professional and Management Occupations	Employed Laborer and Service Occupations	Median Family Income (\$1,000s)
51.8	27.6	35.5	7.4	47.6	10.0 ^a
37.8	26.5	30.4	15.6	33.5	9.2 ^b
40.5	48.4	23.2	19.5	25.6	15.7 ^c

whites appears to be less expected, less recognized, less stigmatized, and less often the focus of research and commentary.” Andrew Hacker (1995, 100) adds that:

Neither sociologists nor journalists have shown much interest in depicting poor whites as a “class.” In large measure the reason is racial. For whites, poverty tends to be viewed as atypical or accidental. Among blacks, it comes close to being seen as a natural outgrowth of their history and culture.

Nationally in 2011, poor whites exceeded the poor African American total by roughly eight million: 19,171,000 versus 10,929,000. Because the white population base is so much larger, however, the African American poverty rate was and is vastly higher: 27.6 percent versus 9.8 percent (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2012, 14). In 1982, the first grade year for members of the Beginning School Study Youth Panel (BSSYP, or Youth Panel), the nation’s central cities were home to 6.8 million poor whites, 14.5 percent of the white population and an increase of 42 percent from the 1969 total (Wilson and Aponte 1985, 239).⁹ In that light, it ought not to surprise that a sampling of schoolchildren from some of Baltimore’s neediest neighborhoods would include low-income whites; the surprise is that the presence of whites in these kinds of communities has received so little attention.

When they were twenty-eight, we interviewed fourteen of the seventeen white men originally sampled as first graders. At the outset, their family background and neighborhood census profiles were barely

distinguishable from those of their black classmates, but what of later? Six had dropped out of high school and eight had arrest records, four resulting in convictions. Most of their offenses were drug related, paired with auto theft, assault, robbery, and shoplifting. Eleven acknowledged drug use, including cocaine (six) and prescription drugs (three); half told of other users in the family. Among blacks, marijuana was the drug of choice; among whites, the list was more expansive. As regards schooling, here too the experience is fairly similar: three of the six dropouts had GEDs; four others had attended college—one had a bachelor's degree, one a master's degree, and the others had begun but did not finish associate's programs.

Differences do begin to show up in these young men's work experience: thirteen of the whites were working full time when we spoke with them, ten continuously over the preceding two years. Like their black counterparts, many were working in construction, but their number also included a graphic designer, a social science researcher, and a catering company manager. Two also reported earnings over \$50,000, but the white earnings distribution was more favorable overall, nine earning between \$25,000 and \$40,000.

Such differences in the adult standing of whites and blacks who began life in similar distressed conditions are not peculiar to the children of Baltimore's high-poverty West Side, but how similar in fact were those conditions growing up? Viewed through the lens of census data on neighborhood poverty levels and the like, all these neighborhoods appear to be distressed, but impressions from the inside can be different. Consider Alice's fond reminiscence of her low-income white West Side neighborhood, a part of the city outsiders are advised to avoid:

For me, back when I was growing up, it was fine. I mean, you had the fights and all, but what neighborhood doesn't? And, but, I mean, it was fine, I mean, we got along with everybody. We, like a lot of the neighbors would have like sometimes block parties, and stuff like that, and we just, the neighbors would get close, have cookouts, and stuff like that, and just have fun.

It is commonly thought that high-poverty neighborhoods are socially fragmented and suffer a weak sense of community, but that is mistaken (see, for example, Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley 2002). Apropos of the point, we see in chapter 3 that these segregated black and white high-poverty neighborhoods are quite different in other pertinent respects: crime rates in the white communities were much lower and their sense of neighborliness much higher.

When low-income whites and blacks live in close proximity, one might think race the great divide, but here too, impressions can be misleading. Consider Clyde's account:

it ain't like I see on TV. It's a lotta different things like . . . like a lotta blacks live like in the inner city and the whites are like higher up and it's different. Down by us . . . down in the . . . uh . . . economically depressed area, it like we all together. That says we all live together. It ain't like a all-black neighborhood here and they don't like us cause we're a all-white neighborhood. Everybody . . . we all live together down there. It's more blacks around our way. But . . . everybody gets along with everybody.

Idealized perhaps, but from this young man's perspective, the big clash locally was with the "uppity class people" in a neighborhood some distance off—those he calls "the rock 'n roll type":

it ain't like the black and white thing. It's like inner city. That's where we live at. And we used to fight them. Ain't like we fought em cause they're white. It just they used to act different. They used to sit and talk about us like we were stupid and everything like that. It's just they would talk about us, white and black and like Hispanic kids was down there. Cause, you know, it wasn't cause of the race. It was like cause they're different. Different . . . um . . . economic class.

