WORK WITH GROUPS

IN

A METROPOLITAN "INNER-CITY" PROBLEM AREA

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In several large cities special experimental projects have been undertaken in problem areas. An integrated approach based on the skills of casework, group work and community organization has been used, supplemented by research. The two following papers on the three year SPECIAL YOUTH PROJECT IN THE ROXBURY SECTION OF BOSTON, provided the case material for a meeting on this subject at the National Conference on Social Welfare, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1957.

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THE CULTURE OF THE ROXBURY COMMUNITY

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Community Culture and the Social Worker

The professional social worker can be described as a person engaged in a deliberate and systematic attempt to bring about changes in the habitual patterns of behavior of those with whom he works. This is not, of course, the only way the social worker's role can be conceptualized, but it can serve as a useful basis for arriving at a productive approach to working in a community setting. If bringing about changes in habitual behavior patterns is seen as a major objective of the worker in the community, it would follow that a logical starting point would be a firm knowledge of what those patterns of behavior are. Social work espouses the dictum "Start where the client is"—but the ways used to describe where he is are often limited or inadequate for purposes of community work.

Most frequently the client's behavior is described in terms derived from the psychodynamic frame of reference; individuals or groups are characterized as "immature," "lacking ego strength," "overly dependent," and so on. When a community rather than individuals is to be characterized, the demographic or economic level of description is most generally used. This has its roots in social work's interest in determining the "needs" of the community in order to plan a pattern of social service, so that the descriptive terms used are those which serve as indices of "need"—number of broken homes, income levels, number of families per dwelling unit, crime and delinquency rates, and so on.

Neither of these two levels of description—the individual personality level and demographic-economic level—adequately handle a body of information that should be of dominant concern to the worker—a thorough knowledge of the habitual patterns of behavior characteristic of the community in which he works—their form, their substance, their color, their feeling tone. The basic question to be asked in this area is—"What are the customary ways of behaving, perceiving, relating, that people manifest by virtue of the fact that they are part of a group which supports conformity to a specific set of behavioral norms and penalizes deviance from them?" Answering this question, which refers to that range of data called "culture" by the anthropologists, should be an essential preliminary step to any community-based change program.

It would appear that gathering such information would involve a reasonably straightforward job of fact-finding, but such is not the case. There are at least two reasons why information of this kind is hard to come by. The first is that relatively little systematic research has been done in this area, and the second, related to the first, is that the job of providing accurate answers to this question is surrounded by an intense and emotionally charged set of cultural taboos. Many reasons exist for not getting accurate answers to this question, or even in asking it seriously in the first place; these reasons are often related to personal insecurities over one's own class or ethnic status, or to values which minimize the importance of group-related differences.
For most individuals, the social class group to which they belong -- its customary ways of behaving, its condoned sets of standards, its ways of reacting to and evaluating members of other class groups -- has a profound influence on behavior and attitudes. This influence is of special importance when members of different social classes habitually contact one another in the course of their work. It is most difficult, for example, for an individual brought up in a home where cleanliness and responsibility have been highly valued to contact a home where such concerns are of low priority without experiencing a strongly negative emotional response. It is perhaps even more difficult for an individual to view with any real objectivity his own social status relative to others, or his position in reference to "social climbing" -- a concern which can be a ruling motivation in a person's life, but which, because an overly-explicit commitment to this is adjudged reprehensible, is seldom admitted or faced directly. Feelings of shame over and denial of class position are particularly prevalent for those who are rising or have recently risen from working class origins. Such individuals frequently tend to be intolerant and critical of those who still maintain the status they have recently left. If such people become engaged in social work, which can for them be a means of attaining higher status, a failure to face up to the implications of their position and the strong emotional reactions associated with it can seriously limit their effectiveness as workers.

The Special Youth Program -- a three year demonstration project of community delinquency control -- carried out its activities in Roxbury, an inner city section of Metropolitan Boston. To understand how the Program attempted to bring about changes in the customary behavior patterns of community residents, it is necessary first to know what those patterns are. The job of describing them can be handled most accurately and economically by saying that most community residents share a cultural tradition quite representative of a typical lower class community. But even the use of the term "lower class" is highly suspect in some quarters, and will produce negative reactions. Despite this, everyone recognizes the fact that there is a given sector of our society which is frequently called the working class or lower-income group, and which possesses a distinctive set of cultural characteristics.

Neither of these two reference terms is very satisfactory. To call the lower class the "working class" appears to imply that middle class people are the non-working class, an implication which is far from accurate, and neglects the fact that the bulk of the unemployed, in fact, come from the so-called working classes. Nor can class status be simply equated with income level, especially today. We are all well aware of the fact that a truck driver or plumber may make seven thousand dollars a year while a grammar school teacher or even a social worker may make only thirty-five hundred or four thousand -- yet the teacher follows a way of life we would all identify as middle class, while the truck driver uses a set of speech patterns, a manner of dressing, a pattern of allocating his income, which could be definitely identified as lower class.

