

CLASSIC

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CROSS-CULTURAL

# 53 Getting a Job in Harlem: Experiences of African American, Puerto Rican, and Dominican Youth

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*We often hear that ethnic minorities who live in America's inner cities are society's dregs: They don't want to work, are lazy and immoral, and collect welfare checks at the expense of the average hard-working taxpayer. In contrast, Katherine S. Newman reached very different conclusions in her study of black, Puerto Rican, and Dominican workers in Harlem. In this selection, Newman shows that the working poor—especially the youth in poverty-stricken inner-city neighborhoods—work very hard to get and keep minimum-wage jobs that offer little hope for upward mobility.*

If you drive around the suburban neighborhoods of Long Island or Westchester County, you cannot miss the bright orange “Help Wanted” signs hanging in the windows of fast-food restaurants. Teenagers who have the time to work can walk into most of these shops and land a job before they finish filling out the application form. In fact, labor scarcity (for these entry-level jobs) is a problem for employers in these highly competitive businesses. Therefore, though it cuts into their profits, suburban and small-town employers in the more affluent parts of the country are forced to raise wages and redouble their efforts to recruit new employees, often turning to the retiree labor force when the supply of willing youths has run out.

From the vantage point of central Harlem, this “seller’s market” sounds like a news bulletin from

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another planet. Jobs, even lousy jobs, are in such short supply that inner-city teenagers are all but barred from the market, crowded out by adults who are desperate to find work. Burger Barn managers rarely display those orange signs; some have never, in the entire history of their restaurants, advertised for employees. They can depend upon a steady flow of willing applicants coming in the door—and they can be very choosy about whom they sign up. In fact, my research shows that among central Harlem’s fast-food establishments, the ratio of applicants to available jobs is fourteen to one. For every fortunate person who lands one of these minimum-wage jobs, there are thirteen others who walk away empty-handed. Since these applicants are also applying to other jobs, we should assume that the overall gap between the supply and demand of workers is not this large. Nonetheless, almost three-quarters of the unsuccessful job-seekers we interviewed were unemployed a year after they applied to Burger Barn,

suggesting that the majority were no more successful with their other applications.

Statewide estimates of the gap between the number of people who need jobs (the unemployed plus the welfare recipients) and the number of available jobs in New York approach almost 1 million.<sup>1</sup> This is a staggering number—which may indeed be an exaggeration, since it includes many people who are unemployed for only a short time, but it should draw our attention to the acute nature of the job problem, especially for low-skilled workers from the inner city.<sup>2</sup>

Long lines of job-seekers depress the wages of those lucky enough to pass through the initial barriers and find a job. Hamburger flippers in central Harlem generally do not break the minimum wage. Longtime workers, like Kyesha Smith, do not see much of a financial reward for their loyalty. After five years on the job, she was earning \$5 an hour, only sixty cents more than the minimum wage at the time. Carmen and Jamal had done no better. And this is not because they are not valued; indeed, they are. It is because the supply-and-demand curves familiar to students of Economics 101 are operating with a vengeance in poor communities, as they are on Long Island or in Madison, Wisconsin, where the same jobs are paying more than \$7 an hour.

The long odds of landing a job do not stop thousands of inner city residents from trying. When Disneyland took applications after the Rodney King riot in South-Central Los Angeles, some 6,000 neatly dressed young people—largely black and Latino—waited in line to apply. In January 1992, when a new Sheraton Hotel complex opened in Chicago, 3,000 applicants spent the better part of a day in blowing snow, huddled along the north bank of the Chicago River, hoping for an interview. Four thousand anxious job-seekers stood in lines that wrapped around the block in March 1997 when the Roosevelt Hotel in Manhattan announced it would take applications for 700 jobs.

Why do people seek low-wage jobs in places like Burger Barn? How do they go about the task

in labor markets that are saturated with willing workers? What separates the success stories, the applicants who actually get jobs, from those who are rejected from these entry-level openings? These are questions that require answers if we are to have a clear picture of how the job market operates in poverty-stricken neighborhoods like Harlem.

## WHY WORK?

You know, when I was out, when I wasn't working, I used to get into fights. Well, it wasn't really fights, it was like really arguments. . . . [Now, my friends] ask me, "Why don't we see you anymore?" Like, I can't. I don't have time. But, you know, I don't really wanna hang around my block anymore 'cuz it's like getting real bad. You know, it's a lot of people fighting around there for no reason. And they shootin' and stuff like that.

