

# Chapter 1

## Explaining Persistent Black Joblessness

Forty-two weeks after losing the only steady job he had ever held, Anthony Redmond, a thirty-six-year-old high school dropout and convicted felon, remained jobless and became increasingly frustrated. He had gone to great lengths to find work, submitting numerous applications daily in the hopes of securing at least one interview in which he would tell the employer, "I'm a hard worker. I do whatever you want me to do the way you want me to do it. I can start now if you want me to." These pronouncements, he thought, would allay employers' concerns about his competence, pliability, and work ethic and increase the likelihood that he would be offered a job. However, his efforts were to no avail. No matter how many applications he submitted, no matter the form or content of his entreaties, he could not convince employers to hire him.

Sadly, Anthony's circumstances are hardly exceptional. Instead, they mirror the experiences of young, less-educated black men and women across the country whose relatively weak labor force attachment has been the source of much scholarly debate for at least five decades. One of the first to sound the alarm about the extent of joblessness in the black community was Daniel Patrick Moynihan. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Moynihan, then assistant secretary in the Office of Policy Planning and Research at the U.S. Department of Labor, released the report *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (1967), now commonly referred to as *The Moynihan Report*. In it he warned of the impending "new crisis in race relations," explaining that contrary to the great expectations of some and the fervent hopes of others, equality between blacks and whites would probably not come to pass for several generations. Indeed, he argued, the crisis was already in evidence, as indicated by at least three decades of data on joblessness. Moynihan (1967, 66) wrote, "The fundamental, overwhelming fact is that *Negro unemployment*, with the exception of a few years during World War II and the Korean War, *has continued at disaster levels for 35 years*," such that by 1940, "the 2 to 1 white-Negro un-

employment rate that persists to this day had clearly emerged" (emphasis in original).

Twenty years later, in *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987), William Julius Wilson provided another stark reminder. Characterizing rates of inner-city joblessness as a tragedy, Wilson showed that while employment among young white men had hardly changed at all, employment among their black counterparts had fallen "sharply and steadily." By 1984 just 58 percent of all young black men were employed; among those age eighteen to nineteen and those age sixteen to seventeen, figures were as low as 34 and 16 percent, respectively.

While some have argued that the 1990s brought signs of hope, for others the outlook was bleaker than ever. The economists Richard Freeman and William Rodgers (2000) show that employment among less-educated, young black men responded positively to the economic expansion of the 1990s. However, the economists Harry Holzer, Paul Offner, and Elaine Sorensen (2004, 2) contend that the improvements highlighted by Freeman and Rodgers were only *cyclical* in nature, reflecting the business cycle, and not great enough to "offset the negative *secular* trend that has been reducing employment and labor force activity among these young men for the past several decades" (emphasis added; see also Holzer and Offner 2002; Holzer, Offner, and Sorensen 2005). Instead, their analysis reveals, young black men's employment not only declined significantly during the 1980s but fell even more sharply through the 1990s (Holzer and Offner 2002).

In the new millennium, it appears that the crisis is only worsening. In 2004 the Community Service Society, an independent, nonprofit organization in New York City, released its annual report, *A Crisis of Black Male Employment* (Levitan, 2004). The report indicated that in 2003, 52 percent of New York City's working-age black men were jobless, the employment-population ratio having fallen some twelve percentage points since 2000. By far, this decline represented the sharpest experienced by any other subgroup of workers they studied.<sup>1</sup> At 57 percent, even black women in the area had higher levels of employment.

Despite the male-centered focus of the joblessness literature, black women's rates of employment have been troubling as well. Until the late 1960s, employment among black women was quite high. According to Mary Corcoran, almost 73 percent of young black women were employed in 1969, a rate roughly equivalent to that of white women. Between 1969 and 1991, however, employment among young black women deteriorated substantially, and the gap in employment between black and white women grew. Correspondingly, during this period unemployment rates among black women were very high and surpassed those of white women by a margin of no less than two-to-one. As Corcoran (1999, 54) explained, "At every education level and every year

(with the single exception of college graduates in 1970), African American women's unemployment rates were much higher than white women." Owing to a combination of factors, including welfare reforms, the economic expansion, and the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) (Ellwood 2000; Meyer and Rosenbaum 2001; Noonan, Smith, and Corcoran 2007; O'Neill and Hill 2001; Schoeni and Blank 2000), black women made noteworthy employment gains throughout the 1990s, but persistent joblessness among them remains a very troubling concern.

How do we explain the crisis of joblessness that Anthony Redmond suffered for at least forty-two weeks and that each year is regularly endured by growing numbers of similar young black men and, to a lesser extent, black women? Four theoretical perspectives dominate current debates. Chronic black joblessness is most often explained in terms of pervasive employer discrimination, the changing structure of urban economies, cultural deficiencies, poor access to social capital, or some combination of the above. Each of these theoretical frames of persistent joblessness is compelling and each has wide appeal, but whether considered singly or taken together, they provide an incomplete understanding of the causes of joblessness because, to varying degrees, they do not examine closely or systematically the process of finding work that the black poor undertake (exceptions include Newman 1999). By failing to do so, they overlook—or, as in the case of the cultural deficiency perspective, critically misstate—the meanings that the black poor attach to their labor market experiences. They fail as well to see that the meanings that inform behaviors are produced within the context of interpersonal relations. These relations matter because it is through social interactions and engagements that the poor diagnose problems of joblessness, theorizing about its primary causes and possible solutions. It is through social interactions as well that the joblessness discourses they produce have their ultimate consequences, shaping how poor blacks engage with each other as actors, specifically as job-seekers and job-holders, in ways that affect their labor market outcomes above and beyond the initiating factors deemed to cause joblessness.

By examining the process of finding work closely and systematically, I learned that interpersonal relations between job-seekers and job-holders were characterized by a pervasive distrust that deterred cooperation between these two sets of actors. The majority of job-holders were disinclined to assist their job-seeking relations, citing job-seekers' lack of motivation, neediness, and irresponsible behavior as reasons for their unwillingness. In response, and in an effort to save face, a significant minority of job-seekers were reluctant to seek assistance or to accept it when offered. These interpersonal dynamics played out in a low-wage labor market where employers relied heavily on job referral networks

for recruitment and screening. Thus, in addition to and in the context of declining employment opportunities, employer discrimination, presumed cultural deficiencies, and a lack of access to social resources, interpersonal dynamics between black poor job-seekers and their labor market intermediaries also have a profound effect, I contend, on the employment chances of the black poor. Furthermore, I propose that the centrality of interpersonal dynamics highlights the role that micro-level processes play in the reproduction of inequality, essentially cementing the disadvantage initiated by larger macro- and meso-level forces.