Clyde is working-class white, a high school dropout who completed high school by way of the GED.

This excursion into the area of Baltimore made infamous in *The Corner* reminds us that no single template can do justice to life in the "inner cities across the country"; nor do all of the urban disadvantaged fit the underclass profile. The point of most immediate relevance is that urban disadvantaged and urban underclass are not the same. The underclass are, under most constructions of the term, a small minority of the nation's poor, and that includes the poor who reside in high-poverty communities (see Jencks 1991). Indeed, by some estimates they are a declining minority (see Jargowsky and Sawhill 2006), though whether that reversal still holds owing to the recent deep recession remains to be seen.

This book is not a journalist account of the urban underclass, but rather a social-scientific inquiry into the lives of the urban disadvantaged. *The Corner's* characterization of life on the "mean streets" of Baltimore is recognizable in some of the youth who are the focus of this volume, but *The Long Shadow* also tells of the successes of those who recover from a misstep along the way. Our goal is to present a picture of

the whole range of urban disadvantage over a long enough time frame to gain perspective on some of the considerations that move them along different life paths. From this glimpse of inner-city children grown up, we have already learned that:

not all disadvantaged youth follow the same path;
many who slip along the way manage to recover;
urban disadvantage is not color coded as is commonly thought; and
neighborhoods that appear similar to the casual observer can be quite dissimilar in ways that bear on children's later life prospects.

Urban Disadvantage, Materially Construed

For us, and in this volume, the long shadow of family background is cast by material conditions of family life, along with opportunities stratified along lines of race and gender. Today's high technology, knowledge-based economy increasingly favors those with a college degree. In 2002, compared with men without a high school education, those age twenty-five to thirty-four with some college earned 20 percent more and those with bachelor's degrees earned 65 percent more, up from premiums of 5 percent and 19 percent, respectively, in 1980.¹⁰ This is hardly a recent phenomenon. Smoothing over the ups and downs of the business cycle, the earnings premium that today attaches to a college degree appears to be an historic high.¹¹

A shortfall of credentialed skills leaves many behind, and African American men are the hardest hit: among high school dropouts in the 2004–2005 school year, the earnings of black men ages twenty to twenty-eight averaged \$2,038, against median earnings of \$15,288 among Hispanics and \$14,269 among non-Hispanic whites (Sum et al. 2007). Indeed, for men like these simply finding work is a challenge, and hanging onto it another. According to Andrew Sum and his colleagues (2007, 2–3), “only 1 of every 3 young black male high school dropouts was able to obtain any type of employment during the average month in 2005” and just 23 percent worked full time. That so few African American dropouts find any kind of work explains how their annual earnings can be so low—an excess of zero earnings drives down the average. Wilson (2008, 58, figure 4.1) adds that the black-white employment gap widens as one descends the education ladder, from 86 percent versus 88 percent among male college graduates in 2005, to 57 percent versus 73 percent among high school graduates, to 33 percent versus 54 percent among high school dropouts.¹²

The so-called feminization of poverty is gendered urban disadvantage in another guise. The phrase was coined by Diane Pearce (1978) to spotlight the doubling of poverty levels in female-headed households between 1950 and 1974. Pearce implicated escalating divorce rates, but those rates since have leveled, displaced by a rapid rise in out-of-wedlock and never-married childbearing as the driving forces behind increases in the feminization of poverty (Cherlin 2005, 36). In 1960, never-married mothers accounted for fewer than 5 percent of the children of single mothers; by 2006, they accounted for 43 percent (Thibos, Lavin-Loucks, and Martin 2007, 6). African American women find themselves especially challenged by the burdens associated with single parenting: today more than 70 percent of black children are born outside marriage, against 29 percent of non-Hispanic white births (Martin et al. 2012, 45).¹³

Many of these households are mired in poverty—for example, in 2007, compared with 8.5 percent of children in married couple households, 43 percent of children in female-headed households fell below the poverty line. Again, a bad situation overall is worse among African Americans: more than half the children in African American single-mother households live in poverty but only just under a third of white children do (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics 2009, 115; see also Thibos, Lavin-Loucks, and Martin 2007).

These figures establish what is well understood: family circumstances and a depressed economy in places like Baltimore put many children at risk, but at risk for what? That risk is best defined by the challenges they overcome: in the short term, to stay on a positive path—to stay in school, avoid trouble, and find work in a tough economy; in the longer term, to achieve upward mobility, financial stability, and a fulfilling personal life. As statistics like those recounted remind us, many of the urban disadvantaged—low-income, black and white, men and women—fall short. This book shows that it is wrong to generalize broadly from such statistical profiles.

