

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Crossing Boundaries of Race, Class, and Neighborhood

I need to go check out the suburbs and see how they treat them out there,
and then maybe I can put two and two together to see what's going on.

—Keisha, African American tenth-grader, Harper High

Imagine the scene: Students from a public school located on the South Side of Chicago disembark from their bus in front of a stunning \$65 million educational facility located in the suburbs. One African American student exclaims, “This school is way better than I thought it would be!”¹ She says this before even entering the school to tour the Olympic-sized pool and other world-class athletic facilities, walk the well-lit hallways, and attend several classes. Until this day, having no concrete comparison with which to measure the education she is receiving in her school on Chicago’s South Side, this young lady has not been able to really fathom or comprehend the short shrift she receives in her education. Her statement succinctly reveals the importance of the concept of “relative deprivation”—that is, the way people compare their plight with similarly situated others.

These students were highlighted in a 2006 episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* that I viewed nearly a year after conducting my field research in four Chicago public high schools, including Harper High. Inspired by Rev. Jesse Jackson to expose “America’s School Crisis,” Oprah had decided to use these vastly different settings to reveal the disparities in educational opportunities and achievements. The episode begins with Microsoft founder and philanthropist Bill Gates and his wife Melinda lamenting that lagging behind other industrialized countries in educational achievement has greatly harmed America’s stature as the most powerful country in the world. The Gateses outline their efforts to fund schools and scholarships for students to overhaul all that is not working in our system of public schooling.

Oprah’s cameras track students who have left Harper, their all-Black school in the South Side Chicago neighborhood of Englewood, to attend Neuqua

Valley High School located in Naperville, Illinois, less than one hour west of the Windy City. The experience of the students from Naperville who venture into Harper from their suburban enclave is also filmed. The contrast between the two schools is vividly shown: the inner-city school's surrounding "low-income community" is portrayed as devastated and disorganized; the suburban public school located only thirty-five miles away, in contrast, is depicted as neat and clean.² The physical condition of the school buildings foretells the accomplishments of the students therein: whereas 99 percent of the suburban school students graduate in four years, only 40 percent of the Harper students do so.

The suburban students' first shock upon their arrival at the South Side school is having to go through metal detectors to enter—and that is just the beginning of the stark differences they notice between the two schools. Not surprisingly, the suburban students are used to facilities that are infinitely superior to those at the city school. For instance, they have actual instruments for music class; only a few working instruments are available in the South Side school, and most of the students improvise by pounding out notes with their hands on their desks. The suburban students seem not to grasp how privileged they are to have a working Olympic-sized pool and state-of-the-art fitness equipment, while the inner-city students have only a dilapidated gym with peeling walls, an empty pool, and broken and tattered fitness equipment. Their academic experiences are worlds apart as well: students at Neuqua Valley High have a couple of dozen advanced placement (AP) courses to choose from, while the city school offers only two. One suburban student sums up the experience for all who are participating from her school: "We really take our resources for granted."

The chasm between the two schools' test scores is as wide as their physical differences. While 77 percent of students at the suburban school meet the Illinois math standards, fewer than 1 percent meet the standards at the city school. One girl somberly remarks that, even though she is an A student in math at Harper, she is totally dumbfounded by the trigonometry class she has attended that day in the suburbs: "I was looking at the math problems that they're doing [at Neuqua Valley], and I'm like, 'What language is that?'. . . As soon as I get to college, I'm going to be lost."

The cameras then show the great disappointment registering on the face of an inner-city female student as she realizes that nothing comparable to this suburban educational experience is available in the city. Accompanied by her classmates' vigorous nods of agreement, she states, "The best school in Chicago can't even compare to this." Viewing this episode, I found it distressing to see the disappointment on each of the Harper students' brown faces as they confront the truth about their substandard educational experience back in Chicago. One student speaks for them all in commenting bitterly, "I feel like I've been cheated."

In this case, ignorance can truly be bliss. Whereas visiting the inner-city school confirms for suburban students their relative advantage as a group, visiting the suburban school only substantiates for the city students their relative subordination. A South Side female student generously states, “I’m glad that y’all have it, ’cuz if we don’t have it, I’m glad somebody have it. But it’s the simple fact that we see y’all doing well and we want to do well too.”

This story is about *place* as much as it is about *race*. In this episode of *Oprah*, only one student in the suburban school looks like she could be identified as a person of color (White-Hispanic); her classmates are all White. The entire group of city students are African American, but that is not the crucial issue. Students in the city of Chicago (and many other urban and rural communities) have been consigned to a separate and *unequal* education simply because of where they live. If the cameras had still been rolling the next day when the inner-city students returned to school, we most likely would have seen profound disillusionment with their school experience and disappointment in the opportunities they were given simply because of where they attended school—a public school in the city instead of the suburbs.