In what follows, I briefly describe and then critique the major theoretical frameworks that social scientists deploy to explain chronic joblessness.

### **Anthony's Insights**

To explain his chronic joblessness, Anthony provided a laundry list of structural barriers and individual constraints, a list implicating employer discrimination, deindustrialization and related spatial and skills mismatches, and cultural preferences. In so doing, he provided proponents of three of the major theoretical frameworks on black joblessness evidence to support their theories about its root causes.

#### ***Employer Discrimination***

According to Anthony, as a black man with a felony conviction, he began every job search with no less than three strikes against him. From his experience, employers were generally unwilling to extend a second chance to men of his ilk. Instead, "white folks" received all of the opportunities. They were given "a better shot." "I can't speak of the whole United States, but for black men here in Michigan, it's hard. Black males here from the age of, say, sixteen on up to forty, and they been convicted or something, all white society look at us like we are no good, you know. You're just going to come back out there and do more wrong. And you're not given more options to do right. [They] just shut [the] door." Indeed, he felt as if the only jobs that black men like him *were allowed* to hold were the lowest-level service-sector jobs at car washes and fast-food restaurants, poorly paid jobs that he felt were best left for teenagers, not for grown men trying to raise families (even though Anthony himself had yet to establish one). Thus, Anthony cited employer discrimination against black men, especially felons, as his greatest obstacle to employment and the primary reason for his chronic joblessness.

Proponents of the employer discrimination perspective would point to mountains of evidence supporting Anthony's claims. First, they

would cite studies of employers' perceptions of and preferences for applicants by race and ethnicity. Not surprisingly, the accumulated findings in this area indicate that applicants' race matters—employers perceive black workers to be less competent, productive, and dependable than labor market competitors from other racial and ethnic groups. For instance, Kathryn Neckerman and Joleen Kirschenman (1991) investigated the hiring strategies of Chicago-area employers for entry-level jobs and found that they held such negative stereotypes about inner-city blacks, perceiving them to be deficient in hard and soft skills, work ethic, dependability, and positive attitude, that they employed recruitment strategies that effectively excluded these applicants from their pool of potential applicants.

Employers also perceive black workers, particularly black women, to be more distracted by familial obligations. Drawing from in-depth interviews with employers in the Atlanta metropolitan area, Irene Browne and Ivy Kennelly (1999) investigated how applicants' race and gender affected employers' perceptions and hiring preferences. They discovered that employers viewed black women as poor, single mothers who either struggled to balance work and family obligations, and so were prone to absenteeism and tardiness, or were so desperate in their efforts to support their children that they would take any position available.<sup>2</sup> Neither image led employers to feel inclined to hire black women. Employers either considered such applicants too great a risk or chose not to hire them because they contemptuously viewed black women's desire to work as based in a search for a means of survival, not a belief in work as a moral good. Although highly problematic, these images were far superior to those they held of black men, whom employers viewed only in the most negative light. Not surprisingly, then, black men were the least favored of all job applicants.

Finally, employers characterize black workers as less pliable and obedient than other racial and ethnic groups of workers. Johanna Shih's (2002) examination of Los Angeles employers revealed that they were less concerned with workers' competence than with workers' pliability, obedience, and manageability. Because employers perceived low-skilled black workers to be far less submissive and deferential than their Latino immigrant counterparts, they were reluctant to hire black applicants. Overall, these findings indicate a clear pattern of disfavor toward black workers that makes their hire less likely, especially in smaller firms, firms located in the suburbs, and firms that cater primarily to white customers (Holzer 1997; Holzer and Ihanfeldt 1998).

Proponents of the employer discrimination perspective would also highlight the compelling evidence based on hiring audit studies (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Turner, Fix, and Struyk 1991). In an audit study, pairs of white and black or Latino testers are matched on a

variety of attributes, save race or ethnicity, in an effort to control for most of the factors that employers take into consideration when making hiring decisions. These pairs, whether as real or fictitious applicants, are sent out to apply for vacant positions randomly selected from help-wanted ads in newspapers. Discrimination is determined to have occurred when testers of one race or ethnicity systematically make it further in the hiring process than their equally qualified other-race counterparts.

These studies have revealed that differential treatment does occur, most often to the detriment of black job candidates. Black testers are two to three times less likely to receive callbacks or formal interviews (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Turner et al. 1991). Among those who receive interviews, black testers wait longer to be interviewed, receive shorter interviews, are interviewed by fewer members of personnel, and receive fewer positive comments than their white counterparts. They are also half as likely to receive offers (Turner et al. 1991).

The stigma of a prior conviction only makes matters worse. Incarceration represents a major factor in joblessness because employers are averse to hiring ex-offenders. According to the economists Harry Holzer, Steven Raphael, and Michael Stoll (2002a), fewer than 13 percent of employers would definitely hire ex-offenders, and almost two-thirds indicated that they probably would not or definitely would not.<sup>3</sup> From a supply-side standpoint, this resistance could at least in part be attributed to the time offenders spend in prison, since incarceration takes away from time that could otherwise have been spent accumulating valuable education, work experience, or training. Employers may also be disinclined toward hiring ex-offenders because ex-offenders are far more likely to be high school dropouts and illiterates (Holzer et al. 2005).

Even if human capital deficiencies were not an issue, however, ex-offenders would still have difficulty securing work.<sup>4</sup> In an audit study designed to examine the effect of having a criminal record on hiring, Devah Pager (2002) showed that employers were twice as likely to call back non-offenders than equally qualified ex-offenders, and the effect of race only magnified this gap. While white non-offenders were two times more likely to receive callbacks than equally qualified white ex-offenders, the ratio among blacks was three-to-one.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, a higher percentage of white ex-offenders received callbacks than equally qualified *non-offending* black applicants—17 versus 14 percent (Pager 2002). Thus, by association, black *non-offenders* are also at a significant disadvantage. Because such a high percentage of young black men have been incarcerated, employers often associate black males with criminality (Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll 2002b). Many who have not been convicted of a

crime are disregarded for positions because they are identified with a group among whom rates of incarceration are staggeringly high.<sup>6</sup> Consistent with Anthony's own analysis of his situation, then, proponents of the discrimination thesis would locate his chronic joblessness foremost in employers' distaste for hiring blacks and their particular aversion to black ex-offenders.

### *Deindustrialization*

As if being a black felon were not enough to destroy his chances of getting a job, Anthony highlighted other constraints as well. First, without a driver's license and a car, he had great difficulty getting to the suburbs where he believed good-paying jobs could be found, and he found public transportation, which provided neither frequent nor reliable service, of little practical value. This lack of reliable transportation essentially left him only able to seek positions relatively close to home. However, he was disinclined to accept these positions because they offered such low wages and few, if any, opportunities for advancement; that he would continue struggling to sustain himself would be all but assured if he took such a job.