The term "lower class" will be used in this paper to characterize a particular and distinctive way of life, the nature of which will emerge more clearly during the presentation. Using the term in this descriptive sense should not be taken to imply a negative evaluation of this group -- an evaluation often associated with the use of the term "lower." To discriminate between important subsegments of our society is not to discriminate against them; the reluctance on the part of some social workers to recognize the importance of discrete class groups in our society, it would appear, denies them the opportunity to acquire information on such groups that could prove of utmost value to them.
Most analysts of lower class culture—Havighurst, Davis, and more recently Albert Cohen and Martin Loeb, have taken as their analytic and perceptual starting point a set of practices and standards identified as "middle class," and have considered lower class culture primarily in reference to this baseline. Using such concepts as "The middle class measuring rod"¹ or "The Core Culture"² as key terms in treating lower class culture leads to a conceptualization of that culture as a defective variant or imperfect reflection of middle class culture.

This approach generally starts out by setting up a check list of dominant concerns of middle class life such as ambition (upward mobility aspiration), thrift, cleanliness, achievement, and so on, and then selects for description those aspects of lower class life which correspond to these focal concerns. Of necessity, this procedure produces a picture of a culture whose basic features are at variance with those of middle class culture, and by an easy logical extension, in conflict with them. A further extrapolation from this starting position produces the view that the basic problem of the lower class child is that of "coming to terms" with the "dominant" middle class cultural system as exemplified and supported in the schools, courts, and social agencies.

This conception has considerable validity for some purposes. The pervasiveness of "middle class" values and practices in many segments of present day American society has been amply documented, and no lower class child who attends school, goes to the movies, watches television or is committed to a correctional institution can avoid exposure to these values nor the problems encountered in making some sort of accommodation to them. But the question of the relation of lower to middle class culture is extremely complex; areas of cultural correspondence and difference from a diffuse and complicated pattern, and the "purest" forms of lower class and middle class culture contain many common elements. Furthermore, as will be brought out later, the reverse problem—that of the middle class child coming to terms with lower class culture—is becoming increasingly acute.

It is often difficult for a middle class professional who moves in a world of offices, organizations, conferences, and the New York Sunday Times to realize how insulated from this world a resident of a lower class community can be. During most of his waking hours he moves in a social milieu peopled with others like himself, and when he touches on the fringes of the middle class world—on

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2. Loeb, Martin B., "Implications of Status Differentiation for Personal and Social Development," Harvard Editorial Review, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1953. Loeb writes, "persons below this core,...segment are working toward achieving the values and behavior of the core group." (page 169). On page 171 he says, "delinquency...is a way of coping with...the conflict of the parental class culture and a different class culture...in ways society in general disapproves." In these ideas, the middle class cultural system is clearly taken as a reference point. The quite prevalent assumption of upward mobility as a dominant motivation of lower class people implied in the first quote is, I feel, open to serious question for very substantial segments of the lower class population.
his job, in school, through an occasionally viewed television program, it appears remote and substantially irrelevant to him and his concerns. A lower class boy can undergo a kind of forced passive exposure to the sentiments and concerns of middle class school teachers for ten years of his life without really investing much of himself in the whole experience. Even while in class, his mind and heart are out on the corner with the boys, a corner where academic achievement is of little consequence and confers no status, and he marks time until he is sixteen when he leaves school and can push the unwelcome ten year interlude out of his consciousness as rapidly as possible.

But whatever the utility or limitations of the middle class centered approach, it is evident that the picture of lower class culture which emerges when major features of middle class culture are used as a basic reference point bears the earmarks of its derivation. The implications of using dominant characteristics of one cultural system as the basis for description of another are clearly pointed up by Benjamin Paul. When using the perceptual patterns of one cultural system to examine another, he writes, "...one system seems to dissolve or fragment the second system, so that the other group's ways of behaving and thinking appear as a...patchwork..."\(^1\). In consequence, most current treatments of lower class life describe it as "disorganized," fragmented, and full of strains. I am not denying that there are elements of disorganization and strain in lower class life—as there are in middle and upper class life—but am suggesting that a considerably greater degree of the "disorganization" and conflict attributed to lower class culture is a function of a middle class centered analytic starting point for perceiving that culture than is generally realized.

A starting point of equal validity for some purposes and greater validity for others is the concept of lower class culture as a cultural system in its own right— with an integrity of its own, a characteristic set of practices, focal concerns, and ways that are meaningfully and systematically related to one another, rather than to corresponding features of middle class culture.\(^2\)

Using this conception as a baseline for description and analysis, many-structural features and behavior patterns of the lower class community appear in a different light. Much of the "delinquent" behavior of lower class adolescents, for example, appears not as a kind of deliberate, malicious, negativistic rebellion against explicitly perceived standards of the middle class community, but rather as behavior in active conformity with fundamental cultural values of their own community. Such behavior is generally both motivated and supported by a network of implicit and explicit behavior standards which are much closer and immediately compelling than standards of the often remote and inconsequential—appearing world of school teachers and social workers. Overtly aggressive behavior can be seen as positive and directed effort to achieve ideals of manliness, maturity and personal worth as these are defined in the adolescent's own culture rather than as deliberate rebellion against the standards of another culture.

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2. There is no claim here that the following analysis does not also bear the earmarks of a middle class centered perceptual starting point. It represents rather an initial attempt to approach this culture type from a somewhat less middle class centered position. This attempt has evident limitations but is a start, at least, in a direction which should be pursued further.
The lower class family, seen in this light, appears a highly persistent and prevalent structural unit, with its own distinctive characteristics, rather than as a "broken home" -- a pathological variant of the middle class family ideal. The lower street corner group appears not as a kind of middle class teenage drug store clique somehow gone wrong, but as a persistent and important feature of lower class life, emerging in direct response to the conditions of that life and supported by institutions and values of the cultural system which surrounds it.