Jessica has worked at a fast-food restaurant in the middle of Harlem since she was seventeen, her first private-sector job following several summers as a city employee in a youth program. During her junior and senior year, Jessie commuted forty-five minutes each way to school, put in a full day at school, and then donned her work uniform for an eight-hour afternoon/evening shift. Exhausted by the regimen, she took a brief break from work toward the end of her senior year, but returned when she graduated from high school. Now, at the age of twenty-one, she is a veteran fast-food employee with an unbroken work record of about three years.

Jessica had several motivations for joining the workforce when she was a teenager, principal among them the desire to be independent of her mother and provide for her own material needs. No less important, however, was her desire to escape the pressures of street violence and what appeared to be a fast track to nowhere among her peers. For in Jessica's neighborhood, many a young person never sees the other side of age twenty. Her own brother was shot in the chest, a victim of mistaken identity. Jessica's mother narrowly escaped a similar fate.

It had to have been like twelve or one o'clock. My mother was in her room and I was in my room. . . . I

sleep on the top bunk. We started hearing gunshots, so first thing I did, I jumped from my bed to the floor. I got up after the gunshots stopped and went into my mother's room. She was on the floor. . . . "Are you all right, are you all right?" she said. "Yeah, yeah." The next morning we woke up and it was like a bullet hole in the window in her room. Her bed is like the level of the window. Lucky thing she jumped, I mean went to the floor, because it could have come in through the window.

Incidents of this kind happen every day in Jessica's neighborhood, but contrary to popular opinion, they never become routine, something to be shrugged off as "business as usual." They are the unwelcome and unnatural consequence of a community plagued by a few very troublesome drug dealers, often the only thriving, growth area of the local economy.

Street violence, drive-by shootings, and other sources of terror are obstacles that Jessica and other working-poor people in her community have to navigate around. But Jessica knows that troubles of this kind strike more often among young people who have nothing to do but spend time on the street. Going to work was, for her, a deliberate act of disengagement from such a future.

William, who has worked in the same Burger Barn as Jessica, had the same motivation. A short, stocky African American, who was "a fat, pudgy kid" in his teen years, Will was often the butt of jokes and the object of bullying in the neighborhood. Tougher characters were always giving him a hard time, snatching his belongings, pushing him around. They took a special delight in tormenting the "fat boy." William's ego took a pounding.

As he crested into his teenage years, he wanted some way to occupy his time that would keep him clear of the tensions cropping up in his South Bronx housing project. Lots of boys his age were getting into drugs, but Will says, "Fortunately I was never really into that type of thing." After a stint with a summer youth corps job, he found his "own thing": working for Burger Barn. Having a job took him out of the street and into a safe space.

The job was good. . . . Just having fun that was unadulterated fun. There was no drugs. It was no pretenses, nobody givin' you a hard time. It was just being ourselves. That was cool.

For Stephanie, the trouble wasn't just in the streets, it was in her house. When she was in her teens, Stephanie's mother began taking in boarders in their apartment, young men and their girlfriends who did not always get along with her. The home scene was tense and occasionally violent, with knives flashing. The worse it got, the more Stephanie turned her attention to her job. She focused on what her earnings could do to rescue her from this unholy home life. Because she had her own salary, she was able to put her foot down and insist that her mother get rid of the troublemakers.

By the end of the month, I told my mother, if [that guy's] not gone, I'm not never coming home. You don't even have to worry about me. I have this little job, I can pay for myself. I'll get my cousin [to join me] and we'll get a room. . . . Ever since then, my mother, she trying to do the right thing. She says he's supposed to be out by the end of the month. So by [then] hopefully he'll be gone.

Living where she does, Stephanie is an expert on what happens to people who do not follow the path she has chosen into the legitimate labor market. People she has grown up with, neighbors, and the boyfriends of some of her closest friends have all had brushes with violence and run-ins with the police. It happens alarmingly often in her neighborhood.

[Gary], my girlfriend's boyfriend, just got shot. Gary and his friends . . . always used to stand on this corner. Always, it was their hangout spot. Some other friends was hustlin' [drugs] on our block and they went up to Gary, gave him a high five and just passed by. Some other guys came up to Gary and shot him. Shot him right in the leg. They told him, "Ya'll can't hustle on my block." He's lucky because the bullet grazed him, but it was a hollow-tip bullet, so them bullets explode. Blown off a chunk of his knee.