Family conditions early in life cast a long shadow. That principle holds broadly, but with exceptions, and in this context they are numerous. The literature on so-called resilient youth shows that many who grow up in disadvantaged circumstances succeed in overcoming often daunting challenges (for example, Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, and Morgan 1987; Masten, Best, and Garmezy 1991; Haggerty et al. 1996). Perhaps, as Frank, a black male from a poor family with a high school diploma and a strong work history, told us, “It’s not where you live, it’s how you live, and the things you make up your mind to do.”

Is it really that simple to will oneself to success? Frank’s view that we create our destiny is widely shared. Certainly as a society we treasure

ragged to riches stories of individuals of great accomplishment who overcome humble origins to achieve The American Dream. They abound in industry, and even at the very highest levels of government. But for every Lee Iacocca or Barack Obama, we see a Henry Ford or a Jack Kennedy. Such great leaps are not the issue here. More relevant is that many of the urban disadvantaged succeed in overcoming the drag of conditions that hold others back. This volume aims to identify the resources and personal qualities that help disadvantaged youth, but also the barriers they face. It is a book about social stratification in the urban context, informed by the experience of the panel of Baltimore children whose life trajectories we tracked for nearly a quarter century from 1982 to 2006. They are an internally diverse group—black and white, mostly low income at the outset, but also some who began life in more favorable circumstances. The next section provides background on the project. The chapter concludes with an overview of the book.

The Beginning School Study Youth Panel

The Youth Panel commenced in the fall of 1982, when the youth profiled in this volume began first grade in twenty Baltimore public elementary schools. For us, the transition into first grade represents a singular life-course transition (see, for example, Entwisle and Alexander 1989, 1993), which accounts for the “beginning school study” moniker. The project’s research design, procedures, and data sources are reviewed in detail in appendix B; here we highlight features most relevant to *The Long Shadow’s* objectives.

The Youth Panel is unusual among single-city case studies in that it is based on a probability sample. This is important because probability sampling assures internal validity (Michael and O’Muircheartaigh 2008). Schools and children were selected for participation in two stages. First, Baltimore’s 123 public elementary schools were classified according to their racial-ethnic composition (segregated white, segregated black, racially integrated) and neighborhood socioeconomic status (white collar, blue collar). Twenty schools were then selected on a random basis from among the six school types defined by these two sampling frames (for example, blue-collar segregated white schools).¹⁴ For the next step, classroom rosters were used to randomly select first-time first graders from within those schools.¹⁵ Because of this probability sampling, the 790 beginning first graders who make up the sample are representative of conditions in Baltimore’s public schools at the time.¹⁶

In 1980, 44 percent of Baltimore schoolchildren were in poverty-level households, fifth highest among the country’s fourteen largest school districts (Abell Foundation 1989, table 4). Two-thirds of the sample were

in low-income families at the project's outset, the exact percentage low-income system-wide at the time (Baltimore City Schools 1988). These low-income children are the main focus of this volume, but to understand what makes their experience distinctive requires a comparative frame of reference. For that, we also examine the upper 25 percent of the sample families. These families are decidedly better off than the larger low-income group, but *better off* is context bound. In families we characterize as disadvantaged or lower socioeconomic status (SES), the typical parent is a high school dropout; in better-off families, most parents have some college.

These family differences across social lines are large, but higher-SES families in the sample fall well short of high SES by national standards. Had the BSSYP been national in scope, it is certain that differences across family circumstances would be larger than those seen in this volume, and very likely the consequences of those difference as well. Still, comparisons along social lines in the book, though limited to the city's public school enrollment, turn out to be highly consequential for children's well-being. Owing to our robust research design, those comparisons are internally valid and can be generalized to the larger population of Baltimore school children. Although our perspective is local, there can be little doubt that *The Long Shadow's* account of the Baltimore picture understates the influence of family background in children's lives. That realization is sobering, for as we will see, differences within the sample are not just large, but profoundly so.

Data Sources

Members of the Youth Panel were six-year-old children when we first entered their lives in 1982 and young adults when we exited in 2006. Their voices are heard throughout this volume by way of wide-ranging conversations with them during the summers of 1995 and 1996, and in 2000 throughout the year, all well after high school. These sessions—162 in all—asked members of the sample to reflect on their years growing up and to look ahead to their anticipated futures. They were recorded and later transcribed. The quotes introduced in this chapter are from those interviews; background on those quoted and profiled is provided in appendix A.