Following sections of this paper will present the culture of the Roxbury Community as a dominant cultural system with a number of variants, all of which share the basic characteristics of the dominant form. A condensed description of selected aspects of the general culture pattern will be followed by brief mention of two ethnic variants of that pattern and finally be material on some aspects of the adolescent variant of the dominant pattern.

Before presenting this material, it is most important to cite some of its limitations. Many of the following statements should be considered highly tentative, requiring further research for their verification or modification. The question needing most clarification at this point is -- "To what segments of lower class culture do these generalizations apply?" Like middle class culture, lower class culture is far from homogeneous, and there are probably at least four to six major variants of the general pattern. To which part of lower class society the following material applies, and how accurately it applies, is still a question. In particular, description of the dominant pattern is less applicable to that sector of lower class society where there is a more stable family pattern, and to that sector which adheres strongly to religious values and practices.

Since it is impossible to cover the richness and detail of Roxbury's culture in the short compass of this paper, material will be selected in terms of the concept of "cultural focus." An area of cultural focus in any social group is one in which there is a high degree of interest, much emotional involvement, and a complex development of forms and practices. Areas of cultural focus in the larger American society are manufacture, athletics, and organization, in contrast, for example, to a cultural focus on supernaturalism in medieval Europe, or warrior prestige in aboriginal North America. External descriptive features of the culture will be presented, followed by some areas of major cultural concern.

**General Features of Roxbury and its Culture**

Demographically, Roxbury may be very briefly described as an inner city district of 113,000 people, 85% of whom have incomes of under $1,500, and 30% incomes under $1,500. It is an area where small business and manufacturing establishments are interspersed with dwelling units of a wide range of types and sizes. Roxbury contains nine housing projects which house about 10% of its population. About one-fourth of Roxbury is Negro, with Irish, Italians and Canadian French comprising the bulk of the white population. A small Jewish population is rapidly moving out. Some of Roxbury's residential areas are quite stable, and despite the steady in-movement of Negroes, racial conflict is a minor problem. Delinquency rates are high compared to the rest of Boston, but Juvenile crime attains neither the intensity or frequency of New York's extreme situation. In many ways Roxbury is typical of lower class urban communities throughout the country.

1. For a discussion of the concept of cultural focus, see Herskovits, M. J., "Man and His Works," 1948, Chapter 32.
What are some of the characteristic features of human behavior patterns in the lower class areas of Roxbury? It should be mentioned here that all these characteristics, as well as other aspects of this cultural group, are quite familiar to most Americans, but for the most part they are ordinarily perceived as incidental, inconsequential or unrelated details, rather than as significant and meaningfully interrelated aspects of a distinctive culture pattern. In addition, these features are by no means confined exclusively to lower class groups; many will be familiar to those in contact with higher class communities, but the particular complex of features cited here are manifested in their most characteristic form in the lower class community.

First, in very brief and condensed form, some of the community's external characteristics. Linguistically, inhabitants use a variant grammatical system from that taught in schools -- a system characterized by use of the verb form "ain't" in place of various forms of the verbs to be, to have, and to do, use of the double negative, and a different set of inflection patterns. Pronunciation patterns represent the most developed forms of the local regional dialect. Males are frequently tattooed on arms and hands. Females often wear open-toed shoes with ankle socks, and appear in public during the day with their hair in curlers covered by a kerchief. Women refer to their spouses as "my old man," and men to theirs as "my old lady." The terms "pa" and "ma" are preferred terms of address for parents. Females frequently use a group of obscene terms in conversation with other women that are not used by middle class females. Males engage in a patterned form of mutual deprecation and insult, usually jokingly, sometimes seriously.

When weather permits, a great deal of time is spent outdoors. The "street" becomes the focus of attention and the arena of a great deal of activity for all age groups. In contrast to the relative seclusion and privacy of the middle class home, the lower class individual readily bridges the physical and social distance between his dwelling unit and the street. Women gather in knots on the street or in yards, or spend hours leaning out the windows watching the activities of the street. Men congregate on the corners or in the corner bar. Family groups congregate on the front door steps. There is a strong sense of community in a lower class area, with the "street" or the apartment as a basic social unit. The lower class community is frequently characterized as "disorganized," but this probably reflects a middle class conception of what "organization" is. On the contrary, the lower class community is an extremely tight-knit system, with strong relational patterns, well developed channels of informal communication (the "grapevine"), established gossip patterns and sources, a willingness to contribute to a common fund to help an unfortunate community member, and a general sense of being "all in this together." This strong sense of community is manifested in many ways -- by a proliferation of local self-help associations, by a suspicion of outsiders in the community, and an extremely rapid identification of the stranger, by the strength of the rule against "squealing" or revealing community information to outsiders.

Related to a suspicion of outsiders are prevalent attitudes to higher class groups. These are often seen as very powerful, and considered by many as a legitimate target of exploitation. It is less bad, for example, to steal from a large organization, lie to the welfare worker, or renig on debts to the landlord or grocer, than it is to inform on a community member.
In an important sense the solidarity of the lower class neighborhood with its
tight-knit women's gossip groups, its active adolescent street corner groups, its
men's barroom groups, its clubs and associations, is directly related to the
structural instability of the lower class family. The form of the family is a
critical feature of lower class culture -- it is both a product of the general
conditions of lower class life and itself produces and perpetuates these conditions.