One of the only positive outcomes of these encounters is the resolution Stephanie feels about taking a completely different approach to her own life. She is hardly ignorant of the consequences of getting too close to the drug trade.

The knowledge has given her confidence, in the face of many obstacles (not the least of which is a chaotic home life), that an honest job for low pay is preferable to getting mixed up with people in the illegal sector.<sup>3</sup>

Because the working poor have little choice but to live in neighborhoods where rents are low, they often find themselves in social settings like Stephanie's. They have lots of friends and neighbors who are working at real jobs for little income, but they also rub shoulders with criminals who headquarter their enterprises in these poor neighborhoods. Exposure to folks who have taken the wrong fork in the road provides good reason for seeking a safe haven like Burger Barn.

There are many "push factors" that prod Harlem youth to look for work. Yet there are many positive inducements as well. Even as young teens, Jessica, William, and Stephanie were anxious to pay their own way, to free their families from the obligation to take care of all their needs. In this, they are typical of the 200 Burger Barn workers I tracked, the majority of whom began their work lives when they were thirteen to fifteen years old. This early experience in the labor force usually involves bagging groceries or working off the books in a local bodega, a menial job under the watchful eye of an adult who, more often than not, was a friend of the family or a relative who happened to have a shop.

Taking a job at the age of thirteen is a familiar path for anyone who lived through or has read about the Great Depression of the 1930s, when working-class families fallen on hard times often sent out their young people to find jobs. It stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing expectations of today's middle-class world, in which young teens are told to concentrate on their homework and their soccer leagues and leave the world of work for later in life.<sup>4</sup>

Yet most of the working poor come from homes where the struggles of the 1930s are all too familiar. Poor parents cannot stretch their resources to take care of their children's needs, much less the demands they make when their

better-off peers are buying a new CD or a special kind of jacket—the kinds of frills that middle-class families routinely provide for their teens (along with the second telephone line, access to a car, and many other expensive items). Inner-city kids cannot even dream of such luxuries. Even finding the funds to pay for transportation, basic clothing, books, and other necessary expenses is hard for these families.

While middle-class parents would feel they had abrogated a parental responsibility if they demanded that their kids handle these basic costs (not to mention the frills), many poor parents consider the "demand" perfectly normal. Whether American-born or recent immigrants, these parents often began working at an early age themselves and consequently believe that a "good" kid should not be goofing off in his or her free time—summers, after school, and vacations—but should be bringing in some cash to the family.

Burger Barn earnings will not stretch to cover a poor family's larger items like food and shelter, and in this respect entry-level jobs do not underwrite any real independence. They do make it possible for kids like Kyesha and Carmen to participate in youth culture. Many writers have dismissed teenage workers on these grounds, complaining that their sole (read "trivial") motivation for working (and neglecting school) is to satisfy childish desires for "gold chains and designer sneakers."<sup>5</sup> Jessie and Will do want to look good and be cool. But most of their wages are spent providing for basic expenses. When she was still in high school, Jessica paid for her own books, school transportation, lunches, and basic clothing expenses. Now that she has graduated, she has assumed even more of the cost of keeping herself. Her mother takes care of the roof over their heads, but Jessie is responsible for the rest, as well as for a consistent contribution toward the expense of running a home with other dependent children in it.

Minimum-wage jobs cannot buy real economic independence; they cannot cover the full cost of living, including rent, food, and the rest of an adult's monthly needs. What Jessica can do

with her earnings is cover the marginal cost of her presence in the household, leaving something over every week to contribute to the core cost of maintaining the household. Youth workers, particularly those who are parents themselves, generally do turn over part of their pay to the head of the household as a kind of rent. In this fashion, working-poor youth participate in a pooled-income strategy that makes it possible for households—as opposed to individuals—to sustain themselves. Without their contributions, this would become increasingly untenable, especially in families where Mom is receiving public assistance.<sup>6</sup>

This pattern is even more striking among immigrants and native-born minorities who are not incorporated into the state welfare system. In working-poor households with no connection to the state system, survival depends upon multiple workers pooling their resources.<sup>7</sup> Pressures build early for the older children in these communities to take jobs, no matter what the wages, in order to help their parents make ends meet. Ana Gonzales is a case in point. Having reached twenty-one years old, she had been working since she was fifteen. Originally from Ecuador, Ana followed her parents, who emigrated a number of years before and presently work in a factory in New Jersey. Ana completed her education in her home country and got a clerical job. She emigrated at eighteen, joining two younger brothers and a twelve-year-old sister already in New York. Ana has ambitions for going back to college, but for the moment she works full-time in a fast-food restaurant in Harlem, as does her sixteen-year-old brother. Her sister is responsible for cooking and caring for their five-year-old-brother, a responsibility Ana assumes when she is not at work or attending her English as a Second Language class.