Unequal City provides an in-depth discussion of exactly this issue: how adolescents’ perceptions of themselves and the larger social world are shaped by their daily interactions with others, particularly as they travel back and forth from school. This book examines Chicago adolescents’ experiences within and navigation through ostensibly free yet potentially penalizing places like urban schools and neighborhoods to reveal that their perceptions of social and criminal injustice are both stratified by race and rooted in place.

Chicago’s streets and neighborhoods are defined by a long legacy of racial and class stratification, discrimination, and poverty. The inequalities in resources and opportunities resulting from racial stratification dominate its central social institutions—and most dramatically, its public schools. Adolescents in particular have to traverse social and physical terrain that can powerfully shape both their immediate experiences and their long-term perceptions. Like every urban school system, the Chicago public school system requires that adolescents navigate its “geography of opportunity.”³ Urban high schools play a major role in either ameliorating or further reinforcing adolescents’ racially divergent social worlds, particularly their perceptions of and experiences with authoritative figures across many different social contexts.

Much of the story told in this book is shaped by the journeys that tens of millions of adolescents take each day as they go from home to school and back. This daily routine may be familiar, but it is anything but banal, especially for urban teenagers, who typically go to school by themselves and often travel greater distances than elementary school students. Their trek may involve crossing multiple boundaries of race, class, and neighborhood. It is a central finding of this book that how adolescents traverse this geography has

a significant influence on their worldviews, particularly their perceptions of social and criminal injustice.

This is a timely story of race, place, education, and the expansion of the carceral state. The findings are critical because adolescents' perceptions shape their decisionmaking, behaviors, and outcomes; thus, the social-psychological, educational policy, and urban policy dimensions of this work are clear. The rich description and analysis of students' socialization to the justice system and the activation of their various identities (race, ethnicity, gender, age, class) reveal the differences in how adolescents navigate urban geographies of inequality and opportunity.

I conducted the research at the heart of this study during a decade (2001–2010) of monumental transformation in Chicago's public housing and public schooling that wholly shifted urban lives and wrought vast unintended consequences. Reforms since the early 2000s, such as "Renaissance 2010," which closed or combined many public schools, coupled with the transformation and demolition of Chicago's vast stock of high-rise public housing, have drastically reshaped the city's overlapping housing and educational landscapes. One result is that schools continue to play a major role in either subverting or reinforcing young people's divergent social worlds—that is, the vastly different social conditions, economic conditions, and distinct experiences by race and place that they confront every day.⁴

Unequal City addresses these issues by focusing on three interrelated themes. First, it explores how high school students from different social, racial, and economic backgrounds experience police contact and perceive injustice along a gradient that diverges along racial and ethnic lines. Second, it uses the experiences of youth, particularly their interactions with teachers, police, and parents, to uncover how their experiences shape their perceptions of themselves and their wider social worlds. Finally, this book uncovers the driving forces behind, and consequences of, policies that have intricately linked the public school system and the criminal justice system.

This study's use of both quantitative and qualitative data is a unique contribution to urban sociology. I have used a distinctive array of data sources to document the mechanisms and processes by which high school students' decisions and behaviors profoundly shape the trajectories of their adult lives, as well as their perspectives and experiences: a 2001 survey of approximately 20,000 Chicago public school ninth- and tenth-graders; a survey and in-depth interviews conducted in 2005 with forty ninth- and tenth-graders across four different public schools; a follow-up survey and interviews in 2010 with four students; ethnographic observations in the schools and neighborhoods; and newspaper archives. The variable at the center of this work, "perceived injustice," measures young people's attitudes about social and structural disadvantage, which may include their awareness of differential opportunities to achieve economic or educational success. This study also

focuses on adolescents' personal and vicarious interactions with authoritative institutions and their representatives, such as teachers in school and police officers on the street.

Neither Child nor Adult

We laud young people as “the future,” and yet more often than not their voices remain unheard or ignored. Youth are often the focus of public policy decisions—such as policy on school curricula, policing tactics, or the deployment of neighborhood resources—but we usually do not view them as subjects with opinions that should be solicited and incorporated into policy decisions, even if they are the ones most affected by them. Scholars' understanding of children and teenagers is not much better than that of the general public. There is a dearth of sociological research that both presents the perspectives and experiences of youth in their own words and embeds these perspectives and experiences within the formative social institutions that shape their lives.⁵ This is especially the case for marginalized minors who are deeply enmeshed in the state through the provision of public housing and public schooling and matters of public safety and who do not feel that they have much agency to determine the substance and impact of their encounters with state agencies.

The only way to address this fundamental gap is to penetrate the worlds of these teens, and that effort requires going to their schools and neighborhoods, observing the interactions in their daily world, and sitting down and talking with them. Teenagers have a great deal to share, and they offer many challenges to the conventional vision of how school works and what day-to-day justice and equality feel like. Society cannot afford to ignore their voices any longer.