Second, Anthony felt thwarted by his limited human capital. Again, he had little desire to work at poorly paid jobs such as those at fast-food joints and car washes. However, as a high school dropout who had been incarcerated for most of his adult life, he lacked the education, training, and work experience to compete for jobs that were both physically proximate and relatively well paid. Expressing his frustration, Anthony exclaimed, "There's more jobs out there, but you got to have more education. They want associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees, for everything. I was shocked when they told me that you have somebody with a bachelor degree to be a janitor." Thus, not only did he link his joblessness to the spatial mismatch he faced, but he felt limited by a profound skills mismatch as well.

Proponents of the deindustrialization perspective would find much in Anthony's narrative to support their theory. Foremost among the proponents of this thesis is William Julius Wilson (1987, 1996), who argues convincingly that black joblessness is largely, though not entirely, the result of the changes in the structure of urban economies, particularly in the northeastern and midwestern regions of the country. Specifically, during the latter half of the 1960s, the deindustrialization of urban economies set a transformation in motion: jobs shifted from centers of production and distribution of material goods (which had offered well-paid jobs to those with limited educational credentials) to centers of administration, information exchange, and higher-order service provision (which offered well-paid jobs to those with extensive education,

training, and skills). As manufacturing jobs left the central cities of the North, relocating to the suburbs, exurbs, and commercial centers of the Third World, they were replaced by jobs better suited for those with higher levels of education. Drawing from the work of John Kasarda, Wilson has shown that between 1970 and 1984 every major central city in the Northeast and Midwest experienced sharp declines in the number of jobs for which educational requirements were low while showing noteworthy increases in the number of jobs for which the average level of education was higher. New York, for instance, posted losses of almost 500,000 jobs requiring less than a high school diploma, but gained over 250,000 jobs requiring more education. Although Philadelphia lost 172,000 low-skilled jobs, it gained 39,000 that were high-skilled. St. Louis lost ground on both counts—89,000 low-skilled jobs coupled with 2,000 high-skilled positions. As a result, during the 1980s alone, “the central counties of the Frostbelt’s 28 largest metropolitan areas lost nearly one million manufacturing jobs and over \$28 billion in manufacturing worker earnings” (Kasarda 1995, 215).

Although blue-collar workers of all racial and ethnic stripes were negatively affected by these declines, black men were by far the hardest hit. Not only were they most heavily concentrated in the industries that lost the most jobs and that had jobs that required the least in terms of education, training, and skills, but their representation was far lower in the industries that experienced job gains and those with jobs that required higher levels of education and skills.<sup>7</sup> In areas of the country that had not undergone industrial restructuring of this type (the South and West), employment among black men suffered much less.<sup>8</sup> Thus, according to this approach, at least through the 1980s black joblessness was largely a function of diminishing opportunities due to deindustrialization and related spatial and skills mismatches.<sup>9</sup>

From the diminishing opportunities perspective, then, Anthony’s prolonged joblessness is not surprising. Anthony, like many low-skilled black men of his generation, has confronted a labor market that has few decent jobs to offer that are relatively close to his residence and for which he is qualified. Indeed, between 1967 and 1987 (in 1987 Anthony was convicted of breaking and entering and grand theft auto), southeastern Michigan had lost over 100,000 manufacturing jobs—half of its total—while gaining two and a half times that number in trade and high-level service jobs between 1977 and 1987 alone. Unfortunately, Anthony Redmond had fallen victim to the changing structure of the urban economic landscape.

### *Cultural Deficiency*

By and large, proponents of the cultural deficiency perspective would argue that Anthony’s “crisis” is of his own making—or, more accu-



rately, that it is a product of the precepts of his culture, whose norms, if not values, are incompatible with those of the mainstream. As evidence, they would point out that Anthony, rather than taking personal responsibility for his plight of joblessness, rationalized his prolonged unemployment by highlighting a number of factors seemingly outside his control: employers discriminated against him, showed little compassion toward him, and were easily intimidated by him; the public transportation system was inadequate; and jobs for which he was qualified were too demeaning. His many excuses for nonwork revealed the extent to which Anthony did not view work as an obligation of citizenship and as a productive enterprise unto itself. Instead, his excuses were evidence that, at best, he viewed work as something to aspire to only when all necessary preconditions had been met (Mead 1992).

Although there are a number of variants on this approach, including those that problematize the supposedly matriarchal structure of the black family (Moynihan 1967; Patterson 1998), Lawrence Mead, political scientist and author of *The New Politics of Poverty* (1992), arguably provides the most sophisticated, if a somewhat contradictory, treatment of the cultural deficiency perspective, employing what appears to be a fair and balanced approach that belies his blame-the-victim viewpoint of the joblessness crisis.<sup>10</sup> Mead asserts that blacks' difficulties are rooted in subcultures of defeatism and resistance. Defeatism expresses itself whenever blacks are faced with the logistical difficulties of finding and keeping work. When tasks such as finding a job, arranging safe and dependable child care, and obtaining reliable transportation become too difficult, Mead argues, blacks surrender, blaming everything and everybody for their inability to secure work while waiting for others (read: whites) to initiate change that will better their circumstances. Their refusal to take personal responsibility, Mead contends (1992, 149), masks a deeply ingrained learned helplessness, the seeds of which were planted in slavery when blacks developed a "paradoxical reliance on the oppressor to undo oppression." Thus, when opportunities do arise, blacks, convinced that they cannot succeed, do not make the effort.<sup>11</sup>

Mead argues for the existence of another subculture as well—that of resistance. In this case, however, blacks are not overwhelmed by the logistics involved in securing jobs. Instead, they find morally repulsive the opportunities to which they have access, characterizing the positions for which they are qualified as too demeaning, too dirty, too difficult, and too poorly paid. Consequently, they resist, forsaking these positions even though they generally lack the credentials necessary to compete for jobs that do not offend their sense of themselves as workers and their sense of what jobs should offer. Unlike the subculture of defeatism, in which blacks have *too little* pride to succeed, in the subculture of resistance they have *too much* pride. Thus, Mead asserts, high

rates of joblessness should be attributed to the black poor's refusal to lower their expectations and accept positions that they consider menial.

