The Evolution of 

an Urban Lower Class Community

Two miles from the towne of Port City lies the village of Midcity. Its colonists are mostly from London, but there are also a few from the west of England. Among its inhabitants are many farmers, and there are also a goodly number of people of substance. In the towne there are none of the poorest sort...

Thomas Dudley, Royal Governor, 1630

…..whereas it hath been the practice of the Negro servants of this town to be abroad in the night at unseasonable hours to ye great prejudice of many persons and families..and whereas too many of the townspeople are frequenting the common houses and taverns which have become so numerous and where one may find all manner of drinking, dancing, gambling, and other violations of the laws...and whereas the good citizens of this towne are no longer safe from the robbers and footpads who lurk in ambush along the main thoroughfare to Port City...the petitioners pray that it may be prevented and punished.

Petition to Midcity Town Council, 1739

The youth gangs of Midcity frequented the corners and roamed the streets of a community which may be characterized with little qualification, as “lower class.” The bulk of its residents engaged in manual occupations, had relatively little
specialized training or advanced education, lived in low-rent apartments in multiple-unit buildings, and pursued a characteristic set of life practices involving drinking, gambling, and violation of legal statutes as customary behavior. Chapter One adduced a range of statistical measures indicating that this way of life was neither random nor disordered, but reflected instead, cohesive and organized subcultural patterns. Future chapters will describe in some detail the character of these patterns with respect to practices such as mating, drinking, schooling, family behavior, and the like. The demographic material of Chapter One suggested that the lower class subculture of Midcity was not directly associated with the particular racial or ethnic groups which composed the community in the 1950’s, but rather with a set of social status levels of diverse racial and ethnic character.

The existence in Midcity of an identifiable lower class with a well-developed subculture raises a pivotal question—how did this come to be? Later sections of this work will argue that characteristic attributes of city gangs—including their propensity to violate laws—are in fundamental respects a product of the urban lower class subculture. On this assumption an explanation of city gangs and gang delinquency requires, as one essential constituent, an explanation for an urban lower class. How can one account for the existence of a lower class in Midcity?

The issue of origins is as controversial as it is ancient. The statement “...the poor you have always with you...” was derived from close familiarity with a lower class which flourished almost 2,000 years ago. In contemporary America there are many who do not admit of the existence of a lower class, at least in the sense in which the term is used here. Those that do use this concept maintain a wide range of divergent positions both as to its nature and its origins.

In the United States, explanations for the existence of a lower class tend to assume a characteristic American form. There is a pronounced tendency, during any particular historical period, to derive the existence of the contemporary lower class from some set of social or economic circumstances peculiar to, or especially pronounced during, that particular period. The existence of contemporary lower
class populations was attributed in the early 1800's to industrial conditions accompanying the shift from muscle power to mechanical power; in the 1870's to social dislocations attending the aftermath of the Civil War; in the 1910's to cultural dislocation attending the process of immigrant assimilation; in the 1930's to characteristics of the economic system which produce depressions; in the 1950's to characteristics of the system which produce prosperity and uneven affluence; in the 1960's to cultural conditions attending shifts by the Negro population from rural to urban residence, and from lower to higher status.

Closely related to the tendency for contemporary observers to derive lower class from contemporary conditions is a tendency to assign causative primacy to social conditions the observers disapprove of and wish to see changed. Among these have been the relative powerlessness of workingmen vis-à-vis their employers; the non-“Americanized” state of recent immigrants; the weakness or absence of centralized economic planning and administration; discrimination against “minority” groups. This would suggest that in many cases the kinds of explanations forwarded to account for the lower class were geared more directly to the requirements of social reform than to those of adequate explanatory validity.

In the United States, during the past 300 years, mechanical power has replaced muscle power; wartime has become peacetime; immigrant foreigners have become Native Americans; powerless workers have formed powerful unions; diffuse administrative power has become far more centralized; depression has become prosperity; country dwellers have become city dwellers; minority groups have moved from lower to higher status. In the face of all these changes—some recurrent or cyclical, others not—a lower class and a lower class subculture have persisted. This would indicate weaknesses in those explanations, which derive the lower class from contemporary conditions, and suggest the importance of an extended historical perspective. The basic question is clearly indicated: In the face of marked changes in technology, the character and residence of the population, the conditions of work and production, levels of wealth and prosperity—what characteristics of the social
order have remained constant—and related in a constant fashion to the existence of a lower class?