Youth are highly attuned to the distribution of opportunity and the presence of social inequality. They are also aware that their “pathways of opportunity can be modified, arrested, or deflected by social interventions, including the actions of government and the leaders of key social institutions.”⁶ As we shall see, the Chicago students I followed offer a profound reminder that we must broaden our concept of “justice” from an exclusive focus on courts, jails, and police to the broader context formed by the social institutions, such as schools, that influence how youth learn about and experience equality and inequality.

I document the gradient—along lines of race and ethnicity—of adolescents' actual contact with police. Just as important, I analyze their perceptions of social and criminal injustice, paying particular attention to how their race and ethnic identity, class, and gender shape their beliefs and experiences. For instance, one African American male student I spoke with, Dewayne, told me that the police “don't represent the law. . . . They figure since they got

that badge they want to play God. . . . All the government is doing is letting them play God.” And what could send a stronger message to students about their relationship with legal authorities than to have the police—those who provide the jailhouse with its inhabitants—standing guard inside and outside the schoolhouse?⁷ These perceptions offer a great deal of insight into young people’s perspectives at the formative stage when their decisions and resultant behaviors can dramatically shape the trajectories of their lives.

Adolescence is a life stage that is full of meaning making. Young people are making sense of both internal and external forces, from their inexplicable, inextinguishable feelings about the girl or boy next door to their concerns about violence in their neighborhoods. The high school students in this study are dealing with very important transitional life events, including moves to new high schools, searches for after-school jobs, and navigation of the world as a young adult with greater independence. These transitions are fraught with major social adjustments that involve changes in status, peers, and, most importantly, the social circumstances they are likely to confront each day.⁸ Understanding that adolescence is also a critical and formative period of politically sensitive beliefs underscores the importance of exploring the development and evolution of adolescent perceptions of inequality.⁹ What young people believe and the stories they tell about their position in the larger social and economic strata must be given serious scholarly attention. Youth are rather accurate about—and sometimes frighteningly aware of—their chances in the world in which we live.

The uses and definitions of the terms “adolescence” and “youth,” which I use interchangeably, have changed over time.¹⁰ The extension of the time between childhood and adulthood in the twentieth century led to the revival of the term “adolescence” to denote a period when youth are in flux with regard to their responsibilities and society’s expectations for them. For instance, adolescents have much more agency than children when it comes to traveling farther from home or taking on low-wage or low-skill work, but they remain subject to the authority of parents, teachers, and even police. The restricted ability of people under eighteen to determine the course of their own lives—where to live or who to vote for when they are old enough or what to do with their days—may actually make their thoughts about the world that much more important.

Race, Place, and Perceived Inequality

I use the notion of “perceived injustice” as a means of capturing public high school students’ attitudes about social and structural disadvantage in general and, more specifically, their awareness of how opportunities for economic or educational success may differ by race, ethnicity, gender, or class. The concept of perceived injustice can also spotlight students’ personal and vicarious

interactions with authoritative institutions and their representatives, whether teachers in the schools or police officers on the street. This study offers a revealing look at a generation of teens whose experiences are relegated to society's margins but whose life outcomes continually demonstrate the inequality of educational and economic chances in a purportedly democratic society.

The focus here on youth's perceptions of injustice draws on foundational research conducted by Herbert Jacob in Milwaukee in 1969 during a "period of relative calm" after the urban riots that had rocked the United States the previous year.¹¹ Jacob defined and measured justice as the congruence between actors' expectations about key agents in the justice system (police, courts, and other legal offices) and their perceptions of the actual behavior of these agents, with injustice denoted as the gap between those expectations and perceptions. Too often scholarship simply reports that African Americans and Whites have different attitudes about the criminal justice system, but Jacob made place central to his analyses of racialized perceptions of justice. He focused his study on three neighborhoods with varying race-class compositions—a "Black ghetto neighborhood," a "White working-class neighborhood," and a "White middle-class neighborhood"—and found that his subjects' evaluations of the police were rooted, to some extent, in neighborhood cultures. As he put it, "Although individual Blacks may report satisfactory experiences, they are much more likely to know persons who have had worse experiences [with police]."¹² Jacob's article was also groundbreaking in its examination of the distribution of perceptions of injustice as an outcome instead of as an explanatory variable.

An individual must have a conception of justice to have a conception of injustice. The same can be said for a person's ability to understand his or her personal plight as deficient or advantageous. The theory of "relative deprivation," or "relative subordination," is useful here. This theory, as articulated in the foundational works of James Davis and extended by William Runciman, stems from "a familiar truism: that people's attitudes, aspirations and grievances largely depend on the frame of reference within which they are conceived."¹³ Relative deprivation applies when people compare their individual plight with that of others, whereas relative subordination is a group-based comparison of status or outcomes. The theory is applicable to both racial and class hierarchies.