The standard middle class family with which we are all familiar consists of mom, dad,
sis, and buddy. These four, or perhaps five, with baby, live in one house by
themselves and comprise a close-knit relational unit. Dad is a permanent and de-
pendable part of the family group, provides its sustenance, and participates
actively in the upbringing of the children. When the children are young, dad and
sis are intimate as are mom and buddy, so the children are trained in cross-sex
relations. After adolescence, dad and buddy become pals as do mom and sis, creat-
ing a firm basis for same-sex role identification.

In the lower class family, in contrast, the father comprises an unstable, undepend-
able, or entirely absent member of the family configuration. Two important forms
of lower class marriage are first, the serial monogamy pattern where the woman
has a succession of temporary mates, living without a mate during the interim
periods, and second, a form where the marriage itself persists over some period of
time, but where the husband is frequently away for long periods, recurrently away
for shorter periods, or when present, contributes little to the family group. For
these lower class families where this unstable or absent father pattern applies,
probably between 30% and 50% of whom families, this has critical implications for
the rearing and personality of the lower class individual. "Ma" is the dominant
figure in the individual's life, and "pa" is usually regarded with bitterness and
scorn. The mother-son relationship is the dominant relationship of lower class
society -- the one relationship the lower class male, no matter how tough or
irreverent, holds sacred.

The lack of a stable father in the home with whom to identify presents an acute
problem for the lower-class male. Until he is about ten and leaves his mother-
centered home to join the gang on the corner, he has had no satisfactory male
figure with whom to identify and learn essential aspects of the male role--his
mother having been his primary object of identification. This produces deep-
rooted fears over homosexuality which lead, by a process of reaction formation, to
the strong emphasis on toughness and masculinity which dominates lower class male
culture. In addition, he has internalized his mother's conception of men as un-
reliable and reprehensible, leading to lifelong feelings of self-hatred. The
vital importance and "sacredness" of his relationship with his mother makes it
extremely difficult for the lower class male to vent what hostility he feels for
her; this pent up hostility is frequently directed towards his wife when he marries,
and often takes the form of resentment at her attempts to limit his "freedom."

This family system has an equally important impact on the lower class female. The
girl child does have a female figure with whom to identify, but has little
opportunity to establish relations with a satisfactory other-sex love object. In
addition, she is constantly exposed to her mother's repeated complaints about
the inadequacy and undependability of her father. In consequence, the lower class
girl generally develops a highly unrealistic fantasy about the kind of husband
she wants and expects to get. This fantasy man represents a negation of everything
she pictures her father having been; he is dependable, doesn't drink, is romantic
and devoted. The fantasy is fed and reenforced through habitual reading of the
True Confession type of magazine, where this ideal is delineated repeatedly. The
lower class girl's resolve that her husband will not be the same kind of man as her father is, of course, inevitably frustrated. Unless some extremely unusual life circumstances occurs, she will meet and mate with men reared in the same cultural milieu and by the same unstable-father kind of family as her own.

After the brief courtship and early-marriage period is ended—and this often occurs when she is 19 or 20—her husband resumes the temporarily suspended habitual behavior patterns of lower class men; he gravitates back to the corner (now the corner bar) with the boys, spends his salary betting on the horses and numbers, goes on the usual Saturday night spree, returns home drunk and acutely hostile to his wife, and heated arguments ensue. The girl feels terribly disillusioned and cheated, communicates to her children her resentment against her husband and men in general, and the same life cycle is repeated. The cycle is reinforced by many of the dominant values and concerns of lower class culture, and is widely prevalent; it cannot be considered merely as a relatively isolated manifestation of a pathological family situation or "broken home."

What are some of the basic values and focal concerns of the cultural milieu which produces and supports this type of family structure? Selected features of the lower class way of life can be presented by discussing briefly four major themes or motifs of lower class culture—areas and issues of general, persistent and emotionally significant concern. These four themes may be called impressionistically, the "trouble" motif, the "thrill" motif, the "fate" motif, and the "fall" motif.

Concern over "trouble" is a dominant feature of lower class culture, with "trouble" conceptualized primarily as unwelcome or complicating involvement with authorities or agencies of middle class society. "Getting into trouble" or "staying out of trouble" are prime concerns for lower class children as well as adults. A lower class mother will warn her son—"Don't you go hanging around with those bums on the corner. They'll get you in trouble!" "Trouble" in this sense is seen as a situation in which the parent will be forced into involvement with the court, school authorities or other authorities, with all the accompanying complications, the painful obligation of facing and dealing with middle class agencies, and probable expenditure of money. The reasons for staying out of trouble are generally based on grounds of practical expediency rather than on moral grounds. The lower class mother will not say—"Don't steal because it's morally wrong or sinful", but rather—"If they catch you and you get a record, you can't get a decent job for the rest of your life." All but a tiny minority of lower class individuals have the inner conviction that staying out of trouble is a proper course of action, no matter how frequently when drunk, angry, depressed, or desperate, they violate this conviction.