In the community of Midcity, as succeeding sections will show—a population identifiable as lower class has been in existence for over three hundred years. A selective historical review of this period—with particular attention to those features which changed and those which remained stable—will illuminate the reasons for the existence and persistence of this social class. The historical data are quite rich; this was initially the case because Midcity’s early settlers included a group of literate clerics with a well-developed propensity for expressing themselves via the written word, and later on because a sufficient number of its subsequent residents exhibited a similar propensity. Unfortunately, due to the circumstances of the present study, only a small portion of available historical materials have been utilized, and the defects of the forthcoming analysis must be attributed at least in part to this relatively shallow utilization.

This chapter will divide the history of Midcity into four periods, examine each one, and conclude with a generalized explanation for the persistence of the lower class based on the historical evidence presented therein. The four historical sections are titled as follows. **1630-1780: An English Country Village; Farm Laborers, Craftsmen, Servants and Slaves. 1780-1840: A Pre-industrial-revolution Mill and Market Town; Artisans, Mill Workers and Paupers. 1840-1880: A small Industrial City; Native and Immigrant Laborers. 1880-1910: A Classic Urban Slum; English, Irish, Jews, and Negroes.**

**1630-1780: An English Country Village:**

*Farm Laborers, Craftsmen, Servants, and Slaves*

Four hundred years before the street gangs of the 1950’s roamed the streets of Midcity, the inhabitants of the community were American Indians of Western Algonquian stock who hunted, fished, and farmed in the rich woodlands
surrounding their village. In 1630 the pattern of their existence was disrupted by the arrival of colonizers from Europe. These new immigrants were Englishmen. The bulk of English immigration occurred between 1630 and 1640; in the latter year the settlement comprised approximately 600 persons. By 1780, when the 140-year old European colony terminated its political affiliation with England and became part of a new and independent nation, the United States of America, its population had increased primarily by natural fecundity, to approximately 2,000.

The advent of the English marked the initial appearance in the community of a population which may properly be designated “lower class.” The Indians whose village had been appropriated were able to conduct the affairs of their society in the virtual absence of intra-societal differentiation based on social rank. Among the first and most enduring contributions of the old world to the new was the concept and practice of a social order whose functioning depends upon a set of social status levels differentiated by wealth, power, and prestige.41

In the decade of the 1950’s approximately 75-80% of Midcity’s population could have been considered lower class; in the decade of the 1650’s, when the town government recompiled records destroyed in a fire, approximately 75-80% of the community could have been considered lower class. In the intervening 300 years, despite some fluctuations, the proportion of lower class residents of Midcity never departed very far from this figure.

None of the English colonists of Midcity were wealthy or noble; a few were, or became, eminent. A major incentive for colonization was dissatisfaction with religious conditions in England, and a few of the leaders of the immigration were highly creative religious scholars; several of the major Protestant denominations of the United States can trace their origins to the seminal climate of intense religious discussion by the elders of the First Church of Midcity. These men, the intellectual aristocracy of the village, along with a small number of settlers who had brought modest fortunes from England, comprised a small minority of the population. The

41 See Miller, Walter B. “Two Concepts of Authority” American Anthropologist, April 1955
village census of 1650\textsuperscript{42} listed about 300 names. Most were male family heads; some were unmarried males and females. Rough estimates based on the occupational data of this census make it possible to distinguish five status levels. About 10\% of the villagers had comparatively large (150-350 acres) landholdings; another 15\% were scholars and professionals; about 25\% were artisans and craftsmen, 35\% farmers and laborers with very small holdings (3-10 acres), and about 25\% were servants. The latter three categories correspond roughly in size and degree of labor skill to the three intra-lower-class status levels of the 1950’s.

The “landed gentry” were primarily managers and administrators; the “scholars and professionals” pursued occupations such as clergyman, physician, army officer and school teacher. Those at the level corresponding to lower class I practiced a wide range of manual occupations including those of carpenter, tailor, shoemaker, harness maker, baker, brewer, miller, and chandler. Those listed as “servants” were both male and female; several of the latter married men of the small-farmer or artisan class and became the mothers of Midcity’s new indigenous lower class. Those listed as manservants worked both as house servants and as low-skilled farm laborers.

There is no intention here of implying a direct correspondence between the social status levels of 1650 and those 1950; there were obvious differences both in the social class implications of the various occupational statuses and the style of life pursued by those in a social status system still modeled on the classic English Feudal pattern. Despite these differences, however, the lower status residents of Midcity as an English village did share significant life patterns and orientations with their social status descendants of 300 years later, and represented the earliest in an unbroken line of low-skilled laborers in the community. A casual reader of the historical accounts of this period might gain the erroneous impression that the bulk of Midcity’s first European inhabitants were men of eminence and high station; one reason for this impression is that virtually all of the writing about the community

\textsuperscript{42} Ref. to Ellis
was done by the relatively small group of higher status persons. Naturally they reported the doings of themselves and their fellows in great detail, and dealt with the presence and activities of the lower class only indirectly and sketchily. The fortunate existence of census-type data reveals that the names which occur so often in the historical accounts as to make it appear that they comprised the bulk of the population, in fact, were a small minority; the majority of Midcity’s colonial residents were humble folk pursuing low skilled occupations in many ways similar in form and context to those pursued by the lower class of the 1950’s.