According to Runciman, "Steady poverty is the best guarantee of [aspirational] conservatism: if people have no reason to expect or hope for more than they can achieve, they will be less discontented with what they have, or even grateful to simply be able to hold on to it."¹⁴ In Runciman's theory, the poor wish for less than the rich do; they do not seem conscious of another possibility. But there is also reason to argue that something more complex is often at work. Those who face the most daunting challenges—young, poor African Americans in particular—may be willing to limit their hopes and

expectations because that is less painful than confronting their disappointment.

As we would suspect from endless anecdotal evidence (including Oprah Winfrey's school swap), and as is confirmed by numerous social indicators (such as poverty, unemployment, education, and homeownership), life in America is shaped by a well-established racial hierarchy. However we attempt to explain it, the presence of a racial gradient, with stagnant extremes, is undeniable in this country. Typically Whites and Blacks are at the poles of the spectrum, with Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans (when counted) falling somewhere in between.¹⁵

African Americans also have the highest perceptions of injustice along a racial gradient, with Whites (and Asian Americans) at the opposite end of the spectrum.¹⁶ A strong perception of inequality does not mean that those who rank high on perceptions of injustice—those, as discussed earlier, who believe the world is fundamentally unjust—are defeatists. In fact, much of the sociological research on perceptions of justice reveals minimal differences between the races in their endorsement of basic principles of justice. Indeed, although as a group African Americans have historically experienced some of the country's highest levels of discrimination, they report some of the highest commitments to education, equity, and opportunity.¹⁷ They have not “given up.” Instead, the stark differences come into play when we look at experiential justice—that is, perceptions of the way justice is distributed *in fact*.¹⁸

The next iteration of perceptions research by sociologists, criminologists, and economists provided even more nuance in this area of study by incorporating class into the analyses and pushing us to think more about the processes and mechanisms that shape individuals' perceptions of injustice; such analyses are also well served by social-psychological research methods.¹⁹ The psychologist Tom Tyler and his colleagues have done much to advance the study of perceptions via their rich line of research on the topic.²⁰ Tyler's work reveals that people comply with the law because they believe it is proper to do so, that they react to their experiences by evaluating their sense of justice or injustice, and that they evaluate the process independently of the outcome. These findings have spurred many new studies and extensively shaped police policy and practices.²¹

Unequal City extends these research traditions in that it “maps the terrain” of perceived injustice across school and residential contexts as informed by race, gender, and class.²² A “place-sensitive” sociology that understands place not just as a backdrop to our social lives but also as an agentic player in our social lives, with measurable and independent effects, is necessary to answer these sorts of questions.²³ The formation and transformation of the Chicago public schools has enormously shaped the social and cultural lives of its students. This relationship is manifest in the various ways in which the Chicago

schools reflect and sustain difference while also facilitating either social engagement or social estrangement.²⁴

Of Journeys and Destinations

“Adolescent geographies” determine both the paths that young people take and their social and physical destinations. Another useful conceptual tool for understanding how schools provide experiences and shape perceptions in a discernibly stratified way is the social geographer and theorist David Sibley’s notion of “geographies of exclusion.” Geographies of exclusion are the literal mappings of power relations onto geographic places and their commensurate social spaces, such as schools and neighborhoods. Through this frame we can begin to understand social boundaries and exclusionary landscapes, particularly how physical terrain becomes imbued with social meaning and markers, which together shape what Sibley terms the “ecological self.”²⁵

People both shape and are shaped by places. This is certainly true for the physical boundaries circumscribed by the paths we travel (such as arterial streets, highways, railroad tracks, and viaducts), and it is just as true for the social boundaries of race-ethnicity, class, and gender that we draw around ourselves and others—through the friends we hang out with, the organizations or gangs we belong to, and the many other components of identity.

We all feel varying degrees of possessiveness about the different spaces we inhabit, whether home, neighborhood, school, or nation. The social composition of these spaces is a key factor in our feelings about them. Possessiveness—that is, the desire to control space—governs social interactions at all of these levels, but particularly at the neighborhood and school levels, where homogeneity paints differences as a threat.²⁶ In our very human desire to feel safe in our surroundings and confident that we can protect our loved ones, we can all too easily become suspicious of anyone who does not look or talk or walk like us. From this perspective, we all become defined by place—both by the places where we do not belong and by those where we do.