The Gonzales family is typical of the immigrant households that participate in the low-wage economy of Harlem and Washington Heights, and it bears a strong resemblance to the Puerto Rican families in other parts of the city.<sup>8</sup> Parents work, adolescent children work, and only the youngest of the children are able to invest themselves in

U.S. schooling. Indeed, it is often the littlest who is deputized to master the English language on behalf of the whole family. Children as young as five or six are designated as interpreters responsible for negotiations between parents and landlords, parents and teachers, parents and the whole English-speaking world beyond the barrio.<sup>9</sup>

The social structure of these households is one that relies upon the contributions of multiple earners for cash earnings, child care, and housework.<sup>10</sup> Parents with limited language skills (and often illegal status) are rarely in a position to support their children without substantial contributions from the children themselves. Jobs that come their way rarely pay enough to organize a “child-centered” household in which education and leisure are the predominant activities of the youth until the age of eighteen. Instead, they must rely upon their children and, at most, can look forward to the eventual upward mobility of the youngest of their kids, who may be able to remain in school long enough to move to better occupations in the future.

Older workers, especially women with children to support, have other motives for entering the low-wage labor market. Like most parents, they have financial obligations: rent, clothes, food, and all the associated burdens of raising kids. Among the single mothers working at Burger Barn, however, the options for better-paying jobs are few and the desire to avoid welfare is powerful.<sup>11</sup> This is particularly true for women who had children when they were in their teens and dropped out of school to take care of them.

Latoya, one of Kyesha Smith’s closest friends at Burger Barn, had her first child when she was sixteen. She was married at seventeen and then had another. But the marriage was shaky; her husband was abusive and is in jail now. Latoya learned about being vulnerable, and has made sure she will never become dependent again. She lives with Jason, her common-law husband, a man who is a skilled carpenter, and they have a child between them. Jason makes a good living, a lot more money than Latoya can earn on her own. Now that she has three kids, plus Jason’s daughter

by his first marriage, she has occasionally been tempted to quit work and just look after them. After all, it is hard to take care of four kids, even with Jason's help, and work a full-time job at the same time. She barely has the energy to crawl into bed at night, and crumbles at the thought of the overnight shifts she is obliged to take.

But Latoya's experience with her first husband taught her that no man is worth the sacrifice of her independence.

This was my first real job. . . . I take it seriously, you know. . . . It means a lot to me. It give you—what's the word I'm lookin' for? Security blanket. 'Cuz, a lot of married women, like when I was married to my husband, when he left, the burden was left on me. If [Jason] leave now, I can deal with the load because I work. [Jason] help me—we split the bills half and half. But if he leaves, I'm not gonna be, well, "Oh my God, I'm stranded. I have no money." No. I have a little bank account; I got my little nest egg. You know, so it does mean a lot to me. I wouldn't just up and leave my job.

For Latoya, as for many other working mothers, working is an insurance policy against dependence on men who may not be around for the long haul.<sup>12</sup>

## FINDING A WAY IN

Tiffany was little more than ten years old when she first tried to find work. She was still living with her mother in the Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn at that time, but they were in trouble. "Things were bad," she remembers. "Checks weren't coming in. And what would happen is we needed food. . . . So I would pack bags and stuff [in a local store] for spare change. And after a full day, I would make enough to buy groceries." Little Tiffany wasn't saving for gold chains, she was trying to help make ends meet in a family that was falling apart.

But the bagging job wasn't a real, legitimate job. In fact, it was pretty dicey.

We was at the whim of the cashiers. Discretion was with the store owner. 'Cause they would run us out sometimes. It was almost like how you see on a larger scale, big-time [crime] organizations. . . . It was like a

little gang thing going on with the packers. There was a lead packer and even he would extort money from the other packers. One time I got beat up by a guy 'cause I was the only female. I was not gonna give none of my money. And he bullied me around. I was scared. I didn't go back for a while.