Additional evidence as to the lower class status of a substantial proportion of Midcity residents may be derived from information as to political participation. Although the governing body of the church was directly influential in town affairs, Midcity also had a secular government which was organizationally independent of the church. The major governing organ was the selectmen (“fivemen”, since it comprised five men) whose members were elected by “the body of the people.” This “body,” in fact, did not include those whose social status was seen as inappropriate to political participation. Available data support a rough estimate that approximately 60% of Midcity’s adult males were not enfranchised. Decisions as to eligibility were made by the selectmen who formally designated as “freemen” those entitled to vote and run for office. In 1659 a delegation of non-freemen petitioned the selectmen for the right to vote; there is no record of action on this request.

Estimating the proportion of non-enfranchised males at about 60%, and the proportion of the occupationally lower class at about 75-80%, it is evident that being occupationally lower class and belonging to the non-voting class were not coterminous; something like 15-20% of occupationally lower class men, presumably those at the higher skill levels, were enfranchised. For the bulk of the lower class, however, pursuing lower skilled occupations and not voting were concurrent conditions. A situation of this type was not legally sanctioned in the 1950’s; in practice, however, the association between low skilled occupational status and failure to participate in the political process was still quite close.
The displacement of the resident Indians by the incoming English was a gradual process; in 1654 Indians were still listed as “members” of the First Church; in 1670 the medical care of Indians was still considered a public responsibility of the village. It was not until about 1700 that the last of Midcity’s former inhabitants reluctantly, and under unremitting pressure of military force, abandoned their community to the English. The departure of the Indians established a second major precedent for Midcity; it was the first known instance of a process that was to be repeated often during the next 300 years—the advent of a new ethnic group and its gradual displacement of a resident population. Most of the later instances of this process differed from their precedent in that some portion of the earlier population remained in the community as another portion of their fellows fled. In any event, it is hard to say which of the many displaced groups left the community more reluctantly—the Indians forced out by the English, the English overwhelmed by waves of Irishmen and Jews, or the Jews driven to flight by the immigration of Negroes. Midcity was “well watered with coole and pleasant Springs issuing forth the Rocky-hills, watering the Vallies of this fertill Towne...filled with a laborious people whose labours the Lord hath blest.” This 1654 description conveys the appeal of the community for the “laborious people”—an appeal which transcended many changes in size, in economic circumstance, and in governing auspices—so that each successive set of displaced residents clung to their Midcity homes until it became inescapably evident that the accession to political power or the newly-achieved dominance of a different group presented serious obstacles to their continued presence in the community.

Another feature of the community during this period established a third precedent—the presence of African Negroes as a low skilled laboring class. While the majority of the English immigrants were manual workers, many of them were small craftsmen and artisans, and did not, therefore, constitute a readily available source of labor for the low skilled manual tasks involved in farming, milling, building, transportation, and the like. At first the English believed that the
indigenous population could, with appropriate training, be recruited for this purpose. A not insignificant by-product of the attempts to “civilize and Christianize” the Indians conducted by local clerics would be, it was hoped, an indigenous population which could understand the language and customs of the English sufficiently well as to enter the fields, households, and mills as farmhands, servants, and laborers. It soon became evident that these hopes were based on a most fundamental misconception as to the nature of the native North American culture. Extensive attempts to teach the Indians to read, write, and take orders were undertaken; the second minister of the Midcity church spent the major part of his life and vitality in an intensive effort to induce the Indians to adopt the beliefs and customs of the Christian English.

With the exception of a few well-publicized converts, “praying Indians,” these efforts were met with dismal failure. The culture of the Eastern Algonquians was singularly maladapted to the conditions of subordinate domestic labor. With few exceptions the Indians were proud, convinced of the rightness of their own ways, and fiercely independent. Attempt to induce them to adopt the stance of obedient servitude assumed without difficulty by any self-respecting English indentured servant met with a spectacular lack of success. After a vain attempt to consider the Indians as fellow townsmen who could comprise a ready-made slave or servant class, and “executing” a few who responded to these expectations by murdering their would-be masters, the English of Midcity gave up the attempt to convert the natives into a serving class.