### *Summary and Critique*

In Anthony's narrative, proponents of each of these three theoretical frameworks for explaining chronic black joblessness would find evidence to support their theory about its root causes. Scholars such as William Julius Wilson (1987, 1996) and John Kasarda (1995) would highlight the difficulty that Anthony had in finding decent-paying jobs within reasonable proximity to his home as evidence of the disproportionately negative impact that deindustrialization and resulting spatial and skills mismatches have had on the employment of lesser-educated black men and women in the inner city. Proponents of the employer discrimination perspective would focus on Anthony's contention that employers are disinclined to hire young black men, especially ex-felons, and point to mountains of evidence from research on employers' perceptions (Browne and Kennelly 1991; Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991; Shih 2002) and audit studies (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Pager 2002; Turner et al. 1991) to support their argument. Cultural deficiency scholars such as Lawrence Mead (1992) would point to Anthony himself and his subculture as the primary source of his chronic joblessness.

None of these perspectives, however, facilitates a full understanding of the problem of black joblessness. This is true of both the structural and cultural perspectives. Structural accounts of black joblessness, although profoundly insightful, often fail to consider the meanings that the black poor attribute to objective factors. While several theories of joblessness compete for dominance as discourses in the minds of poor people, and while any theory can be deployed within a particular context to explain persistent joblessness, it seems that the black poor largely understand persistent joblessness as a failure on the part of individuals to uplift themselves. In fact, prior survey research suggests that among the black poor, structural factors such as discrimination do not register as major impediments to achieving their goals. Paradoxically, even as employers are loath to hire them except under the tightest of labor market conditions (Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996; Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991; Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991; Wilson 1996), even as they intuit widespread prejudice and discrimination from employers specifically (Harris and Associates 1989; Kasschau 1977) and from white society generally (Sigelman and Tuch 1997; Sigelman and Welch 1991), and even as they confess how little control they feel they have over their own lives (Hochschild 1995), they are far more likely than expected—and more likely than the black middle class and,

in some cases, than even poor whites—to explain their relatively low socioeconomic attainment in terms of deficient motivation and individual effort (Hochschild 1995; MacLeod 1995; Parent 1985; Schlozman and Verba 1979).

In *Facing Up to the American Dream* (1995), Jennifer Hochschild explains this apparent paradox by arguing that although most poor blacks acknowledge the importance of discrimination in the daily lives of blacks generally, they are less likely to feel personally affected by it and, more importantly, *they do not perceive it as the most important force shaping their life chances*. Often, it is the least mentioned factor of those volunteered (Harris and Associates 1989). And in *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men* (2004), Alford Young's elaborate cultural analysis of how young, inner-city black men make sense of mobility and opportunity in the United States, he finds that although some men linked theirs and others' mobility to the structure of economic opportunities, highlighting such obstacles as race- and class-based discrimination, the common understanding linking all of his respondents was that the individual is largely responsible for creating or taking advantage of opportunities that lead to his or her own mobility. Young (2004, 138) explains: "Echoing once again the moralism of the language of individualism and the American Dream, all the men underscored individual effort and initiative as the principle driving force behind mobility." Consequently, even while acknowledging the prevalence of discrimination and other structural constraints, poor blacks nonetheless largely concluded that hard work and individual resolve were most essential for blacks' achievement. The assumption is that if blacks do not achieve—for instance, if they are struggling with chronic joblessness—they have only themselves to blame.

My own interviews bear this out. To ascertain how respondents made sense of joblessness, I asked, "How hard is it to find a job, any job?" Given that slightly over half of my sample were unemployed at the time of the interview and that many more had experienced extended periods of joblessness in the past, not only did I expect that the majority of respondents would report that finding a job, any job, was difficult, but I largely expected respondents to situate their difficulty in structural constraints. Indeed, theorists of both structural and cultural deficiency accounts would probably have hazarded such a guess. Both sets of theorists, however, would have been incorrect. The majority of my respondents, six in ten, indicated that finding a job was not difficult at all. Just three in ten thought it was.

Furthermore, what distinguished respondents in the first category from those in the second were their base assumptions about how the U.S. stratification system works. Those in the majority had little doubt about the system's openness. After all, they argued, jobs are readily

available, and to the extent that they are not, *those with perseverance will nevertheless succeed, because any job-seeker with motivation and drive can find one*. Others reasoned that the abundance of formal intermediaries, programs, and services available to aid the transition to employment deprives the jobless of any credible defense for their joblessness. Those favoring this view generally argued that anyone who claims an inability to find work simply cannot be looking and that joblessness indicates a weakness of character, a failure of the individual, who either lacks the desire to work or the internal fortitude to gain employment.

These understandings of the roots of joblessness not only have consequences for the behaviors of the black poor in the labor market, as both job-seekers and job-holders, but they also affect how they engage with others who are trying to find work. However, because the dominant structural perspectives generally neglect the interactional nature of the job search process, they ignore the significance of patterned social relations and the meanings that emerge from these and shape how job-seekers understand joblessness and engage the job search process. By failing to consider how the black poor make sense of these objective factors—which they see as diminishing their chances for employment, and rightfully so—proponents of this perspective also overlook how these understandings inform the behaviors of the job-seeking black poor in ways that affect the outcome of joblessness above and beyond the objective factors deemed to bring joblessness about.

Unlike the structural approaches, the cultural deficiency perspective ignores or disputes the significance of structural constraints while locating the crisis of black joblessness solely in the meanings that the poor attach to work, meanings that proponents of this perspective would argue are disconnected from objective reality (Mead 1992; Patterson 1998; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1998). For instance, Mead argues that poor blacks' chronic joblessness is rooted in their subcultures of defeatism and resistance to low-wage work, such that even when job opportunities are plentiful, they are unwilling to take advantage of them to better their circumstances. However, because Mead does not examine closely and systematically the process of finding work that the black poor undertake, he critically misstates the meanings that the black poor attach to work, job finding, and joblessness.

Indeed, the weight of the evidence indicates that the black poor are not resistant to low-wage work. While Harry Holzer's (1986) analysis of racial differences in reservation wages indicates that as much as 40 percent of the employment gap between young black and white men can be explained by black men's higher reservation wages, in his replication of Holzer's study, which focused on a longer period of time, Stephen Petterson (1997) found no evidence indicating that young

black men's joblessness was linked to higher reservation wages. In addition, in their study of Harlem's working poor, Katherine Newman and Chauncy Lennon (1995) found that at the fast-food restaurants they studied, for every one vacant position there were fourteen applicants. Furthermore, after tracking ninety-three job-seekers who had not been hired and who remained unemployed one year later, Newman and Lennon found that their reservation wage was just \$4.59 per hour on average. Although this was slightly higher than the minimum wage at the time, given the substantially higher cost of living in New York City, this desired wage was meager at best. Such evidence does not support a description of a subculture of resistance.