What reasons are offered then for the frequency with which they do get into trouble? One reason is connected with the concept of "fate," or fortune, or luck. Many lower class people have the feeling that their lives are controlled by powerful forces outside themselves—forces over whose whims and fancies they have no control. This feeling is related, perhaps, to the frequently harsh, inconsistent, and apparently arbitrary administration of childhood punishment and discipline. This conception of the individual as a relatively passive instrument of outside forces has many implications. In contrast to the middle class individual who believes in advancing his own position by directed and deliberate effort, the lower class individual waits around for that big break which may be just around the corner. It's all in the way the dice roll, the cards come up, the wheel of
fortune turns. If lady luck is going to smile on you tomorrow, you'll get your big break; if she isn't, there's not much you can do about it.

The "fate" motif is related to the prevalence of gambling of all kinds in the lower class community--playing the numbers pool, betting on horse races, card games, dice. The concept of fate and the individual as a passive pawn of uncontrollable forces often serves to explain to the individual the reasons he got in trouble. As he sober up in the jail cell or under the eyes of his angry wife and begins to recall what he did the night before, he feels--"I didn't want to get in trouble! I didn't mean to! Something just came over me. I couldn't help it." What the individual conceptualizes as the operations of external forces which force him into trouble against his will might be conceptualized on a psychodynamic level as the "acting out" of inner impulses of intense anger, desire, or envy, which indeed have to him all the aspects of powerful and mysterious forces which unconsciously impel his behavior.

A third motif is that of the "thrill." Lower class life is frequently characterized by confinement to a restricted locale, tedious and repetitive daily work, and limited funds for extensive recreation. To counteract a fear that life will become dull and boring, all sorts of devices for creating excitement, risk, and a feeling of adventure are built into lower class culture. The prevalence of gambling mentioned in connection with the "fate" motif, is important here. No matter how dull your job or difficult your home life--there is always the chance that tomorrow your number might come up or your horse place first. Many lower class people lean heavily on alcohol or other stimulants which serve to create situations of excitement or risk. Fights, flirting, arguments, all kinds of exciting and risky events which may plunge one into or dangerously skirt the edges of "trouble" can and do result from drinking. Much illegal activity by adolescents has the "thrill" motive as one basis. The younger will say--"Ah, nuthin' ever happens around here. Let's go out and find a little excitement." The excitement frequently starts off with alcohol and leads to a brawl or an auto theft, and ends in the courtroom. The almost universal use of television by lower class families, the rapidity with which television entertainment became an important staple of lower class home life, is also related to the need for externally stimulated excitement.

A fourth area of concern in lower class culture is related to the fear of falling in the social scale. To many lower class people the fear of becoming "riff-raff" or "poor-white trash" is much more compelling a concern than any desire to rise in the social scale. The lower class mother's injunction against hanging around with those bums on the corner is much more prevalent than any urging to associate with a "nicer class" of companion. The spectre of the skidrow derelict, the flop-house vagrant, represents an ever present danger of losing what social status they have; the accusation "you're nuthin' but a bum" has more than superficial meaning in lower class society; it means one has lost the last vestiges of human respect, and has slipped down to the extremes of poverty. Because such an eventuality represents a realistic possibility to many lower class families, it is something to be feared and worried about.
The Negro Variant of Roxbury's Lower Class Culture

Roxbury contains three primary ethnic-religious groupings: Negroes, who currently comprise about twenty-five percent of the community and are continuing to move in; Catholics, mostly Irish but including some Italians, Germans and French; and Jews, who are moving out rapidly. Within the Negro community there are two gross subdivisions along class lines—a higher and a lower social class. The higher class group is, in general, better educated, lighter colored, and strongly oriented towards white middle class culture. This type of higher class Negro probably represents the most actively upward mobile segment of present day American society.

A general characteristic of the Negro community as a whole is a highly developed sense of class-awareness. This class-awareness is prevalent both for the higher and lower group, but it is played out differently in each. Roxbury's higher class Negroes tend to be extremely sensitive to behaviors and cultural practices identified with social class status, and to respond to Negroes in the lower class groups primarily in these terms. In general the higher class group is severely judgmental and evaluative towards the lower, and is strongly motivated to avoid being identified with them. The lower class group tends to conceive class status primarily in terms of material objects—clothes, cars, a roll of cash to show off; the higher class group sees status more in terms of education, manners, morals, etiquette, and residential locale. Focal concerns of the higher class Negro group are equality and justice vis-a-vis the White World.

The culture of Roxbury's lower class Negro group retains many elements of classic lower class southern Negro culture, but is modified in important respects by contact both with higher class Negro society and exposure to the values and practices of the middle class white world. As in the classic southern cultural system, a dominant concern for both sexes is sexual activity, love making, and mate seeking. This begins at an early age and is characterized by a high degree of elaboration of sexual and mating practices, and intensity of involvement. The self esteem of both sexes is so closely tied in with wanting to be seen as an effective lover and sexually attractive to the opposite sex that a testing and retesting of this sexual appeal continues throughout most of the individual's life, making the maintenance of a monogamous mate pattern very difficult. Related to the dominant concern with mate-finding are strongly developed competitive feelings among Negro women. This antagonism sometimes reaches a sufficient degree of intensity as to result in severe physical fights between women.