Residents of Midcity then adopted an expedient already widely employed by their fellow colonials in many parts of the British Empire. They purchased, as legally-owned property, natives of distant Africa who had been captured and enslaved in the numerous wars between African tribes. The culture of these Africans, unlike that of the Indians, was not antithetical to the requirements of subordinancy and servitude. The first African slaves were imported about 1670. In 1750 there were about fifty Negroes in Midcity, and in 1780 about 100, comprising
about 5% of the population. The use of Negro slaves as laborers was not confined to the relatively small number of larger landholders, although it was these men who took the initiative in their importation. In 1720 William Curtiss, a man of modest means, “bought a horse and a Negro and set up farming.”

Although the right to buy and own Negroes as property was abolished at about the same time that Midcity became subject to the laws of the newly-created United States of America, Negroes working as low-skilled laborers were still much in evidence in the 1950’s. Thus, of the three major ethnic groups inhabiting Midcity during this early historical period—Indians, English, and Negroes, two were still represented in the 1950 community, and of these the Negroes were more numerous. Midcity Negroes in the ‘50’s were thus one of its two “old stock” populations—having been present in the community for almost 300 years.

The economic circumstances of Midcity during this period served to establish a further precedent of the most direct significance to its future as a predominantly lower class community. The characterization of Midcity by one modern historian as a “purely agricultural village” conceals the fact that even during its most rural days the Midcity community had started to evolve a pattern of diversification in production, distribution and marketing which was to come into full bloom in succeeding historical periods, and was to remain a constant characteristic of the community. In the earliest years of this period, the primary economic activity of the villagers was, of necessity, the production of farm products for immediate local use. However, as soon as some surpluses began to accumulate, and the village became connected by roads with nearby towns, farming as a source of food and related products became the primary occupation of a diminishing minority of villagers.

From its earliest years the economic ethos of Midcity was oriented to manufacture and commerce rather than the fruits of the soil. While some proportion of the town’s agricultural product did, of necessity, go directly for consumption as food, it is significant that the inhabitants chose to convert that produce not so consumed into crafted or processed products before putting them on the market.
Cattle was a major agricultural product, but Midcity chose to focus on hides rather than beef, and rapidly became involved in the manufacture of leather, an essential material for clothing as well as a variety of other crafted products. By the end of this period there were 18 tanneries and their associated slaughter-houses in Midcity; one writer characterized the town as “tannery for the colonies.” Soap and candles, other animal products were also manufactured. In addition to the tanneries there were about a half-dozen mills; Midcity’s several rapid streams and small rivers provided a strategic location for the water mills that served as a prime source of power until the time that steam came into use. Included among the mills were several grist mills, a cloth (fulling) mill, a sawmill, and a chocolate mill. There were also several breweries—establishing another Midcity precedent.

Midcity was in fact the nearest inland town to Port City, which was at this time developing into a flourishing seaport and needed a vast array of products to outfit its vessels and maintain its port facilities. Among these, in addition to leather, were rope, sailcloth, netting, casks, nails, planking, spars, and similar products. The mills and small craft shops of Midcity became engaged in the manufacturing, storage, and delivery of these products. The necessity of transporting its products to Port City required wagonmen, porters, stevedores, and dockmen in addition to the blacksmiths, cartwrights, wheelwrights and other craftsmen needed to build and maintain the horse-drawn vehicles which formed a steady stream along the three mile road between Midcity and the Port City waterfront. Midcity also maintained, of course, a variety of shops and markets to supply its own residents, and local shops included grocery markets, bakeries, hardware and household goods stores, tailor shops, and the like.

Thus, while farming for local consumption was Midcity’s principal economic activity during the start of this historical period, by its close the community exhibited a highly diversified mix of small shops, small craftsmen, wagoners and haulers, mills, tanneries, and so on. These commercial facilities, moreover, were not isolated in particular sections of town but rather were scattered in and amongst the
dwelling units so that ones’ place of work and place of residence were close by, if not identical. What is of particular significance for the future of Midcity was the fact that the bulk of Midcity’s economic enterprises utilized and depended on a local supply of manual labor at various levels of skill—from the lower skilled porters, loaders, mill and farm laborers to the higher skilled carpenters, stonemasons and weavers. Major features of Midcity’s economic adaptation—mixed residential and commercial districts, a production system dependent on a supply of resident manual laborers, and a production-distribution-marketing system characterized by variety and diversity—present in embryonic form during this period, were to develop and expand, becoming stabilized and persisting characteristics of community life for 300 year.