Nor is there much evidence that they are defeatists. Newman (1999) argues that the urban poor do adhere to mainstream values, do want to work, and do go out of their way to find and keep jobs. Newman criticizes urban poverty scholars for focusing so much attention on the minority of low-income blacks and Latinos who do not work to the exclusion of the majority who do. By studying in ethnographic detail the working poor's labor market experiences, Newman found that even within the context of shrinking opportunities and low-wage, low-skilled jobs, many of them dead-end, most urban residents continue to "soldier on." "One of their greatest assets," Newman (1999, xv) notes,

is the commitment they share with more affluent Americans to the importance of the work ethic. These are not people whose values need reengineering. They work hard at jobs the rest of us would not want because they believe in the dignity of work. In many instances they are not only not better off, they are actually worse off from a financial perspective for having eschewed welfare and stayed on the job.

Others have made similar arguments and presented similar evidence (Iversen and Farber 1996; Jones and Luo 1999; Wilson 1996).

By failing to examine closely the process of finding work, a process whose nature is interactional, and basing their determinations of defeatism and resistance almost solely on the outcomes of persistent joblessness alone, cultural deficiency theorists also critically misstate the meanings that the black poor find in work, job finding, and joblessness, and they fail to see the central role that interpersonal relations and social interactions play in producing these meanings. Thus, they are ill equipped to explain behaviors that deviate from their assumptions about the defeatism and resistance of the black poor. In what follows, I elaborate on how we might gain further leverage on the problem of chronic joblessness by examining in much greater detail the interactional nature of the process of finding work.

## Social Capital and Its (Im)Mobilization

The social capital perspective assumes what the other perspectives have neglected—that personal networks play a major role in the job-finding process. For instance, in his classic 1974 study, *Getting a Job*, Mark Granovetter examined how 282 professional, technical, and managerial workers from Newton, Massachusetts, found their jobs. He discovered that for the overwhelming majority of workers, personal contacts with whom they had interacted during ordinary social activities had made the match. Furthermore, Granovetter found that those who used personal contacts had better employment outcomes overall. An instant classic, *Getting a Job* revealed what remains to this day an incredible insight—that while we may assume that economic activities and outcomes have nothing to do with social relationships, they are in fact products of it. Granovetter's revelation was undoubtedly the inspiration for a generation of research examining the effect of social capital and social networks on status attainment, and it has had important implications for understanding chronic joblessness among the black poor.

To clarify, social capital is typically defined as the resources to which individuals have access by dint of their connection to others in their network of relations. Although many theorists are associated with the term, Pierre Bourdieu (1985) is usually credited with providing the first systematic discussion (Lin 2001; Portes 1998).<sup>12</sup> He used the term to describe the resources or profits to which individuals have access as a result of their membership or participation in groups such as families, parties, and associations. These resources or profits, which can be economic, cultural, or symbolic in form, are the product of the time and energy that members direct toward a series of material or symbolic exchanges with each other that help to reproduce social relationships with the conscious or unconscious objective of promoting long-term obligations from which tangible or intangible profits accrue.

Glenn Loury was one of the first to implicate social connections in the process of differential access to opportunities by race and gender; in doing so, he provided a framework within which to better understand racial inequalities in the labor market. In "A Dynamic Theory of Racial Income Differences" (1977), Loury drew from sociological research on intergenerational mobility and inheritance of race to assert that even if we could equalize racial differences in the quality and quantity of human capital, and even if we could encourage employers to eliminate their discrimination against blacks, racial inequalities would persist. Criticizing neoclassical theories of racial income inequality for being too individualistic and ignoring group processes, he asserted that blacks would continue to be disadvantaged in part because *blacks gen-*

*erally have poorer connections to the labor market and lack information about job opportunities.* Relative to whites, blacks lack social capital.

Incorporating ideas behind the social capital theoretical framework into his analysis of persistent black joblessness, William Julius Wilson (1987) explained that when the black middle and working classes moved away from what were once vertically integrated black communities, those left behind became residents of neighborhoods steeped in poverty. As a result of their lack of regular and sustained contact with individuals who had strong attachments to mainstream institutions, residents have become socially isolated. Relative to poor residents of low-poverty neighborhoods, the number of people to whom residents of high-poverty neighborhoods are connected is small, and the connections they do have are also disadvantaged. Consequently, they know few who can act as role models, socializing them about appropriate workplace behavior and, most importantly, providing them with links to jobs. Thus, Wilson has argued, absent access to personal contacts who are able to provide job information—that is, absent social capital—even during strong economic times members of this group still have great difficulty finding work.

Wilson's thesis caused urban poverty scholars to begin to consider the role that personal relations play in the persistent joblessness crisis; this change of focus was an important breakthrough in urban poverty research since these largely quantitative approaches had done well in identifying the ways in which network structure and composition matter. For instance, all else being equal, larger, more diverse, and wider-ranging networks allow for greater efficiency in the flow of new and different kinds of information, whose quality, quantity, and timing increase individuals' edge in the competitive arena, thereby improving their attainment outcomes. Furthermore, networks higher in social status provide better resources since resources greater in quality and quantity inhere in positions located higher in social structure (Burt 1992, 1997; Campbell, Marsden, and Hurlbert 1986; Lin 1999; Lin and Dumin 1986).

This focus, however, has led scholars and researchers to neglect, within the context of embeddedness, the role of interpersonal relations and the intersubjective moments that inform the behaviors of the various actors who participate in the process. After all, access to job contacts does not guarantee that job information and influence will be mobilized on a job-seeker's behalf, as Nan Lin intimates when he states (2001, 92), "Not all persons accessed with rich social capital are expected to take advantage of or be able to mobilize social capital for the purpose of obtaining better socioeconomic status. An element of action and choice should also be significant." A job-seeker's decision to seek assistance or to accept it when offered and a job-holder's decision about whether to provide assistance depend in great part on interpersonal

dynamics. And these dynamics do not always lead to cooperation between the actors occupying these positions. Indeed, as I will show, interpersonal relations and intersubjective moments are crucial for understanding persistent joblessness. This is not because they reveal the extent to which the black poor, especially those from high- and extreme-poverty neighborhoods, are disconnected from mainstream ties who could link them to job information and influence their hire. Indeed, similar to the findings reported in Newman's *No Shame in My Game* (1999), I found disconnection to be a rather rare occurrence.<sup>13</sup> Rather, interpersonal relations matter because it is through these interactions and engagements that the poor come to diagnose the problems of joblessness, theorizing about its primary causes and possible solutions. It is through these social interactions as well that joblessness discourses have their ultimate consequences, shaping how poor blacks engage with each other as actors, specifically as job-seekers and jobholders, in the economic realm, and thus affecting their labor market outcomes above and beyond the initiating factors deemed to cause joblessness (Pescosolido 1992). But only by examining the process of finding work and doing so in ethnographic detail do we gain insight into how black, poor job-seekers make sense of the process of finding work, the actions they take during the process, the motivations that underlie these actions, and how each of these is informed by their interactions with others in their social milieu. *Lone Pursuit* is an effort to address these empirical and theoretical shortcomings in the literature.