Crossing boundaries from the familiar to the alien can produce a gamut of emotions in young people, from anxiety to exhilaration. Border crossing, Sibley notes, can produce the “thrill of transgression,” but it can also result in harassment, physical danger, or even arrest.²⁷ Because they are moving from childhood to adulthood, teenagers are inherently border-crossers: they do not fit comfortably in either category. Adults are not comfortable continuing to give them the benefits of childhood, which they seem to have outgrown, but they are equally uncomfortable extending to teenagers the privileges of adulthood, which they may not yet deserve. At the same time, social behavioral expectations for teenagers—what they are expected to do and how they are expected to act—are invariably bound up with the places they either inhabit

or are excluded from. Physical place is thus inextricable from our moral judgments about teenagers as well as our tolerance (or lack thereof) for their deviant practices.²⁸

The connection between our ecological and imagined realities has become clearer in a recent line of scholarship that centers on “cognitive landscapes.” Building on Gerald Suttles’s idea of “cognitive maps,” Robert Sampson and Dawn Bartusch suggest the metaphor of “cognitive landscapes” to describe the demographic and ecological structures of those troubled American settings in which the presence of crime and disorder may be seen as the norm.²⁹ The idea of cognitive landscapes complements other scholars’ theoretical contributions to our understanding of how place and physical mobility shape individuals’ perceptions of social success and mobility.³⁰

This book adopts these ideas to make sense of how adolescents reconcile their particular position in the reigning social hierarchy with their personal aspirations and life experiences. For the young people in this study, as for all of us, specific social locations—that is, their peer networks, neighborhoods, and schools—act as frames of reference. What they perceive and experience as normal is affected by their individual place in the larger social structure and cultural milieu.³¹ Youth’s socioecologically structured “cognitive landscapes” involve interactions with authority figures, which may have an impact on their feelings of injustice. This book combines awareness of the multiplicative influences of place, race, age, gender, class, and other components of identity to present a richer, fuller account of the variation in youth perceptions of inequality and opportunity.

An Urban Laboratory Like No Other

Just as there is great racial stratification in urban school systems, there is a concomitant geography of opportunity in America’s urban centers. The city of Chicago, the site of so many great sociological studies, provides an especially interesting locale to use in evaluating the confluence of racial inequality, economic instability, spatial segregation, and crime with the research focus of this book—youth perceptions of injustice.³²

The defining experience for Chicago’s young people of attending the city’s public schools is being forced to navigate its “geography of opportunity,” or more accurately, the city’s “geography of inequality.”³³ Chicago’s racial stratifications are well known and long-standing—and, for many of us, so taken for granted that it is easy to forget that these racial divides permeate the city’s social institutions. These institutions, especially urban neighborhoods and schools, are the central sites that create, maintain, and perpetuate inequality.

Because public schools are typically organized around geographical catchment areas, they reinforce and exacerbate the effects of residential segregation and social isolation.³⁴ The majority of African American and Hispanic stu-

dents living on the South and West Sides of Chicago and attending schools there have a radically different educational experience than their counterparts in the Loop, Chicago's downtown, and the communities farther north, who are typically Whiter and wealthier. Those on the South Side are literally "out of the loop" in comparison to their peers just a few miles north, where schools have tremendously different resources. This geographical variance in school quality has been the cause and consequence of students leaving their neighborhoods to take advantage of an expanded portfolio of "educational options" within the Chicago public schools system.

After the Illinois Charter Schools Law was passed in April 1996, the state and city leadership began allowing—and even encouraging—parents to apply to send their children to schools outside their neighborhood's borders. The lawmakers' intent "in authorizing charter schools," they said, was "to create a legitimate avenue for parents, teacher, and community members to take responsible risks and create new, innovative, and more flexible ways of educating children within the public school system."³⁵ Former mayor Richard M. Daley and U.S. education secretary Arne Duncan began the push that increased the number of privately run public charter schools from zero in the mid-1990s to 133 in 2014, serving approximately 57,000 students in the city of Chicago.³⁶ The rapid growth of the charter school movement has only accelerated the decline in neighborhood high school enrollments.³⁷ Dozens of neighborhood public schools have closed since 2011 under the mayoralty of Rahm Emmanuel, fifty of them in predominantly African American South and West Side neighborhoods.³⁸ As a result, "some 10,000 high school students and 6,000 elementary school students of CPS students, travel as far as six miles" to get to school each day, crossing boundaries of race, class, and opportunity.³⁹

It is not always a bad thing for adolescents to cross boundaries, whether those borders are defined by geography or by social convention. For instance, the teens who attend the magnet school downtown or commute from across the city to Lincoln Park High for its International Baccalaureate (IB) program have an opportunity to see and experience more than their peers who attend school in their home neighborhoods. Their "temporary exile" for the purpose of achieving an education superior to what is available closer to home undoubtedly increases their chances for success and upward mobility relative to their peers who stay in the neighborhood. However, they may also have to grapple with feelings of being seen as out of place in those same neighborhoods, hallways, and classrooms where other students have different skin colors, class status, and experiences. That is why it is important to understand the development and evolution of youth's perceptions of social and criminal injustice from an ecological perspective, not just as these perceptions originate from their race, class, gender, and other foundational aspects of identity.

Moreover, this is not merely a theoretical exercise: the perception of injus-

tice has real and important effects on people's lives. A burgeoning area of research has concluded that perceptions of social injustice are positively related to crime and delinquency, showing that perceptions of injustice have an impact not only on individual lives but also on all aspects of our society.⁴⁰ The stakes are high. We should all be interested in discovering how young people form perceptions of injustice through contact with authorities such as school officials and police officers.