To characterize the bulk of Midcity’s colonial villagers as lower class on the basis of their general level of labor skill will, to most readers, seem reasonable. The farm laborers, haulers, mill workers, house servants and field hands of Midcity shared with the contemporary urban lower class a low level of education, little wealth, and involvement in relatively low skilled manual occupations. But does this make them “lower class”—with the connotations this term has acquired in more recent times? Surely the millers, craftsmen, smiths, and bakers of this English village were sober, respectable, peaceful, and law-abiding—in sharp contrast to the image of the contemporary urban lower class—with its “broken” families, transiency and instability, economic dependency, and propensity for drinking, gambling, stealing, fighting, and in general running afoul of the law.

Available historical records provide little direct information as to the daily lives and customary behavior of Midcity’s colonial lower class, particularly those forms of behavior which failed to conform with the rigid statutes of the times. The degree to which these people did in fact engage in classic patterns of lower class crime must be inferred largely from the insistence with which the laws interdicted certain forms of behavior, which someone must have been engaging in. There does appear in the records, however, scattered references to specific offenses by the
towndpeople, and these must serve to indicate the form of violative behavior during this period.

Extensive data currently available, some of which is presented in the next chapter, show that the actual volume of criminal behavior among lower class populations is substantially higher than among higher; it is impossible to derive even roughly comparable information on the volume of crime from available historical records, particularly during earlier periods. It is possible, however, to get a fairly good idea of the form of such behavior. As future chapters will show, the principal forms of crime engaged in by the lower class residents of Midcity in the 1950’s were stealing, fighting, and illegal drinking; it would appear the criminal behavior of the colonial lower class approximated this pattern.

Illegal drinking was by far the most prevalent form of adult crime in Midcity of the ‘50’s, and there is ample evidence that it was also prevalent in the 17th century. The first brewer was licensed in 1653, and the first tavern (“ordinary” or “common house”) established soon afterwards. The first arrest for drunkenness was recorded shortly after the initial English settlement. On March 4, 1633, the Midcity court ordered that “Robert Coles, for drunkenness by him committed at (Midcity) shal be disfranchised, weare about his necke a “D” made of redd clothe...to continue thus for a yeare...”; in the 1650’s, one John Mathew, “being convict of notorious drunkenness and not holding remorse” was banished from Midcity. By 1768, according to one writer, “intemperance had become so prevalent” that severe restrictions were placed on the sale of wine and liquors.

This period was marked by a continuing and determined battle by town officials to hold down the number of breweries and taverns, and an equally determined battle by the sympathizers of alcohol to increase them. One reads of laws restricting the number of taverns to a specified number, and a few years later to a somewhat larger number; it would appear that the laws were not too effective in controlling the proliferation of drinking places. Nor did they appear to be much more effective in controlling the distilling and vending of spirits; in 1725, a widow
Pierpont was fined for selling alcohol without a license. One writer remarks, “The use of ardent spirits was almost universal, their abuse very common. They were offered on all occasions, ceremonial or social, --a call, a trade, a wedding, birth or funeral, a church dedication, --and to refuse was considered an affront.”

Direct references to theft were few, but there is little doubt that it was prevalent. Laws against thievery were stringent and severe. Early statutes indicate that the villagers had the habit of removing masonry from public roads for their own use and digging clay from the town clay pits at midnight. The commercial traffic along the road to Port City also posed a severe temptation to thieves. Drake points out that the road was the scene of frequent robberies; “so dangerous had it become, that in 1723 it was fenced in by order of the General Court.” In 1642, Mrs. William Webb, a baker’s wife, was tried and convicted for a common type of offense during this period—that of giving short weight, and nipping bits of dough from bread loaves after having weighed them. In the years 1669 and 1771, seven Midcity residents were hung on the gallows for crimes of various kinds, including thefts. Seven executions in two years in a town of 700 people would suggest that town authorities did not regard at least some of the citizenry as particularly law-abiding.

Crimes of violence do not appear to have been particularly common among the English residents of Midcity. Some were, however, recorded. Family fights, one of the more common forms of violent crime in contemporary Midcity, were not unknown in colonial days. In 1644, a Mrs. Anne Munke Stebbins “was so violent of passion that she offered violence to her husband, which being of such infamy she was cast out...” In 1681, a female Negro slave “in a discontent set her master’s house on fire in the dead of night.” For this crime she was herself burnt to death. A good deal of brawling occurred during the course of drinking bouts at the local taverns. It should be recalled, however, that the English were not the only inhabitants of the area during this period, and violence involving Englishmen and

43 Drake, Francis, The Town of (Midcity), op. cit., page 63. For a virtually identical statement as to the prevalence and circumstances of drinking in the 1950’s, when most of Midcity’s drinkers were not Englishmen, see Chapter 10, Drinking Behavior.
Indians was extensive and severe. In 1671, an Indian discovered his wife “lodging” with an Englishman, and killed her. For this crime he was convicted of murder, executed, and his body hung up in chains.”