There is a high premium in the lower class Negro community on originality and inventiveness in the areas of language and clothing. The capacity to originate an apt turn of phrase, a new twist on an old phrase, or to express an idea in an ingenious or unexpected way is highly valued and rewarded. In consequence, a good part of the "latest" argot which permeates other sections of the society originates in lower class Negro culture. The adjectives "cool", "crazy", and "gone" to refer to excellence, as well as many other terms taken up by white adolescents are native to this cultural milieu. Creativity in the area of clothing involves less the origination of forms and more the re-adoption of styles prevalent in other groups. Current clothing fads in lower class Negro society involve adaptive utilization of styles designated as "Ivy League."

Music remains an important cultural focus of the lower class Negro group, although active participation in musical performance is decreasing as commercial entertainment becomes increasingly available. The distinction between those who follow the religious way of life and those who do not was an extremely important determinant
of behavior in the South, and remains to some extent in Roxbury. However, this
distinction does not appear to be nearly as meaningful or influential in Roxbury
as it was in the traditional southern community.

The Irish Variant of Roxbury's Lower Class Culture

As in the case of the Negroes, Roxbury's Irish population can be considered as
comprising two major class groups—a higher and a lower. The higher class group,
in education, occupation and general style of life is of lower status than the
higher class Negro group, and follows a life pattern which may be described as
characteristically lower-middle class. The majority of this group adheres persistently
to Catholicism, attends church regularly, and centers a good deal of its
social and recreational life around the church and church-connected organizations.
The higher class Irish group lives in a fairly homogeneous all-Irish section of
Roxbury, a section separated from the lower class Irish sections and as yet rela-
tively unaffected by Negro in-movement. Men of this group are involved in
municipal administration and services (park, recreation, police, fire, and similar
departments), and the construction trades.

The culture of the lower class Irish community, in its external form, manifests
fewer distinctive ethnically-related features than that of the Negroes, approximat-
ing, in the main, the prototype of generalized American lower class culture. On
the level of surface behavior patterns, Roxbury's lower class Irish maintain few
of the cultural features specifically identified with the European Irish way of
life. One reason for this progressive loss of ethnic distinctiveness is related
to the development in Roxbury of a kind of multi-national lower class Catholic
culture which is absorbing the Irish along with Italian, French and German Catho-
lics. The emergence of this multi-national Catholic culture is manifested both
by the increasing extent of intra-Catholic cross-ethnic marriage (Italian-Irish
is especially prevalent), and by the inclusion in informal social groupings—the
adolescent corner group, the men's barroom group, the women's gossip group—of
members of the various Catholic ethnic groups.

On the other hand, despite the decrease in distinctively Irish cultural features,
such as ethnic dances and active concern over Ireland's politics, sub-surface
characteristics of Roxbury's Irish culture reflect important aspects of traditional
Irish life. Focal concerns of Roxbury's lower class Irish—areas commanding a
high degree of interest and emotional involvement—are first, getting and keeping
jobs and the issue of industry and idleness; second, fighting, arguments, and the
issue of interpersonal aggression; and third, intimately related to the first two,
the area of drinking, drunkenness, taverns and alcohol. These are areas of high
concern in Dublin as well as Roxbury, but since they are also shared by many
non-Irish segments of lower class society, it is difficult to know to what extent
these concerns are attributable to Irish cultural influence and to what extent they
reflect basic aspects of general lower class culture. The conflicting demands of
alcohol and the physical fitness necessary to athletic excellence represent, in
particular, a focal concern of most lower class males.

The role of the Church in the life of the lower class Catholic is complex. Most
adults feel that their children should be raised as Catholics, have Catholic
holy objects in their homes, see the Priest as an important figure, and are
scrupulously careful that the major life-cycle events—birth, marriage, death—
are accompanied by the appropriate Catholic ritual. On the other hand, influence
exerted by the church and its teachings on actual patterns of day to day behavior
appears to be slight. The dominant preoccupations with drinking and fighting, for example, appear to be relatively unaffected by the injunctions of the church in these areas. There exists, in most instances, considerable guilt over such discrepancies, but this is manifested behaviorally only on rare occasions, and has little apparent influence on customary behavior.

To Roxbury's lower class Catholics the Church appears to serve primarily as a kind of symbolic representation of higher forces with whom one recurrently allies himself on ceremonial occasions and through possession of holy objects (the plastic statue of Mary as protection against highway accidents is increasingly common in automobiles of lower class Catholics), and to whom one sends his children for exposure to a formally Catholic education.

The Adolescent Variant of Roxbury's Lower Class Culture

Just as the general lower class culture of Roxbury has its special ethnic variants, so do the different age-groups—children, adolescents, young adults, older adults, the old manifest distinctive subcultural features. The culture of the adolescent subsegment of the community is, of course, of particular relevance to the problem of delinquency control. It is important to stress once more that the culture of the adolescent age group in Roxbury cannot be viewed as an isolated or separate phenomenon, but must be seen as intimately and significantly related to the total culture of the community of which it forms a part.

It is misleading in this situation to speak of a specifically "delinquent" subculture; the significance of specified illegal acts related to sexual behavior, theft, or property destruction must not be viewed primarily in reference to middle class culture, as a kind of deliberate, negativistic and malicious flouting of middle class standards, but rather against the backdrop and in the context of the general cultural traditions and value standards of the lower class community itself. It is the lower class community with its particular values and lifeways and its condoned avenues to status and self esteem that serves as the primary reference group for the lower class adolescent who "gets into trouble," and it is principally against the backdrop of this culture and its systematically related concerns, rather than the often remote and disvalued standards of middle class culture, that his behavior must be appraised.