Four Chicago Public High Schools

The four Chicago schools highlighted in this book—Lincoln Park High, Payton College Prep, Tilden Career Community Academy, and Harper High—were selected primarily on the basis of their racial composition and neighborhood settings so as to represent four unique contexts (see table 1.1).

Lincoln Park High School has programs that attract students from across the district, including the International Baccalaureate program, an accelerated curriculum with “an emphasis on problem solving and integration of knowledge.” The other two programs into which students are sorted at the application stage are a double honors/Advanced Placement (AP) program and the performing arts curriculum. Approximately three-fourths of the school's 2,200 students enter Lincoln Park through one of these special programs. The remaining pupils are admitted from within the school's attendance boundaries. These admittance criteria bring together a diverse group that includes upper-middle-class students who live in condo buildings on Armitage Avenue as well as lower-income students from the Cabrini-Green high-rise housing projects (all completely razed by early 2011) to the south of the school.⁴¹ The average household income in the neighborhood is nearly \$87,000, and the poverty rate is 12 percent.⁴²

The Lincoln Park High School campus consists of two buildings. The main structure, a Greek Revival-style building with beautiful columns that frame the grand entry, is paired with a more modern, two-story building that serves the freshman class. In this separate building, the younger teens have a space all their own in which to bond with each other and transition to high school in a relatively structured setting. Orchard Street was closed in 1979 to make way for a tree-lined mall between the two school buildings. This public space exclusively reserved for the school community gives Lincoln Park the feeling of a small college campus.

Walter Payton College Preparatory High School sits less than two miles southeast of Lincoln Park. Payton, established in 2000, is the newest school of the four studied in this book. It is a selective enrollment school: every student has to pass an entrance exam to be admitted and the school has no enrollment boundaries.⁴³ Payton's administration prides itself on maintain-

Table 1.1 Characteristics of Four Chicago Schools, 2006

	Lincoln Park High School	Walter Payton College Preparatory High School	Tilden Career Community Academy High School	Harper High School
Official school classification	Mixed-race	Integrated	Predominantly minority	Predominantly Black
White	29.4%	40.4%	5.1%	0.1%
Black	35.1	27.5	60.0	99.3
Latino	19.9	22.8	32.3	0.6
Asian	15.3	8.8	1.6	—
Native American	0.3	0.6	0.1	—
ACT composite	21	26	15	14
Percentage low- income	51%	34%	95%	84%
Graduation rate	81	89	56	66

Source: 2006 official school reports.

ing “a student body that is economically, geographically, and racially diverse.”⁴⁴ In fact, this seems to be the case: in 2005, when I conducted my interviews with students, the school’s racial composition was 40 percent White, 28 percent African American, 23 percent Hispanic, and 9 percent Asian/Asian American.

Payton is situated one mile east of (what was) the heart of the Cabrini-Green projects and one mile west of Chicago’s famous “Magnificent Mile,” which consists of high-end retail stores, smaller boutiques, and restaurants. The average household income of residents in the school’s neighborhood, according to the 2008–2012 American Community Survey, is approaching \$72,000, and the poverty level in the neighborhood is slightly under 20 percent.⁴⁵

Payton’s physical appearance is breathtaking. In the entryway behind its grand modernist glass facade, flags representing countries around the world hang from the ceiling. Looking deeper, a visitor notices the school’s generously wide corridors and high ceilings. The structure in which learning takes place is commensurate with the substance. Payton’s curriculum focuses on math, science, and world languages and consists solely of honors and AP courses. It is difficult to get into Payton, and upon being accepted, students usually rise to the challenge. The graduation rate for the school since 2005 has consistently been around 90 percent.⁴⁶

Tilden Career Community Academy High School, the third school in the study, provides a stark contrast to Payton. The median household income of the surrounding neighborhood is approximately \$37,000, with a corresponding 29 percent living below the poverty rate.⁴⁷ The racial composition of Tilden in 2005, when the first interviews were conducted, was fewer than 2 percent Asian and Native American, 5 percent White, 32 percent Hispanic, and 60 percent African American. Since the 2004–2005 academic year, the number of students residing in Tilden’s attendance area who choose to attend Tilden has dramatically declined. According to recent data procured through several Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, 732 area ninth-graders chose other public schools in 2005, while 425 neighborhood students enrolled at Tilden. In 2013–2014, 582 area students enrolled elsewhere, while only 46 students living in the area chose Tilden.⁴⁸

The history of Tilden is both intriguing, as outlined in the preface, and complicated. The current building was constructed before the area’s annexation to the city of Chicago. Tilden began as Lake High School in 1881, became part of Chicago Public Schools in 1889, was rebuilt in 1905, and was renamed for the banker and former Board of Education president Edward Tilden in 1915.⁴⁹ The L-shaped, three-and-a-half-story building was the all-boys Tilden Technical School from 1917 until the early 1960s. At that point, it educated over 2,000 students at any given time—a far cry from the 327 students who attended the school in 2014.