In the 1950’s a form of violent crime which seriously agitated the community was the gang fight—a combat encounter between groups of young men. The 17th century again set the precedent for this form of behavior; time and again between 1650 and 1690 small bands of Englishmen engaged small bands of Algonquians in bitter combat. In one of the more serious of these engagements ten of Midcity’s young men were killed; there is no record of the number of casualties among their antagonists. The criminal significance of fighting between bands of Indians and Englishmen obviously differs from that of fighting between bands of fellow Americans during later periods of Midcity’s history. Viewed, however, as a form of behavior entailing violent and hazardous confrontation between opposing bands of young males, it is apparent that the Indian fighting of the 1650’s and the street fighting of the 1950’s, however much the former may be viewed as heroic and the latter as reprehensible, exhibit a high degree of commonality in external form. At any event, violent confrontation, however justified by being categorized as “war” or “defense,” represented an ancient tradition in Midcity.

It further appears that colonial Midcity was no stranger to the variety of petty violations commonly accompanying lower class life. In 1733 laws were passed levying fines upon the prevalent practice of equine drag-racing along the main street of Midcity; gambling took many forms; cards and dice were ubiquitous, and subject to numerous unsuccessful attempts at legal control; youths and maids customarily frequented the streets and fields engaging in legally condemned manifestations of affection. In 1739 a group of Midcity’s wealthier landholders, greatly upset at the “unhappy practice of the Negro servants of this town to be abroad at unseasonable hours,” demanded that the selectmen institute measures to control this situation. Apprehension by the white middle class property-owners over the spectacle of lower class Negroes engaging in disorderly behavior in the streets of
Midcity was not, therefore, a phenomenon unique to the poverty-and-Negro-ghetto period of the 1960's.

By the time it had reached the close of its earliest period of existence as a community in the European tradition, Midcity already manifested a set of social conditions of central significance to its future as an urban district whose subculture engendered and nurtured its youthful street gangs. Four such conditions may be cited. The first was that of ethnic replacement. At the start of this period the community was predominantly Indian; at its close it was predominantly English. This was the first of many instances of the in-movement of one ethnic or national group precipitating the out-movement of another. This instance, however, was unique in a fundamental respect; the social organization of the out-moving group did not incorporate a system of differentiated social status levels and did not, therefore, contain a lower class. The European culture of the English, by contrast, embodied a highly developed system of differentiated social status levels, in which a low skilled laboring class played a prominent part. The advent of the European-English form of social organization thus also marked the first appearance of a “true” lower class in Midcity. The historical evidence establishes that the central occupational involvement of this class revolved on low or relatively low-skilled manual labor; available evidence is too meager, however, to permit certain knowledge as to whether this class also manifested other forms of classic lower class behavioral practice. One indication that such forms did in fact accompany the low-skilled laboring way of life during this time is furnished by available evidence as to crime. The pattern of drinking behavior pursued by some substantial portion of Midcity’s colonial residents approximated the model of lower class drinking behavior in its most classic form. They also engaged in fighting, stealing, and a typical variety of behavioral practices such as racing in the streets, noisy nocturnal congregation, and public involvement in forms of adolescent mating behavior traditionally designated by middle class adults as “disorderly.”
The historical data clearly establish a second important circumstance; there was a lower class in Midcity from its very beginnings as an English community. This fact goes directly in the face of a “golden age” mythology maintained by later residents of Midcity and many similar communities; during earlier times, the myth goes, the community was composed almost entirely of persons of wealth, social standing, and quality, if not of outstanding stature. From this peak of eminence and worth, the myth continues, a progressive deterioration occurred, due primarily to the incursions of “lesser” stocks, until today the community has fallen into sadly regrettable disreputability. This image achieved major currency during the final stand of the English in the late nineteenth century, and in fact is still maintained in virtually pristine form by many upper and middle class residents of the Port City area, a few of whose ancestors lived in Midcity during earlier days. The total number of Midcity’s early residents whose descendants achieved social-register status comprised a small minority of the population; the great bulk of the populace consisted of lower class laborers and artisans whose family names merged inconspicuously into those of the vast body of “common people” in the United States.

A third condition concerns the role of the Negro in Midcity. Although it was not until the most recent historical period that Negroes achieved the status of a major ethnic group in Midcity, their presence in the community has venerable precedent. Africans comprised a low skilled laboring class in Midcity three hundred years ago; while their numbers in the community have risen and fallen during the intervening period, both their presence in the community and their involvement in low-skilled labor is as old a phenomenon as anything in the history of the United States.