These interview materials are vivid and full of insight, but the BSSYP is centrally a survey project and a rich store of survey data is on hand to help in tracking the children's development. Participants were interviewed in person up to twenty times through high school and twice after high school.¹⁷ The latter covered experiences since high school in family life, employment, postsecondary schooling, and what we call

problem behaviors—such as contact with the criminal justice system, alcohol and drug use, and smoking. None of our surveys achieved 100 percent coverage, but most years the yields were quite satisfactory, averaging 77 percent across the entire collection.¹⁸

The Young Adult Survey (YAS) commenced in 1998 with 82 percent of the interviews completed that year and the majority of those interviewed (55 percent) age twenty-two at the time; 38 percent were age twenty-one; the rest were twenty-three and older. For convenience, we refer to the YAS as the project's age twenty-two survey. The second after high school survey, the Mature Adult Survey (MAS), took place about eleven years after the panel's expected high school graduation in the spring of 1994. Because 70 percent of interviews were conducted in 2005 and 66 percent of those interviewed were age twenty-eight at the time (31 percent were twenty-nine), the MAS is referred to as the project's age twenty-eight survey.

Parents and teachers of the children also are represented. Parents were interviewed up to eleven times from first grade to eleventh grade and teachers interviewed up to nine times, the last in ninth grade.¹⁹ Additionally, we use school records from Baltimore, as well as from schools outside the city to which children transferred.²⁰ These provide report card marks, department ratings, achievement test results, promotion histories, and disciplinary problems. Appendix B reviews sample attrition and retention over the project's twenty-five-year history, as well as details on the measurement of key constructs.

That the BSSYP data archive is uncommonly rich and encompassing is a decided advantage for *The Long Shadow's* agenda, which weaves together information over many years and from many sources. Our goal is to tell a complicated story with fidelity, yet keep it digestible, a challenging balance that has obliged a number of compromises (to be reviewed as they are encountered). What we have not compromised is our determination to honor the participants' experience in their key particulars.

What Comes Next

This is not the first time we have posed questions of the panel participants about their family life, their schooling, or even their transition to adulthood in relation to experiences growing up. This is a local study of national import and has supported much useful research. Its scientifically strong research design, long time frame, high sample retention over many years, and intensity of its fieldwork set it apart from other single-city case studies. Indeed, even before the age twenty-eight

Mature Adult Survey became available, the project had achieved recognition as a landmark longitudinal study of the twentieth century (Phelps, Furstenberg, and Colby 2002).²¹

Although the issues taken up in this volume are not new to us, *The Long Shadow* is altogether new and quite different from any of our previous published work. That holds for its topical breadth, the variety of data sources brought to bear in the execution of its agenda, and how those data are used. Our previous work will be brought in at times to help inform interpretations and our sense-making, but selectively and, we hope, judiciously. As well, we have tried to make this volume accessible and self-contained; no grounding in our previous studies is needed. The book presents statistical analysis, but is self-consciously nontechnical; where technical issues cannot be avoided, that material is relegated to footnotes and appendices.

Those points speak to the book's character. As regards its substance, our overriding goal is to elucidate how it is that some of the urban disadvantaged manage to get ahead in life, while others are held back by the circumstances of their early family lives. Toward that end, we use the project's rich store of survey, interview, and school record data to support close inspection of the children's unfolding lives at home and at school, beginning in first grade, continuing through the end of high school (however concluded), and then well into their third decade of life.

The majority of the sample children grew up poor or near-poor in a city that has been near the top nationally on virtually every indicator of community and family distress. Their experience of urban disadvantage is described in chapters 2 through 4. Chapter 2 reviews conditions in Baltimore City during the children's and their parents' formative years. The economic history of Baltimore over the latter half of the twentieth century spans the industrial boom of the postwar years when the parents were coming of age and the industrial bust that is backdrop to the panel participants' development. The deindustrialization, downsizing, and impoverishment of places like Baltimore is a familiar tale and its relevance for children's well-being is understood, but the earlier story of the region's industrial buildup is no less relevant because it has implications for the resources commanded by the children's parents.

The details of Baltimore's changing economy and demographics over the panel's two generations are, in ecological terms, elements of the backdrop social context that frames children's development; in the foreground are the close-up conditions children experience daily in their home lives, their neighborhoods, and their schools. These three

institutional settings—home, neighborhood, and school—affect children’s development all along the way, but the focus in this volume is how they are experienced in early childhood, around the time of the children’s entry into “real school” as first graders. The socioeconomic standing and makeup of their birth families are reviewed in chapter 3; neighborhood and school are addressed in chapter 4. The book is a story of socioeconomic destinations constrained by socioeconomic origins; by the end of chapter 4, the origins side will be in hand.

