

commercial developments, shoving black residents into higher-density, lower-quality housing. In both North and South, suburbanization increased racial isolation, as white employers and developers moved new jobs and housing to all-white suburbs. Without public transportation to suburbs, many Americans of color were increasingly isolated from better jobs and good-quality housing. Today, the problem for many African Americans and other Americans of color is isolation in central-city residential areas, a pattern for which powerful white decision makers are largely responsible.

In assessing solutions for institutional racism, the authors call for a significant expansion of public investments. The goal should be to reverse “long-standing patterns of disinvestment in minority communities with investment in those communities.” Government should make much greater public investments in schools, jobs, and community services. These new efforts should also include strategies to increase wealth in communities of color, such as providing a tax-supported trust fund for every child to guarantee an adequate education and

enforcing the ban on housing discrimination so that families of color can access good housing (the major source of wealth for U.S. families). Government should also provide an expanded “social wage,” including government-guaranteed health care for all workers.

For nearly four centuries, racial oppression in this society has been much more than a matter of white prejudice and individual discrimination; it has been deeply embedded in the social institutions as they evolved. Today this institutionalized, systemic racial oppression continues as a kind of slavery that will not die. If it ever happens, eradication of this ingrained racial oppression will likely involve large-scale organization by concerned Americans from all backgrounds who finally insist on the full implementation of the old ideals of “liberty and justice for all.”

Joe Feagin, a past president of the American Sociological Association, has written and edited 47 books, most concerning racial and gender prejudice and discrimination, especially institutionalized discrimination.

young, isolated, and black

review by *lauren j. joseph*

The Minds of Marginalized Black Men

by Alford A. Young

Princeton University Press, 2004, 266 pages



The Near West Side of Chicago is one of the most destitute urban regions in the United States. The neighborhood is geographically and socially isolated from downtown Chicago and suburban areas, and virtually all its residents are African American, living either in or near large housing projects. The men in this neighborhood have more experience with the penal system than with employment, and gang activity and drug dealing are widespread.

The Minds of Marginalized Black Men is based on Alford Young’s extensive interviews of poor black men from the Near West Side. Rather than concentrating on their norms, values,

and behaviors, as most studies of poor blacks in urban neighborhoods do, he examines their thoughts, beliefs, and ideas, including their views on work, stratification in American society, and social inequality. Young also looks at how they think about the impact of race on their own experiences and on their prospects for moving up in the world, reaching for the American Dream. His interviews of 26 men between the ages of 20 and 25 develop a picture of how poor black men make sense of their lives in the face of difficult conditions, helping us understand how and why they act as they do.

Young makes the effects of social isolation on these young men strikingly clear through his discussion of their relationships. Less than a third have social contact of any kind with non African Americans, and more than half do not know or regularly interact with a single person with a college degree. Most of their contacts are with African Americans who are unemployed and did not finish high school. They have little experience with steady work; only one of the men Young talked with had ever held a job for more than a few months.

The decline of American manufacturing during the last several decades has left many unskilled laborers without job options, and many of these men have stopped trying to find jobs that are simply not available.

Only a few of the 26 men had ever spent a significant amount of time outside the neighborhood. One worked in a McDonald's downtown, where he served white-collar professionals. Another lived for a year with a friend in Iowa, where he met people of other races and backgrounds. The rest of the men, however, have little experience of life outside the Near West Side and of people of other races and classes; they know almost nothing about daily life outside of their insular community.

Young found that the most important factor shaping their thoughts and beliefs on issues of race, inequality, and social mobility was their lack of exposure to the world outside their neighborhood. Their understanding of race and racial discrimination as forces affecting their lives is directly related to the extent of their social isolation. About one-third of the men see little connection between race or class distinctions and social hierarchies in the United States. They understand that equality is not a reality, but when asked to explain how race figures in their lives, or whether other racial groups have more advantages than blacks, they usually answer "I don't know." Some of them said they had never encountered discrimination. These men, Young points out, have had no sustained interaction with whites, and thus do not see themselves as victims of direct discrimination or of the racist thinking that creates differences between racial groups.

These men share similar ideas about the way mobility works in American society. When asked what it takes to move up in life, or to get a good job, they speak only of individual initiative and "hard work." All responsibility for success and failure falls on the individual's work ethic; they do not see race and class as affecting their ability to succeed.

The rest of the men in the study fit into two other categories: "marginally connected" and "provisionally connected." All of them have had more contact with people outside the Near West Side, including other racial groups and hierarchical settings. Such contact usually occurs in prison or in schools outside the neighborhood. These men develop a deeper understanding of the external constraints that often block their success and social mobility, including racial discrimination and socioeconomic inequalities.

All the men in Young's book have simple aspirations: to own a home, to have a steady job that pays enough for them to support a family, and to stay out of jail. However,

Some of these men, Young points out, have had no sustained interaction with whites, and thus do not see themselves as victims of discrimination.

since they have seldom held jobs, they know little about how to go about finding work. Young notes that "[t]he ability to talk about the world of work with great clarity and depth comes from being well immersed in that world," and chronic unemployment limits their understanding of how to achieve their goals.