A central feature of the adolescent variant of the lower class culture of Roxbury, reflecting a similar pattern in adult culture, is the prevalent tendency of adolescents to form themselves into autonomous friendship groupings based primarily on age. There are three major types of group units—a three boy or girl clique, which tight-knit and geographically mobile, a six to eight individual corner group which is relatively autonomous but not particularly stable, and a fifteen to twenty-five person male group which forms one unit of a larger aggregate of similar groupings. These larger aggregates generally contain from three to seven age-graded segments. A fairly typical corner group aggregate, the "Outlaws," might include six segments—the Midget Outlaws, boys thirteen to fifteen; Junior Outlaws, boys fifteen to seventeen; Intermediate Outlaws, boys seventeen to nineteen; the Outlawettes, girls fourteen to sixteen, and the Little Outlawettes, girls twelve to fourteen. The several age-graded segments seldom assemble at the same time and in the same place except for unusual occasions such as defense against a rival gang attack. Each segment retains its identity as a unit, "hangs out" at a habitual locale such as a candy store or amusement center, and engages as a unit in a set of activities ranging from collective vandalism to participation in organized athletics.
The street corner group serves as a primary reference group for the lower class adolescent; its values become his values, and he is extremely sensitive to support or condemnation of his behavior by the group. He feels that his personal security depends on his acceptability to and membership in the group, and strives to conduct himself so as to be in maximum conformity to group standards. The critical importance of the street corner group to the lower class male is related to the structural instability of his family of orientation which severely limits its utility as a satisfactory primary group, and the absence or undependable presence in the family of a male household head. These conditions produce a craving for a group in which one can learn and reinforce the ways of masculinity, and the corner group provides the necessary vehicle. In many instances this group is the first real "family" the boy has ever had; his real "home" is out on the corner with the boys, and remains there throughout his life.

What are the basic standards of the lower class street corner group? We can cite briefly three dominant areas of concern for lower class adolescent males, and one for families. These areas of concern, since they are so strongly group supported, serve as powerful influences on the behavior of group members.

The first is what I have called the "toughness" ethic. The behavioral ideal for the street corner boy is the "tough guy." He is hard, cynical, blase, and above any emotion but anger. Toughness involves bravery, daring, and, most important, a complete avoidance of any behavior identifiable as effeminate. The toughness ethic operates to influence behavior both in that one strives to achieve it and goes to great lengths to avoid its opposite. To "punk out" on a fight is the ultimate disgrace. "Chicken" is the most feared accusation, and a boy will go to any length to avoid it. Constant testing of toughness goes on within the corner group through a pattern of barbed insult and counter-insult, where each boy's ability to stand up under invective and give it back in kind is continually on trial. The group as a whole must retain its "rep" or reputation for toughness in relation to other groups, fearing that a loss of toughness "rep" will relegate it to the bottom of the community heap, and make it a defenseless object of outside ridicule and attack.

A second dominant concern of the male corner group is adult-ness. This is an intense desire to be seen as "grown-up," and a corresponding fear of being seen as immature and childish. But the street corner boy conceives grown up-ness not in terms of consistent acceptance of responsibility or other limiting aspects of adult status, but rather in terms of the visible external aspects of adult behavior--especially of privileges accorded adults. To be adult means to own a car, to drink, to smoke, to use profanity whenever one wishes, to be smooth and skillful with women, to be out from under schools or youth organizations. The term "kid stuff" is one of prime derision, and whatever is labeled "kid stuff" is assiduously avoided. Thus, membership in a settlement house or boy scout troop or boys' club will be out of the question if the group defines this as kid stuff. Similarly, not drinking is seen as a mark of childishness, and much of the drinking of the corner boy is motivated by the wish to be seen as "big" and the corresponding fear of being a "kid" than by a conscious desire for the effects of alcohol.

A third cultural focus of the male street corner group is on "smartness." Smartness in this cultural situation has little to do with formal education; rather it is related to the capacity to outsmart or out-fox others, and to avoid being outsmarted yourself. The corner boy strives to avoid being an "easy mark," or a "sucker," or a "lush"--the term used in Roxbury--but to be able to out-fox or "con" others.
Middle class institutions and their personnel are seen as fair game for such "smart" tactics, and the lower class corner boy can develop extraordinary skills in outmanoeuvring such personnel and using them for his own ends. A boy who is wise to the ways of an institution, for example, is able to produce at a moment's notice a glowing testimonial for the institution or agency requesting it—pictureing in the most vivid terms how lost, unregenerate, and hopeless he was before agency "x" or institution "y" began to reform his ways, and how redeemed and grateful he is now. The model for the exercise of this skill—which has a long tradition in lower class culture, is that of the professional reformed drunkard who makes a career of testifying with deep conviction at revival meetings.

Any new person entering the corner boy's milieu is immediately tested as to how "con-able" or gullible he is, and if he can be readily outfoxed by the group, is marked as a lush, and an object of ready exploitation.¹

The corner girl, in common with girls in other social strata, has as a primary focus being attractive to men. In lower class adolescent society, however, male cultural concerns and values are so dominant and pervasive that the corner girl, especially in her early teens, often sees attractiveness in terms of male standards of toughness, adultness, and smartness, rather than in terms of feminine appeal. Thus, we have the phenomenon of corner girls modelling their behavior on that of boys, even to the extent of forming similar gangs, dressing similarly, and striving for toughness and "rep" in similar ways.