Midcity’s economic and residential ecology represented a fourth major social condition. During this early period Midcity had developed an ecological pattern consisting of a mixture of residential and commercial units in close proximity. Both residential and commercial units displayed considerable variety, with the variety of commercial enterprises particularly marked. Production, distribution, marketing,
and service enterprises, generally on a small scale, were all present and proximate. A most significant feature of this economic adaptation was that its viability depended on the ready availability of a pool of local low-skilled labor. The variety of commercial enterprises of Midcity provided employment opportunities for these people, and its variety of dwelling arrangements provided appropriate housing. From its beginnings, the economic viability of Midcity and the presence of a low skilled laboring class were intimately interlinked.

1780-1840: A Pre-industrial-revolution Mill and Market Town - Artisans, Mill Workers, and Paupers

During its first 150 years as an English community, Midcity was a village in a British colony—a colony in which low-skilled laborers could be bought and sold as property. During the next historical period, the sixty years from 1780 to 1840, Midcity was a town in a state of an independent nation—a state which outlawed slavery in 1780. The events which marked the end of one phase and the beginning of another—the war of independence, the establishment of a new nation, and the abolition of slavery—were all of the most direct relevance to the existence of a lower class in Midcity. Of particular relevance was the constitution of the new nation, which, in adopting the principle that “all men are created equal” as a fundamental tenet of national ideology, placed the society in official and explicit opposition to the existence of status inequalities. However, despite the potential for change of these and related events, the social status circumstances of Midcity remained much the same. Most of the characteristics of the pre-revolutionary community which were hospitable to the existence of a resident lower class population remained in existence, and new ones came into being.

Midcity continued to grow, but quite slowly. Between 1780 and 1840, its population increased from approximately 2,000 to approximately 9,000. While this represented a more than fourfold increase, the average annual increment of new residents was only 100 per year. The national background of the residents remained
predominantly English. With the abolition of slavery the number of Negro residents underwent a slow albeit a temporary decline. Some of the ex-slaves did remain, and continued to work as servants and in other low-skilled jobs. A few embarked on the classic American course of upward social movement through occupational betterment; in 1832, for example, John Parkinson, a local artisan, took on a Negro apprentice.

Although the numerical predominance of the English remained secure, this period witnessed two events which presaged profound changes. Its latter years saw the arrival of the initial representatives of the first large-scale immigration to the new nation of continental European peasants—the Germans. The first of these came to Midcity in the late 1820's. They took jobs as low-skilled laborers, mostly in Midcity’s growing number of breweries. The Germans never became a major group in Midcity, but these immigrants established a precedent in that they were the first of a series of immigrations of Europeans which were to continue to replenish the ranks of Midcity’s lower class during the next century.

The second event presaged a far more substantial alteration of Midcity’s ethnic character. In 1818, the newly-formed Midcity-Port City Mill Dam Corporation, undertaking extensive construction of new water power facilities, imported a group of Irish peasants to work as construction laborers. While the Irish did not establish permanent residence during this period, their importation as low-skilled laborers presaged a movement which was to assume massive proportions in future years. It is worthy of note that less than thirty years elapsed between the time that English employers were prevented by law from importing African tribesmen to serve as low skilled laborers until the time they began to import Irish peasants to serve in a similar capacity.

The need for additional sources of water power reflected a continuing growth of commerce and industry in Midcity. Virtually every type of commercial enterprise which had employed low skilled labor during the previous period underwent expansion. The use of steam power on any extensive scale did not become common
until the next historical period, but the growing number of mills and factories were able to produce a variety of products using a combination of water and muscle power. Included among Midcity’s milling and manufacturing enterprises during this period were a cable factory, turpentine factory, lead factory, distillery, breweries, chemical and dye (“colour”) works, and others. While some of the early manufacturers went out of business or became obsolete, their places were taken by others, often producing similar products. For example, as leather breeches passed from fashion, one factory which had been engaged in their production converted to a woolen mill. The growing volume of trade also occasioned further growth of service enterprises such as taverns and hostelries, and the increasing flow of commercial traffic required manual labor for construction of roads, as well as other municipal facilities.