Walking through the main entrance at 4747 South Union Avenue, with its navy blue doors flanked by four Ionic columns, gives the visitor a sense of the school in its former days of glory. As Tilden Technical School in the middle of the twentieth century, the school focused on training future engineers, electricians, and machinists.⁵⁰ The school continues to take pride in its history while imagining a brighter future. The visitor walking Tilden’s halls will find recently affixed messages of uplift interspersed between about fifty newly restored murals depicting famous architects, scientists, engineers, and writers who graduated from the school.⁵¹ The visitor might also find the interior foreboding, however; everyone entering the building must pass through metal detectors and proceed down dimly lit hallways. The physical atmosphere no doubt shapes the tone and tenor of the behavior of the schools’ inhabitants, who are playful and open at times, but guarded and resolute at others. To this day, Tilden is constantly fighting against the middle, with a graduation rate that has hovered around 55 percent every year since this study began in 2005. The average ACT composite score for Tilden students is 15.

Located three and a half miles southwest of Tilden, Harper High School is nestled in the middle of a residential area in West Englewood that is lined with small bungalows with porches where residents hang out and people-

watch. The surrounding blocks are dotted with prominent notices of Block Club Rules, wooden placards that broadcast the residents' disapproval of ball-playing, profanity, and loud music. The average household income of residents in the neighborhood is around \$30,000, with a 40 percent poverty level.⁵²

The curriculum at Harper is organized into six small school programs that focus on combining academic studies with job skill training in business and entrepreneurship, communications, construction, culinary arts, language arts, and writing arts. The majority of Harper's students (85 percent) join these small schools after successfully completing their first year in the Freshman Academy; the other 15 percent continue with a general high school curriculum.⁵³ In 2006, Harper's graduation rate was 66 percent, and the average ACT composite score was 14.

Harper's sprawling four-story brown brick building dominates more than half of its block on South Wood Avenue. The outside of the building features gorgeous murals that complement the school's decor, which is inspired by its cardinal-red mascot. Once inside, the visitor to Harper sees wide hallways and bright corridors filled with students who are drawn from the surrounding neighborhood. These young people, and their school, have been on the local and national radar for nearly a decade since Oprah's "school swap" experiment. In 2008 Harper was designated one of the first "Turnaround Schools"; in February 2013 a two-part series on the critically acclaimed public radio show *This American Life* documented the violence that pervades the lives of Harper's students, both inside and outside school walls. First Lady Michelle Obama visited Harper in April 2013 to listen to students' firsthand accounts of confronting violence.⁵⁴ Twenty-six Harper students visited the White House in June 2013.

All four of these schools have rich histories and fascinating present-day dynamics that contextualize the numbers and narratives of the participants in my research. Lincoln Park, Payton, Tilden, and Harper are not simply educational institutions that play the enormously important role of shaping the hearts and minds of Chicago adolescents. They are also institutionalized spaces that create a climate and provide experiences that profoundly shape the perceptions and experiences of their inhabitants. The account that follows reveals both the simple and complex notions that young people have about themselves and the world in which they live that are directly informed by their race, neighborhood, and school contexts.

The Outline of the Book

Unequal City builds a crucial case for why social scientists, politicians, policymakers, teachers, and parents should focus on the home and school contexts

of youth to understand how their perceptions of inequality are shaped by their racially divergent worlds and their interactions with authority figures within and across those social spaces.

Each day Chicago residents navigate streets and neighborhoods that are still strictly demarcated by the identities of their inhabitants. Adolescents have to traverse social and physical terrain that powerfully shapes their immediate and long-term perceptions and experiences. As I will show, the passage from home to school each day embodies the curious predicament of the urban American teenager, who will learn as much, if not much more, about his or her identity, social inequality, and the workings of the larger social structure of authority during these journeys as he or she will at school. This is especially the case for the tens of thousands of students who travel more than two miles to attend high school.

Chapter 2 chronicles the perpetually changing educational landscape in Chicago, whose educational and residential policies, instead of shoring up schools as formative social institutions that can create and maintain social solidarity, have often wrought instability and conflict. When social cohesion is interrupted, danger can arise. A Chicago teenager's daily routine of traveling to school can be a theater of both sociability and violence. Day in and day out, students must work to avoid danger from peers and neighbors, as well as the police meant to protect them.

Safe passage between places, just like the broader passage from adolescence to adulthood, is not a uniform experience for all young people. This is abundantly clear in American cities. So how do urban adolescents navigate the passage between home and school? What do they think about their experiences? In chapter 2, I use four students' journeys to their schools to answer these questions through the lens of "geographies of inequality." Their perceptions of safety further restrict or expand their visions of the city and inform how they navigate within and across its various physical and social borders.