Lower Class Culture and "Middle Class Delinquency"

Of late there has been increasing concern over what has been called "middle class delinquency." It has become fashionable to assert that delinquency is no longer primarily a lower class problem, since boys and girls from "respectable" families and substantial residential sections are becoming involved to an increasing degree in "delinquency" behavior.

Why this concern? It is one consequence of what I believe to be a major trend in present day American society—the diffusion and spread of behavior patterns previously confined to lower class communities. This trend has been underway for some time, but has accelerated rapidly since the Second World War. Patterns of dress,
language and behavior characteristic of southern lower class culture, Negro and white, are being transmitted through mass media to the middle class adolescent community. The popularity of Elvis Presley—a representative lower class southerner, is one manifestation of this. Lower class Negro culture and its dominant concerns, including the stress of active sexuality, is being communicated to a mass middle class audience through the vehicle of "Rock and Roll" music, which is simply an amalgam of classical Negro folk blues and traditional "Hill-billy" or southern lower class white music. In this process of cultural transmission, the disc jockey, a dominant taste-setter for adolescents, serves as a primary agent of transmission.

Along with the spread of musical forms indigenous to lower class Negroes and white southerners—forms reflecting their way of life and dominant concerns—has come familiarity with patterns of behavior characteristic of these groups. Patterns of dress (pointed black shoes; peg pants; the "D.A." haircut), patterns of speech (lower class Negro argot—"Crazy, man."); "I'm hip, Daddy."); "Cool it."); and the dominant concerns of lower class culture described earlier (toughness; aggressive masculinity as a model for both sexes; illegal behavior as prestige-conferring; the stress on "thrill"; drinking, smoking and profanity as a badge of adulthood are becoming increasingly familiar to middle class adolescents. It is apparent that for large segments of middle class adolescent society behaviors and values characteristic of lower class culture, even though they are not explicitly recognized as such, have attained considerable prestige. To counterbalance the notion of middle class culture serving as the "measuring rod" for lower class adolescents, one must recognize the degree to which lower class culture is setting the tone for much of the behavior of the middle class adolescent.

It is this diffusion of lower class cultural characteristics into middle class communities, I would like to suggest, that accounts for much of the current furor over "juvenile delinquency," and that it is this trend rather than the actual increase in juvenile crime by either lower or middle class adolescents that has aroused so intense a public reaction.

The type of behavior characterized as "delinquent" has long been accepted as a customary and expected aspect of the way of life of lower class communities. Despite the long standing prevalence of this kind of behavior, it was accepted as a fairly "normal" state of affairs by the middle class community, and one which merited little major concern, as long as it remained "on the other side of the tracks." However, when patterns of behavior formerly confined to lower class areas began to spread to children of "respectable" families, a high degree of public indignation was aroused. Middle class parents became greatly concerned over the problem of "delinquency" at the point when their own children appeared to be adopting the behaviors and attitudes considered "normal" in a lower class community, rather than because the actual amount of delinquency in lower class communities was on the increase. This phenomenon, I feel, accounts for the current concern over "middle class delinquency," which, in fact, still comprises a relatively small proportion of all delinquency. One corner gang in a substantial middle class neighborhood arouses more public concern than thirty such gangs in a lower class neighborhood, and one stabbing involving a middle class boy rates more official attention than ten stabbings involving lower class boys.

But despite the middle class adoption of some lower class behavior patterns and the increase in lower-class-type crimes committed by middle class children, it is still lower class delinquency that remains the real social problem. The occasional crime committed by the middle class adolescent may create the biggest headlines, but it is the persistent, continuing, and prevalent commission of illegal acts by residents
of lower class communities that constitutes the real social and economic drain. The statistical frequency of middle class delinquency may have increased to some extent, but it still comprises an insignificant proportion of the juvenile crime that must be handled by official agencies. It is the lower class delinquent that still comprises the major load for these agencies—the police, the courts, the truancy departments, the correctional institutions. The bulk of tax-derived public funds allocated to juvenile crime goes to the apprehension, adjudication, and confinement of lower class children.

While the adoption by middle class youth of lower class patterns of ganging, drinking, smoking, dress, and language may arouse the greatest public attention, the strategic point of attack against delinquency has been and remains the lower class community itself. It is here that these patterns of behavior have their source, and from which they receive their sustenance, and it is here that juvenile crime is most prevalent. If the existing pattern of juvenile crime is to be altered to any appreciable extent, it will not be done by arranging more effective "treatment" facilities for the occasional middle class "problem child" who gets into trouble, but rather by attacking the problem at its source and point of greatest seriousness—the lower class community.

The task of bringing about changes in such a community is, of course, an extremely difficult one. Such an effort must examine carefully and take into account the existence of prevalent, group-supported traditions such as those described in this paper, and realize the extent to which they are deeply rooted in the cultural tradition and mutually reinforce one another. The corner-group worker technique is one method for attempting to induce changes in this most complex and difficult arena of human behavior—a method which is graphically and skillfully described in the following paper.

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