Regarding their relationships with black women and their children, these men have almost nothing to say. Despite the fact that 21 of the 26 men were fathers, they speak of women only in response to Young's specific questions. He notes that these men see women as having no part in what it takes to find opportunity and move up in American society. In addition, since only three of the men live with their children, most of them do not see fatherhood as an obstacle to

moving up, not even recognizing it as a potentially significant factor. Young's book, it is easy to see, would have been much different had it examined low-income African-American women's conceptions of social mobility and opportunity in American society.

Young's study reveals how much relationships, rather than simple social categories, shape experiences in the inner city.

His analysis shows that relationships to others, in the broader context of social isolation, produce their ideas and worldviews. Categories of identity, such as being black, being poor, or having few job skills, remain in the background as he draws out the profound impact of these men's relationships (or lack of them) with people outside their isolated neighborhood. Ultimately, what is most important in shaping what these men think and believe, and how they understand the world of work and their future, is the quality and quantity of their relationships to others and to knowledge and information.

Young also offers some important reflections on the meaning of race and the extent to which race is a relational category. Only through sustained interaction with whites do his subjects become aware that race shapes their lives. Without exposure to people of different races and classes, they remain only vaguely aware of how their membership in a racial category creates advantages or disadvantages for them. Only when confronted with whiteness does their own blackness become meaningful and comprehensible. Thus, Young's analysis shows how race is itself a relational system—how the racial categories of whiteness and blackness are only meaningful in relation to each other. The social distance between racial groups is what makes race significant, but the width of that gap can make race invisible to those who lack the experience to understand how it affects their lives.

Young's focus on thoughts and beliefs is a new analytic approach to the study of low-income African-American men. His book moves away from the classic sociological tendency to infer what people think or believe from observations of their behavior. He combines cultural analysis with urban sociology to probe the minds of these men, taking into account both the structural and ideological effects of urban poverty. His study occupies a space between the "culture of poverty" thesis and structural analyses of the inner city, presenting a

theory of relationships as the way to understand low-income African-American men. Young's innovative method sees these men as doing more than reacting passively to structural conditions as he synthesizes social context, individual ideas and meanings, and the capacity for action.

Lauren Joseph has conducted research on masculinity in collegiate fraternities and is currently involved in a project on gay tourism, globalization, and urban ethnography in Buenos Aires.

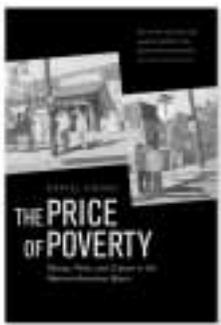
barrio economies

review by *robin rogers-dillon*

The Price of Poverty

by Daniel Dohan

University of California Press, 2003, 295 pages



Daniel Dohan's *The Price of Poverty* is a deceptively simple book. It examines how social context affects the experience of poverty in two Latino neighborhoods in California: Guadalupe, populated by new, often illegal, immigrants, and Chavez, inhabited by American-born Latinos. Based on extensive ethnographic research, *The Price of Poverty*

provides a sense of what it is like to live in those neighborhoods. One of the most underappreciated aspects of "bad" neighborhoods—those with high rates of crime and poverty—is the monotony of everyday life. This book captures the tedium of poverty, the relentless, everyday frustrations.

Like any good ethnography, *The Price of Poverty* is more complex beneath its simple surface. It centers on work, crime, and welfare—the three primary sources of income—and on the ways that local institutions influence choices among them. Dohan challenges the notion (which has already been challenged a bit more than he acknowledges) that the people living in Guadalupe and Chavez make such choices on the basis either of external opportunities or internalized cultural preferences. Instead, he argues, social institutions such as social networks and local organizations (both legal and illicit) influ-

ence those choices and shape the experience of poverty.

What motivates this book, however, is not the tedium and hardships of poverty that it so carefully documents, but the question of why the experience of poverty can be so different and lead to such different behavior. Why do some areas have such high crime rates? Or high rates of welfare use? Why is it reasonably safe to walk the streets at night in some low-income neighborhoods, but insane to do so in others?

Traditional answers to these questions are either structural or cultural: Either there is something different about the opportunities (primarily economic) in the different neighborhoods, or the difference lies in the values and norms of the people in those communities. Dohan does not reject the influences of structure or culture, but he does argue that these are largely mediated through social institutions. Structure, in Dohan's formulation, can affect poverty directly, for example through job loss, but it does so even more profoundly through institutions, as he illustrates with the example of Nora, 41, and her son Robert, 21, both unemployed. To find a job, Nora attended a job-training program funded by the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, known to local residents as the "Farmworkers" program. She was eligible because her mother had been a farm laborer. With the help of the program, Nora was able to find a good job with a tech firm in Silicon Valley. Her experience was not unusual; most of her classmates also found work.

Nora's son Robert was not eligible for the Farmworkers program, which was open only to farm workers and their children. He tried to find work through a local community-center jobs program, but dropped out because he felt that their help was not

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