### **Anthony's Oversight**

Although Anthony provided me with a fairly exhaustive list of factors to explain his joblessness, the one thing he failed to mention was an odd omission, I thought, given the extent to which it pervaded our conversations about his daily efforts at job finding. Specifically, even as days of unemployment multiplied into weeks, weeks rolled into months, and months approached a year, Anthony was strongly disinclined to seek assistance from his family members, friends, and acquaintances, not because he lacked contacts who could aid him during his search, but because he did not feel that he could or should mobilize his connections on his own behalf. When asked about the importance of using friends, relatives, and acquaintances for job information and influence, Anthony explained that while they were important to the process, he preferred not to employ this approach to finding work, stating somewhat defensively, "You ain't got to worry about me using your name to get in the door. Just give me an application; just turn it in for me. That's all I ask you. Because, you know, say if I do get a job and mess up on the job, I won't drag you down with me. So I prefer not to use your name."



Just as he resisted seeking assistance from his network of relations, save to the extent that they could give him information about job openings, so too was he unreceptive toward providing assistance to others. As he explained, "I'll use the same method on myself. I used to tell them, 'I get you an application, but don't use me at all. If you mess up a job, it won't fall back on me either.'" In other words, in a low-wage labor market where employers rely heavily on informal networks for recruitment and screening, Anthony, a man desperately seeking employment for some ten months, was so disinclined toward, even distrustful of, personal contact use that he approached the job-finding process as a defensive individualist, both in seeking a job and in being a potential job contact.

Had researchers examined in ethnographic detail Anthony's process of finding work, they would have discovered that although he believed that his prospects for finding work were made worse by employer discrimination and declining opportunities for lesser-skilled workers, he was even more convinced that ultimately his crisis of joblessness was of his own making and that only through his own efforts would he overcome his labor market difficulties. Moreover, researchers would have noted that Anthony's understanding of his situation and his resulting job search behavior—going it alone—derived from interactions he had with friends, relatives, acquaintances, and institutions, especially those who were positioned to assist him but chose not to because they blamed him for his own struggles. These labor market intermediaries were institutions and individuals who feared the effect that assisting him would have on their own well-being and who communicated these understandings and concerns to him in subtle but often obviously demeaning ways. It was these understandings, these tensions or conflicts between the roles of job-seeker and job-holder, that nurtured a pervasive distrust between them and Anthony and that primarily shaped his individualistic approach to job search; that approach, in turn, only disadvantaged him further because he was forsaking the use of personal contacts in a low-wage labor market that was heavily dependent on such referrals (Holzer 1996).

Job-holders' distrust and reluctance to assist their job-seeking friends and relatives have been noted in other qualitative studies. For instance, Newman (1999) observed that personal contacts were vital to the job-matching process among the low-wage workers she studied. However, assistance was not always forthcoming. Fearing that their referrals would prove unreliable and compromise their reputations with their employer, a few of her subjects, Newman observed, denied help to their job-seeking friends and relatives. In telling the story of a young black man struggling with the desire to be "decent" and the call of the "street," Elijah Anderson (1999) also noted that some in positions to

provide job-finding assistance were often wary about doing so because they feared the negative consequences that a bad match might have on their own employment health and well-being. And in *Race and the Invisible Hand*, Deirdre Royster (2003) reported that a few of the black working-class men she interviewed felt that they had to use their positions as labor market intermediaries “carefully and sparingly” because they feared the negative consequences to their reputations if their referrals “messed up.”

However, while these works are noteworthy, their reports are only suggestive of a pattern of distrust and noncooperation. In the absence of systematic investigations of job contacts’ willingness to assist, it has been unclear to what extent those in possession of job information and influence have been disinclined to provide job-finding assistance. Nor has it been clear what conditions have had to be met for assistance to be forthcoming. Furthermore, previous research has not examined how job-holders’ reluctance affects job-seekers’ understanding of their own joblessness and thus the motivations behind their approaches to job search. *Lone Pursuit* does.

## The Study

In collaboration with Alford Young Jr., a sociologist at the University of Michigan, and a small team of graduate students, between the fall of 1999 and the summer of 2002 I conducted in-depth interviews and a survey of 105 low-income, young, black men and women from “Southeast County,” Michigan.<sup>14</sup> The purpose of the project was to collect data on the social experiences that helped shape the black poor’s cognitive map of the world of work and their place in it. It was also designed to gain an understanding of how individuals’ mental maps informed their labor market decisions, including information about their job referral networks and the process of finding work.

### *Research Design, Sample, and Data*

As is often the case when studying low-income populations, we had great difficulty recruiting participants through random sampling techniques (Edin and Lein 1997). I catalog these difficulties in appendix A. More than one-quarter of the sample were recruited from one of the most socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods in Southeast County through recruitment strategies that included direct calling, letter mailings, and door-to-door canvassing of the neighborhood’s three public, low-income housing projects. Slightly fewer than three-quarters of the sample were recruited from two social service agencies. One of the agencies catered to residents experiencing various housing issues

and provided them with some employment assistance as well. The other agency, the job center, yielded the bulk of our 105 interviews. In all, 72 percent of respondents were recruited at both social service agencies, and two-thirds at the job center alone.

The job center, a one-stop employment service center, offered a variety of programs to aid the transition to labor force participation and employment, including education, training, and employment programs, GED classes for high school dropouts, child-care referral services, and transportation services. Although the center was open to all of the county's residents, the majority of clients were black and poor. As a consequence of their participation in Michigan's Family Independence Program (FIP), the state's version of the federally funded TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) program, welfare recipients were required to take part in FIP's Work First program, which was housed at the job center. Work First clients were mandated to spend several hours each day looking for work, and many did so by browsing the employment section of local newspapers or surfing job bank websites on computers provided by the center. Work First also mandated that recipients take classes and workshops held at the center to increase their marketability and employability.

Because of welfare reforms that required welfare applicants to name the fathers of their children, young men were also being held accountable in ways that involved the job center. Court-ordered to pay child support, unemployed fathers were strongly encouraged by the state to visit the center to find work. Employed fathers stopped by hoping to find a better job than the one they already had. Both types of fathers were motivated by the desire to stop or, more realistically, slow their child support arrears. Childless young men and women also stopped by to browse local papers, surf the Internet, call employers, and submit résumés via fax or the Internet. All of these kinds of users also worked with staff members who recruited and screened applicants for local employers willing to hire from this low-skilled population and who encouraged job-seekers to attend weekly job fairs. It was largely from this general population of center clients that my sample was drawn.