Still, Tiffany felt she was doing something useful, something important. When customers gave her a tip, she thought she had earned it, and it was more money than she had ever seen. But the whole day might yield no more than fifty cents.

By the time she was thirteen, Tiffany's mother had given her up to a group home in New York's foster care system. In some ways, she had more stability in her life, facing less pressure to provide the food for the table. Yet group homes are regimented, Spartan places, with many rules and regulations. Once school was out for the summer, Tiffany wanted to escape the military atmosphere—the system of infractions and privileges withdrawn, the searches of personal belongings, the single phone call on the weekends—and find something useful to do. She also wanted to earn some money, since her group home was lean on what it deemed "extras," like funds to take in an occasional movie.

Ironically, because she was in foster care, Tiffany had direct access to the city's employment programs for young minorities, collectively known as "summer youth" by most inner-city kids. Through the good offices of her caseworker, she found a job as a clerical assistant in an office that provided assistance to victims of domestic violence. At the age of thirteen, Tiffany was answering the office phone, taking down information from women who had been battered and were seeking shelter. The job gave Tiffany an appreciation for white-collar work: the clean environment, the comfort of air-conditioning (while her friends working for the parks department were outside sweating the hot summer), and the feeling of importance that comes with a little prestige and the ability to help someone in trouble. It focused her desire to work in a social service agency someday.

Working for summer youth, Tiffany discovered one of the liabilities of a paycheck delivered

by the government. Like Social Security checks, these salaries were delivered biweekly, on the same Friday, to thousands of kids working throughout the city. Everyone in her neighborhood knew when those checks would be available.

There was a real element of fear involved. Hundreds of other people were getting their checks. There were many people who would steal your check. People would follow you to the check-cashing place and take your money. Waiting on line, you'd usually take a friend with you to pick up your check. If you were smart, you wouldn't cash it right away. You'd go home. You'd wait and go to a check-cashing place in your neighborhood. But you know the young, they wanted their money right away. They wanted to go shopping. So they'd cash it right there and they get hit.

Despite these problems, Tiffany learned a lot from this job that she could apply to other jobs as she got older. She discovered that work involved taking care of responsibilities that were delegated to her and no one else, that it wasn't always fun but had to be done anyway. It taught her that she had to be on time and that completing her work in a defined period of time was an expectation she had to meet. "I had to stay on top of my duties!" Public employment of the kind Tiffany had is often the first gateway into the full-time labor force that inner-city kids experience.<sup>13</sup> They graduate from bagging groceries for tips into these more regular jobs and learn firsthand what it means to report to work daily, handle responsibilities, and be part of an organization.

Job corps initiatives, like the one Tiffany participated in, were born out of a desire to give inner-city kids something constructive to do in the months between school terms, a prophylactic against petty crime during the long hot summers of the War on Poverty years. But they have a much more important, albeit latent, purpose: They are a proving ground for poor youth who need an introduction to the culture of regular (salaried) work. A summer youth position is often the first regular, on-the-books job that an inner-city kid can find, the first refuge from the temporary, irregular, off-the-books employment that kids find on their own.

Larry's first experience with work was handing out advertising flyers on the sidewalk in front of a drugstore. It wasn't a popular occupation in the wintertime; Larry had to stand outside in the freezing slush, waiting for infrequent customers to come by and reluctantly accept the broadsheet thrust at them. It lasted for only a couple of weeks, for the employer decided it wasn't bringing in much business. So Larry followed the advice of his older friends and applied for a summer youth job. He landed one working for the New York City Parks Council, a jack-of-all trades position. "I basically did everything for them," he noted. "Fixed benches, cleaned the park, helped old people. You know, all kinds of things. Paint, plant, mop, sweep, all that. Whatever they needed done, I'd do it."<sup>14</sup>

Working for the parks and recreation department, Larry learned some basic carpentry skills. He also learned what all newcomers to the world of work must absorb: how to cooperate with other people, show up on time, take directions, and demonstrate initiative. Most important of all, the job gave Larry a track record he could use when he went out to look for a new job when summer was over.

That Park job did get me my job at [Burger Barn], 'cause they could see that I had work experience, you know. They called and they got good reviews on me. I'm a very hard worker and I'm patient. All of the stuff that they was looking for, you know.