Chapter 3 takes a closer look at Chicago, a "city of neighborhoods" in which a major anchor of the community, the neighborhood school, has been displaced. The "racial-spatial divide" in the United States, according to the sociologists Ruth Peterson and Lauren Krivo, is characterized by "a social arrangement in which substantial ethno-racial inequality in social and economic circumstances and power in society is combined with segregated and unequal residential locations across racial and ethnic groups."⁵⁵ The racial-spatial divide is a significant structural mechanism that captures the array of resources, opportunities, and diversity available to young people and also shapes their ability to perceive, experience, and adapt to discriminatory treatment in education, employment, and housing. This chapter's examination of the school as a central, organizing social institution lays the foundation for the analyses that follow, demonstrating how teens who daily cross race, class, neighborhood, or gang lines to attend school have an "expanded frame" for

understanding social and structural hierarchies, and how this frame affects their view of themselves and their prospects for mobility.

Chapter 4 investigates the claim that contemporary urban youth are increasingly exposed to police contact, and at earlier ages, than urban youth in the past, owing to the implementation of the surveillance practices and disciplinary policies of an overtly carceral institution and its accompanying carceral apparatus. Schools are ostensibly free but have come to resemble correctional facilities. Metal detectors, surveillance cameras, and other mechanisms designed to monitor and control inhabitants are now standard equipment. Youth who must navigate these spaces risk police contact, and their response to these penalizing “routines and rituals” within their educational institutions varies depending on their safety concerns and their relationships with the enforcers of the law.

The descriptions of four types of Chicago school environments earlier in this chapter reveal some of the prisonlike practices endorsed by our education system even when safety threats are improbable. Every day students encounter pat-downs and are monitored on live video surveillance cameras by police officers. Chapter 4 also broadly examines the criminalization of adolescence, revealing who it is students believe police are there to “serve and protect” and detailing their ambivalence about the presence and purpose of the police and security guards patrolling their hallways and classrooms.

If teens have been deemed “criminal” or “suspicious” and made subject to police searches while walking to school, have they already left adolescence and entered into some netherworld of adulthood? Through this example and countless others, young people are often introduced to the criminal justice system without setting foot in a jail or courtroom. Chapter 5 explores how these personal and vicarious encounters with justice and injustice, usually experienced as students travel from their neighborhoods to their schools and back home again, shape their attitudes toward authorities. When young people are formally stopped, searched, and sometimes arrested, or when they know someone else who has had that experience, they develop well-formed opinions about the prejudices and practices of the police with whom they interact, regardless of their visceral responses to the experience.

Many of the youth surveyed and interviewed for this work expressed feelings of powerlessness and an understanding of inequality that originated in one or more of the essential components of identity—age, race, gender, and class. Each of these categories can be a marker of power or its opposite; these young people often experienced the latter, powerlessness, in at least one (if not all) of these categories. These components of identity—and the relative power or powerlessness deriving from each—shaped these teens’ beliefs about their opportunities for mobility, from finding a good job to living in a nice house to driving a fancy car. For these young people, as it is for all of us, their visions

of the future were shaped to a great extent by their experiences in the present. As we shall see, the sense of the social mobility they would have as adults was influenced by their physical mobility as teenagers.

Chances are that most of the people reading this book were not stopped by a police officer when they were a teenager; nor were they frisked or brought in for questioning. Most of us think of the police—when we think of them at all—as a benign force on the periphery of our lives that serves to protect us when we call them. For many urban young people, however, especially males of color, police play a much more aggressive and proactive role in their lives. Many of these young people routinely have contact with the justice system, and I join the call of criminologists to policymakers to take note of the uneven impacts of the justice system.⁵⁶ The justice system's impact is concentrated squarely on young males of color, particularly those who are identified as African American or Hispanic. One aim of this research is to learn how their hopes and dreams have been affected by the opportunity structure made available to them in our purportedly democratic society.

What we shall see is that schools, which should be an equalizing force in American society, are instead more likely to reproduce existing social stratification by race, gender, class, and neighborhood. Schools are essentially institutionalized spaces in which structures of power re-create themselves. They are also social sites where the ultimate objective is to shape the formation of students' knowledge of self, community, nation, and world. Thus, we must confront crucial questions: What exactly are our young people learning in school—not just about math and science but also about their own importance and the relative worth of their peers? What signals are they receiving about what the future holds?

Let us begin to explore the minds of marginalized minors by delving into the realities of their worlds. As we learn a bit more about life in Chicago, and about the wide variety within and across young people's school and home environments, we will see how their sense of racial hierarchies is constructed and how their adolescent visions compare to our understandings of ourselves and our fellow adults. The perspectives of these young people and their horizon of expectations, which are so often ignored, give us a moving and at times disturbing look into our future. We will see that their beliefs and understandings are both stratified by their race and rooted in their place. The potent mix of these forces has a lot to tell us about ourselves, and about the world we create each day for our youth.