Interviewers took up residence at the job center's office during regular business hours. With the assistance of center staff, interviewers identified subjects who fit the study criteria and recruited them for participation. We sought black men and women between the ages of twenty and forty who resided in Southeast County and who had no more than a high school diploma or GED. Respondents were asked about their family background, networks, employment history, and job-finding methods. They were also questioned in-depth about their childhood (including childhood impressions of work); marriage, relationships, and children; employment history, experiences, and impres-

sions of work; job referral networks; philosophy of employment; and attitudes and opinions about the extent and nature of job opportunities for low-skilled workers like themselves. Interviews averaged between two and three hours and were conducted by African Americans. The reader should refer to appendices B and C for the in-depth interview protocol and survey instrument used to gather data. I also undertook an extensive examination of the job center while there. This examination included extensive interviews with center staff about their experiences assisting clients searching for work, observations of client and staff interactions, and a study of the center's physical space.

In table 1.1, I display the mean characteristics of respondents in the sample. (See table A.1 for mean characteristics by data collection strategies.) The average age of the sample was twenty-eight years, 78 percent had never married (though just under half reported living with a spouse or partner), and 75 percent had children—2.5 on average. Eighty-four percent were high school graduates (or had gotten a GED), and just over half were employed. On their current or most recent job, respondents' mean wages were \$9.30 per hour (and the median was about \$8.50). However, because median tenure was only eleven months—nearly one-third had not worked longer than six months—most families survived on poverty-level earnings. Indeed, one-third of respondents were receiving public assistance at the time of the interview—14 percent of the men and 47 percent of the women. Nearly half reported having ever received assistance—31 percent of the men and 68 percent of the women. (By and large, these figures are what we have come to expect in terms of the social and economic status of the black poor.) Finally, employing a variation of the categories of neighborhood poverty concentration typically used in urban poverty studies, I found that 69 percent of respondents lived in census tracts in which rates of family poverty were low to moderate (0 to 29.9 percent), and 31 percent resided in neighborhoods characterized by much of the urban underclass literature, with rates of family poverty that were high to extreme (30 percent and higher).

One of the novel approaches taken here is that I consulted with respondents about their roles as both job-seekers—individuals taking steps to find work on their own behalf—and job-holders—individuals in possession of information and influence and so in a good position to affect employers' hiring decisions on behalf of their personal relations. Regarding their role as job-seekers, I queried them about the level of difficulty they had finding any job; the obstacles they had faced in their attempts to find work; the extent to which friends, family members, and acquaintances were important to this process; and their experiences seeking help from others. I paid particular attention to why they asked others for assistance when they did; who they asked and why

**Table 1.1 Mean Sample Characteristics**

	Mean	Range
Age	28.4 (5.9)	17–43
Gender (females)	.52	0–1
Never married	.78	0–1
Have children	.75	0–1
Number of children (if parent)	2.5 (1.4)	1–7
High school graduate/GED	.84	0–1
Employed	.52	0–1
Hourly wages	\$9.30 (\$3.50)	\$2.50–23.00
Public assistance		0–1
Currently receiving	.31	
Women	.47	
Men	.17	
Ever received	.46	
Women	.68	
Men	.31	
Neighborhood poverty rate		0–1
Low to moderate	.69	
High to extreme	.31	

Source: Author's compilation.

Note: N = 103.

they asked the people they did; what these contacts did for a living; whether or not they had influence on the job; what type of assistance they provided; whether or not they as job-seekers gained employment; and how they assessed the role that their ties played in the job-matching process. These questions were part of the effort to understand how respondents, as job-seekers, generally experienced the job search process, the role that their job-holding ties had played in the process, and how job-seekers made sense of job-holders' role.

I also asked them questions about their role as job-holders who were in a position to affect job matches between employers and job-seekers. What did they typically do when they heard about openings at their workplace? Had anyone ever come to them for help in finding or getting a job? How did they determine whether they would provide assistance, and what form did that assistance take? How did they assess the positive and negative aspects of helping others find work? My goal was

to gauge how respondents, as job-holders, experienced the job-matching process and to understand the role that they saw for those in possession of information and influence vis-à-vis the job-seeker, the costs and benefits they associated with providing assistance, and the decisionmaking process they used to determine whether or not to assist.

### *Pervasive Distrust and Noncooperation*

Interviews revealed that Anthony was hardly unique in his approach to job-finding assistance, whether as a potential contact or as a job-seeker. Although some job-seekers and job-holders were willing to receive and provide job-finding assistance, distrust between job-seekers and job-holders was pervasive, and it negatively affected their decisions to cooperate during the job search process. Specifically, when in possession of job information or influence, the overwhelming majority of job-holders expressed concern that job-seekers in their networks were too unmotivated to accept assistance, required great expenditures of time and emotional energy, or acted too irresponsibly on the job, thereby jeopardizing the job-holders' own reputations with their employers and harming their already tenuous labor market prospects. Consequently, they were generally reluctant to assist the job-seekers in their network. To justify their unwillingness, job-holders literally ranted about the importance of self-reliance, espousing individualistic tenets about finding a job.

Furthermore, job-holders' reluctance had consequences for job-seekers' search behavior. A substantial minority of job-seekers so feared falling short of expectations or being maligned by their personal contacts for being jobless that they were disinclined to seek assistance or to accept it when offered. To justify their reluctance to use personal contacts, job-seekers embraced individualism, choosing to forgo personal contact use in favor of much less effective job search methods.