Chapter 5 describes the children’s standing with respect to several key transition to adulthood milestones over the years after high school—working full time, becoming a parent, marrying or partnering, and living apart from one’s parents. It is a bridging chapter in several senses. Organizationally, it separates chapters devoted to the Youth Panel’s socioeconomic origins from the chapter that describes their socioeconomic destinations. The transition to adulthood also bridges stages of the life course, from children’s near complete dependence on the parental family in childhood and early adolescence to the increasing self-dependence expected of late adolescence and emergent adulthood.

The bridging imagery works well from a stratification perspective also: the transition to adulthood carries young people from an identity rooted in family socioeconomic origins to one anchored in their own socioeconomic destinations as adults. Chapter 5 reveals differences across social lines in the details of how these adult transition milestones come together in the children’s lives, with distinctive patterning by race and gender and along lines of family socioeconomic background.

Consequences for their socioeconomic destinations, rooted in family, neighborhood, school, and details of their adult transition, are taken up in chapter 7, but first those destinations need to be mapped. That is done in chapter 6, which sketches the panel’s socioeconomic standing at the time of the MAS (roughly age twenty-eight) in the same terms used to locate their parents in socioeconomic space: their levels of schooling, occupational status, and earnings. Because well-being in adulthood is as much a family affair as a matter of personal accomplishment, however, for members of the Youth Panel in family unions, we also examine the levels of schooling, occupational status, and earnings of their spouses and cohabiting partners.

The tendency for like to marry is well established (see, for example, Blossfeld 2009), and on that basis we expect, and do see, similar socioeconomic profiles for the partners in these relationships. However, the likelihood of marrying or partnering is quite different across social lines, and comparing two-earner families against one-earner families

is certain to show the latter badly disadvantaged (Isaacs 2008) This is stratification-relevant within the sample because lower-SES white women are more likely than their African American counterparts to be in family unions as young adults. When children are in the picture, whites also are less likely to be parenting alone. The literature on inter-generational mobility does not often contrast socioeconomic standing in personal terms against that at the family level, but doing so proves to be instructive.

With a solid descriptive account of social origins and social destinations in hand, we then shift into analytic mode to examine implications of the former for the latter. At issue is the fundamental question of social stratification as a field of inquiry: who gets what and why?²² The book identifies two mobility regimes. Chapter 7 evaluates a life-course developmental model of the sort used to study the role of schooling in status attainment. Success in school is the vehicle by which children of privileged family background maintain their privilege across generations, but also the vehicle by which some lower-SES children rise above their origins. That much is well established in the literature, but in the experience of the Youth Panel children, it is more a precious few than some: barely 5 percent of the panel's urban disadvantaged complete college, 4 percent with bachelor's degrees and fewer than 1 percent with associate's degrees.

The story of status attainment through schooling is a familiar one and *The Long Shadow* establishes how it unfolds in the urban context. A college degree is the understood way to get ahead in the modern era, but during the closing years of the twentieth century not many of Baltimore's needy children advanced on the strength of strong academic credentials. Status attainment through school instead mainly served to preserve privilege across generations: children of higher-SES families were more likely than their lower-SES counterparts to attend college, to finish college (ten times more likely), and then later to reap the labor market rewards that attach to a college degree.

For the Youth Panel children, however, college is not the only route to material well-being. Chapter 8 identifies a second mobility regime, one that privileges lower-SES whites over blacks of like background. Its benefits accrue first to white men through access to high-wage employment in the remnants of Baltimore's old industrial economy and then, derivatively, to the lower-SES white women who marry and partner with them. Working-class whites have not commanded much attention in literature on the urban poor, and because of that this second mobility regime largely has gone unremarked.²³ For status attainment through school, college completion is the major line of divide; for blue-collar attainment, it is access to well-paid, steady work.

Chapter 9, the concluding chapter, reflects on the two mobility paths taken by the Youth Panel participants on their journey from childhood to mature adulthood. Multiple assets and liabilities in childhood trigger later events and circumstances that channel higher-SES youth along one pathway and lower-SES youth along another. It is an account of cumulative disadvantage anchored in the early formative years (see, for example, Kerckhoff 1993), and offers the insight that pathways are plural. Race and gender come into play in two ways under the noncollege mobility regime: the labor market opportunities that favor white men over African American of like background and the characteristic differences by race in family life that have profound implications for women's economic well-being.