Many of the Burger Barn workers in central Harlem got their start in the public sector. They were able to build on this experience: They could prove to the next employer that they had some experience and drive. This alone put them ahead of many other job-seekers who cannot bring these credentials to bear on the task of finding employment.

The experience also gave them a fount of cultural wisdom about what employers are looking for when they make their choices. Much of the literature on the nation's urban ghetto dwellers tells us that this kind of knowledge has disappeared in high-poverty neighborhoods: Young

people are said to be ignorant of what work is like, of what the managers on the other side of the counter “see” when job-seekers from communities like Harlem or the South Bronx walk in the door.<sup>15</sup> Do they see a willing worker who should be given a chance, or do they see a street-smart kid in shades and funky clothes who looks like trouble?

High schools in Harlem and elsewhere in New York have turned some attention to this problem by trying to educate young people about the realities of a tough job market. They pound information into the heads of their students: that they have to dress right, speak right, behave with respect and a certain amount of deference. They have to park all the symbolic baggage of their peer culture at home. Whether we consider the success stories, people who have crossed the barrier of finding a job, or the ones who haven’t been so fortunate, we find evidence of widespread knowledge of these stylistic hurdles, and recognition that employers hold the upper hand. Decisions will be theirs to make in a highly competitive market, and one must be prepared to meet their expectations.

These very mainstream attitudes are particularly clear in the voices of Harlem youth who have had some experience with youth employment programs. Larry’s days in the parks department gave him a chance to see what management’s position was.

If you come to an interview talking that street slang, you lost your chances of getting that job. I think if you want a job, you gotta speak appropriately to the owner, to the employer. . . .

### CRITICAL-THINKING QUESTIONS

1. What motivates inner-city teenagers to work in “hamburger flipping” jobs (such as the Burger Barn) that many middle-class adolescents avoid?
2. How do applicants who get minimum-wage jobs differ from those who are rejected?
3. How do summer youth jobs sponsored by the government encourage a work ethic and provide inner-city teenagers with “cultural wisdom” about the workplace?

### NOTES

1. The Greater Upstate Law Project and NYC-based Housing Works, both welfare rights advocacy organizations, prepared this analysis from Governor Pataki’s administrative reports as well as from NYS Department of Social Services and Department of Labor data. These show that 570,100 New Yorkers are unemployed and 618,628 adults are on AFDC or Home Relief (single cases) for a total of 1.2 million potential job-seekers. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Through 1999* (1995), projects that 242,620 jobs will be available every year between 1996 and 1999. The difference between the potential supply and the potential demand is therefore nearly 1 million in the state of New York.

2. New York City is experiencing a moderate recovery from a locally severe recession occurring from 1989 to 1992. The City Office of Management and Budget has forecast a net gain of 92,000 payroll jobs from 1995 through 1999. If this forecast is accurate, there will still be a net loss of 200,000 jobs between 1989 and 1999. See “Work to Be Done: Report of the Borough Presidents’ Task Force on Education, Employment and Welfare” (August 1995).

3. Drug dealing tends not to be a woman’s business. Crime is generally a male enterprise—and an expanding one at that. We know from youth surveys that a large number of young men from poor urban neighborhoods admit that they participate in criminal activity. Richard B. Freeman, “Why Do So Many Young American Men Commit Crimes and What Might We Do About It?” (NBER Working Paper 5451, 1996), argues that the rise in criminal activity among low-skilled young men over the past twenty years is influenced by the job market disincentives of the 1980s and 1990s.

4. Most young students, those in grades six through eight, who hold jobs are from disadvantaged backgrounds. D. C. Gottfredson, “Youth Employment, Crime and Schooling: A Longitudinal Study of a National Sample,” *Developmental Psychology* 21 (1985), pp. 419–32. See also Catherine M. Yamoor and Jaylin T. Mortimer, “Age and Gender Differences in the Effects of Employment on Adolescent Achievement and Well-being,” *Youth and Society* 22, no. 2 (December 1990), pp. 225–40. Older teenage workers are just as likely to come from middle-class homes.

5. Academics, too, often focus upon adolescents’ expanding interests in acquiring consumer goods as a primary motivation for employment; see Ellen Greenberger and L. Steinberg, *When Teenagers Work* (Basic Books, 1986), and Laurence Steinberg, *Beyond the Classroom* (Simon & Schuster, 1996). This is due, in part, to the changing composition of the teenage workforce, once largely made up of youth from lower classes. See Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage* (Basic Books, 1977).