But theirs was a *defensive individualism*. Within the context of poverty, friends, relatives, acquaintances, and institutions in their social milieu blamed the black poor and jobless for their persistent joblessness, deploying discourses of joblessness that privileged individuals' moral shortcomings and stressed personal responsibility and self-sufficiency as a panacea. Cognizant of how they were viewed and of how their joblessness was understood, job-seekers became defensive individualists. Their potential labor market intermediaries certainly pushed them into defensive individualism, but the black poor and jobless also embraced individualism and self-reliant approaches to job search as their own distrust toward themselves and intermediaries grew.<sup>15</sup>

A skeptical reader might argue that what I found were respondents' justifications for their joblessness rather than the motivations behind

their job search. In other words, job-seekers who expressed a disinclination to seek assistance or accept it when offered did so to make excuses for their persistent joblessness. Such skepticism would be understandable if it were not for two things. First, respondents were asked a number of questions to gain insight into how they understood their labor market experiences. Unemployed job-seekers were asked to explain why they had such difficulty finding work. The whole sample was asked what made finding work difficult, to the extent that it was. In neither case did respondents offer that finding work was difficult because they chose to look for a job without the assistance of friends, relatives, and acquaintances. Instead, as I discuss in the following chapters, the overwhelming majority pointed to what they perceived to be personal obstacles to employment, such as human capital deficiencies, felony convictions, drug and alcohol abuse, lack of motivation, and familial obligations. A significant minority also pointed to structural constraints to employment, such as poor public transportation systems, employer discrimination, and the lack of jobs. Only four job-seekers in the entire sample explained persistent joblessness by pointing to a lack of relations who could help. No job-seekers explained their persistent joblessness in terms of their own unwillingness to seek assistance or to accept it when offered.

Second, one of the strengths of this study is that it attempts to understand the process of finding work from the perspective of both job-seekers and job-holders, those who are well positioned to provide information and influence hires. By adopting this strategy, I show that to the extent that job-seekers are disinclined to seek assistance or to accept it when offered for fear of losing face, they are doing so within the context of job-holding ties who express a great deal of distrust and reluctance to assist in ways that might harm their own labor market positions. In other words, job-holders' accounts of the job search process are very consistent with the accounts offered by job-seekers. Their stories jibe, providing further evidence that what I am referencing here is the actual job-seeking process and the motivations behind job search, not job-seekers' justifications for their own joblessness.

Readers may also wonder about the implications of my findings from having drawn the sample largely from a job center. Surely job-seekers who visit job centers do so because they lack access to social resources or are less likely to deploy the social resources they do have for job finding. These concerns are unwarranted, however, for the following reasons. Clients of the job center were often mandated to visit, sometimes as a consequence of Work First requirements. Others had been strongly encouraged by the state to visit the center to find work in order to pay down rising child support arrears. Also, the recently unemployed were required by the state to register at the job center in order to receive

unemployment compensation. In other words, for many job center users their visits to the center were required and not the direct result of network dynamics.

Furthermore, center respondents were no more likely to express disfavor toward engaging a job referral network than their counterparts recruited by other strategies. I found that participants recruited from the job center were *far less reluctant* to use personal contacts than non-center respondents. Whereas one-third of noncenter respondents claimed reluctance to use personal contacts, just one-fifth of center contacts did. And so it appears that visiting the center was less about the interpersonal dynamics of distrust and noncooperation than it was about being mandated to do so.

## Overview of the Book

In *Lone Pursuit*, I engage current debates about persistent black joblessness by highlighting the process of finding work, which has often been neglected in prior research. In so doing, I show that interpersonal relations and intersubjective moments are crucial for understanding persistent joblessness. This is not because my analysis reveals the extent to which the black poor, especially those from high- and extreme-poverty neighborhoods, are disconnected from mainstream relations who could link them to job information and influence their hire. Rather, it reveals that the process of finding work is in great part a product of job-seekers' interactions with others in their social milieu, especially job-holders. Because the roles of job-seekers and job-holders are often in conflict, however, nurturing interpersonal relations characterized by distrust, these two fundamental nodes are often led to disengage from one another during the process of finding work, making all the more difficult the task of finding work in low-wage labor markets where employers rely heavily on job referral networks for recruitment and screening.

The arguments I put forward in *Lone Pursuit* about the interpersonal dynamics of (dis)trust, (non)cooperation, and individualism among black poor job-seekers and their job-holding relations contribute to these larger debates about the extent and nature of social support networks in poor black communities. In chapter 2, I engage this literature by asking two sets of questions. First, are poor blacks different? Are their interpersonal relations characterized by mutual trust and reciprocity, or are they more accurately described as distrusting and uncooperative, relative to other groups? Second, to the extent that the weight of the evidence supports the latter contention, how might we understand pervasive distrust and individualism among the black poor? To address the first set of questions, I draw from the extensive research on racial and ethnic differences in social support. To address the



second, I draw from the expanding literature on trust and trustworthiness, elaborating on the conditions that must be met in order for the seeds of trust to be sown, grown, and harvested toward cooperative, mutually beneficial ends.

In chapter 3, I dive into the heart and soul of *Lone Pursuit* with an examination of the process of job-finding from the perspective of the job-holder, one of at least two crucial nodes in the job search process. I show that job-holders approach job-finding assistance with great distrust and reluctance and explain their general reluctance to assist in terms of job-seekers' reputations, their own reputations with their employers, and the strength of their relationships with job-seekers. Residing in a neighborhood characterized by concentrated disadvantage also helps to shape the extent to which job-holders understand job-seekers as risky investments and affects the extent and nature of the assistance they are willing to provide.

In chapter 4, I examine the process of finding work from the perspective of the job-seeker and show that a significant minority of job-seekers, cognizant of how they are perceived by others in their social milieu, refuse to seek or accept assistance from job-holders who have job information and influence. Instead, they choose to go it alone, adopting a defensive individualism that belies the central role of job referral networks for employers in low-wage labor markets. In this chapter, I also explore the reasons for their reluctance, linking it primarily to fears of falling short of expectations or being maligned by their job-holding ties for their state of joblessness. I also illustrate how and why men and women experienced these fears differently: the overwhelming majority of "reluctant" personal contact users were men, while the ranks of the "willing" were primarily women.

In chapter 5, I show that pervasive distrust and noncooperation are not unique to relationships between job-seekers and job-holders. They also characterize relationships between job-seekers and the job center employees charged with facilitating their clients' labor force participation and employment. I relate the dynamics between job-seekers and these institutional intermediaries to four key factors—the lack of institutional resources to effectively facilitate job-finding; the dominant institutional discourses of joblessness that define the problem of joblessness and provide a guide to addressing the problem, often quite insufficiently; the tenuousness of staff members' own positions as labor market intermediaries; and the behaviors of the poor and jobless, which largely result from the major barriers to employment they face but are interpreted as evidence of their moral and cultural deficiencies. I make the point that even within the context of institutional social capital, job-finding assistance is not necessarily forthcoming but instead is part of an elaborate decisionmaking process that rests on the inter-

action of these four factors, which also *inhibit* job finding among the black poor.

In chapter 6, I close *Lone Pursuit* by comparing and contrasting explanations for job-holders' and center staff's distrust toward and non-cooperation with job-seekers. I make a broader statement about the conditions that facilitate distrust and noncooperation but that also aid in the reproduction of inequality at the micro level. I also identify those among the black poor who are most vulnerable under these conditions, and I suggest ways in which social policy might better address their issues.