6. Kathryn Edin’s research, based on interviews with 214 AFDC mothers from four cities, makes it exceedingly clear that welfare families cannot make it on state payments alone. Edin found that AFDC, food stamps, and SSI combined make up 63% of the mothers’ average total monthly income (which just covers expenses). Contributions from children, family, and friends account for a small but significant 7% of income.



See Kathryn Edin, "Single Mothers and Child Support: The Possibilities and Limits of Child Support Policy," *Children and Youth Services Review* 17, no. 102 (1995), pp. 203–30.

7. See Marta Tienda and Jennifer Glass, "Household Structure and Labor Force Participation of Black, Hispanic, and White Mothers," *Demography* 22, no. 3 (1985), pp. 381–94. Through a statistical analysis of 1980 CPA data, Tienda and Glass found that the number and composition of adults in extended families affects their labor force participation. The extended family arrangement alleviates economic hardships by spreading child care and other domestic obligations among more adults, thus allowing greater proportions of wage earners per household.

8. See Mercer Sullivan, "Getting Paid": *Youth, Crime, and Work in the Inner City* (Cornell University Press, 1989), for an account of Puerto Rican families in Sunset Park, Brooklyn.

9. Very young children in immigrant families are also commonly sent "home" to be cared for by relatives who still reside in the country of origin. Patricia Pessar, "The Role of Households in International Migration and the Case of U.S.-Bound Migration from the Dominican Republic," *International Migration Review* 16, no. 2 (1982), pp. 342–34.

10. For a discussion of the cooperative (and strained) structure of immigrant residence and family, see Sarah J. Mahler, *American Dreaming: Immigrant Life on the Margins* (Princeton University Press, 1995); Sherri Grasmuck and Patricia Pessar, *Between Two Islands: Dominican International Migration* (University of California Press, 1991); Lloyd H. Rogler and Rosemary Santana Cooney, *Puerto Rican Families in New York City: Intergenerational Processes* (Waterfront Press, 1984); Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, eds., *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered* (New York Academy of Sciences, 1992); Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (University of California Press, 1990); Nancy Foner, ed., *New Immigrants in New York* (Columbia University Press, 1987); and Leo R. Chavez, "Coresidence and Resistance: Strategies for Survival Among Undocumented Mexicans and Central Americans in the United States," *Urban Anthropology* 19, nos. 1–2 (1990), pp. 31–61.

11. Nationwide, unmarried female household heads with children have higher labor force participation rates than married mothers. Tienda and Glass, "Household Structure and Labor Force Participation of Black, Hispanic, and White Mothers," p. 391.

12. This motivation for employment is not uncommon. See Arlie Hochschild, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home* (Viking, 1989), pp. 128–41.

13. Currently there are quite a number of demonstration projects around the country that aim to enrich summer education programs through classroom learning or worksite education, many of which have improved academic outcomes of participants. See Office of the Chief Economist, U.S. Department of Labor, *What's Working (and What's Not): A Summary of Research on the Economic Impacts of Employment and Training Programs* (1995); Jean Baldwin Grossman and Cynthia Sipe, "The Long-Term Impacts of the Summer Training and Education Program" (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures); Arnold H. Packer and Marion W. Pines, *School-to-Work* (Princeton: Eye on Education, 1996). Typically, however, participants (a third of whom are 14- and 15-year-olds) in summer programs work for minimum wage in much less structured settings. Many of them get placements at government agencies, schools, and community-based associations doing maintenance or office work while receiving some remedial education.

14. Mayor Giuliani has been an enthusiastic supporter of workfare jobs and has been criticized for substituting these sub-minimum-wage workers for union labor. Funding for summer youth jobs has been progressively curtailed over the years. It is possible that the tasks Larry performed in the parks will become workfare jobs as well. This is important because it may limit the availability of entry-level public-sector positions for young people coming into the labor market.

15. Janice Haaken and Joyce Korschgen, "Adolescents and Conceptions of Social Relations in the Workplace," *Adolescence* 23 (1988), pp. 1–14, reports that adolescents from higher-status backgrounds have a better understanding than adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds about the workplace expectations of employers. See also James E. Rosenbaum, Takehiko Kariya, Rick Settersten, and Tony Maier, "Market and Network Theories of the Transition from High School to Work: Their Application to Industrialized Societies," *Annual Review of Sociology* 16 (1990), pp. 263–99.