This historical period also saw the initial manifestation of a phenomenon which was also to become recurrent; the attempt to establish middle-class residential areas in Midcity. During the colonial period the residential circumstances of the relatively small group of middle and upper class residents of Midcity were distinguished from those of the lower in that, among other things, their landholdings were considerably larger. While some of these families retained their relatively modest “estates” during the post-colonial period, the size of the higher status population was augmented by a new group—residents of Port City who had begun to accumulate substantial fortunes in shipping, finance, and other commercial enterprises of the prospering port. These men bought up the farmland whose agricultural use was diminishing as Midcity became increasingly industrialized, and built country homes. Most of these were located in a section of town called “Midcity Highlands” or “Upper Midcity”--so designated, originally, because of the geographical elevation of its land rather than the social elevation of its residents. Midcity possessed obvious advantages as a residential area for middle and upper class families. It was scenic and attractive, close enough to the central
business district of Port City as to be convenient, and yet far enough away so that one’s “country” home was, in fact, in the country.

Most of the country houses were built between 1810 and 1830. This period of construction of middle class houses in Midcity was the first of five such enterprises—the most recent having started in the 1960’s. The first four attempts to establish a durable middle class beach-head in Midcity ended in failure—swept away by the inexorable press of social and economic circumstance. The fate of the most recent awaits the future. This first venture in establishing a middle class residential enclave in Midcity was, in fact, the most successful. During the following historical period, middle class business and professional people, attracted by the convenience and prestige of Midcity Highlands, added their more modest residences to the spacious country homes of the earlier and wealthier residents. It was not until the end of the 19th century that the bulk of Midcity’s first community of middle class suburbanites finally fled the district. Thus, during the second and third historical periods, wealthy owners of country homes and substantial professionals pursued a characteristically middle class pattern of existence on the highlands of Midcity as the workaday life of the mills and markets took its course on the flatlands below.

Concurrent with the establishment of a separate and self-conscious middle class community in one section of Midcity was the development of a phenomenon which was to outlast their presence in the community by many years; attention to the welfare of the lower class as an organized concern of the middle class. This attention took a characteristically American middle class form; the establishment of formally organized associations with a “program” of humanitarian enterprises aimed at the succor and uplift of the lowly. In 1789, a group of middle class citizens met to incorporate the Midcity Charitable Society—the first of many analogous social-welfare enterprises, private and public. While the welfare of the lower class was their primary concern, they did not go so far as to absorb themselves wholly in
lower class enterprises; in 1820 the major event of the society’s annual meeting was a concert by the Handel and Hayden Society of Port City.

The welfare of “the poor” as a concern of Midcity’s middle class had been evidenced during the colonial period by, among other things, the establishment in 1670 of a “Free Schoole” whose purpose was, in part, “the maintenance of a schoole master and free schoole for the teaching and instruction of poor men’s children at Midcity aforesaid forever;” and by the building in 1678 of a town workhouse for paupers. During the post-colonial period a major civic enterprise was the replacement of the old wooden workhouse by a new brick almshouse, constructed in 1830 at the cost of $11,000, to house the increasing numbers of penurious laborers. In return for accommodations the residents of the almshouse performed a variety of manual maintenance and construction services for the town. This circumstance was the occasion of some conflict between the residents of Upper and Lower Midcity. Drake writes “Perhaps the most fruitful theme for town meeting eloquence, with the possible exception of allowing the swine to go at large, was the subject of the town paupers and the cost of their support.” He reports this complaint by a resident of Upper Midcity to a Lower Midcity fellow citizen: “You furnish most of the paupers from your part of town and we help support them; but you get their work, and we get nothing,” and the reply—“Well, if we furnish the poor, why shouldn’t we have the benefit of their labor?” As a political issue, the financial support of the poor by the middle class had scarcely lost currency by the 1960’s.

The Midcity Charitable Society and the new brick almshouse were among the first of what was to become an extensive network of societies, organizations, and facilities designed by middle class groups to attend the welfare of the lower class, and hopefully, in the process, of affecting changes in their behavior. By the 1950’s the descendants of those who initiated these enterprises had long removed from Midcity, but the legacy of social welfare organizations and programs they had pioneered was, as shown in Chapter One, extensive and flourishing.
The objects of these charitable ventures, meanwhile, continued to conduct themselves in ways characteristic of lower class populations. Extensive drinking, petty thievery, and general disorder were common. Drake writes of a major market district called “Midcity Neck”—“In the 1820’s a portion of this area called “The Point” was especially riotous and drunken, and (necessitated a continuing) warfare (by church-sponsored lay groups) against intemperance and disorder.” One theft in particular exercised the churchgoers of upper Midcity. In 1804, a silver dedication plaque placed upon the fifth building to be erected on the site of the original First Church was, shortly after the dedication, stolen by person or persons unknown. Officials of the newly-built church, moreover, attributed the fact that it was only half-filled on Sundays to the increasing numbers of “those who prefer to spend their Sabbaths lounging about taverns and pilfering in the fields.” Midcity’s first bank was established in 1826, and within a few years, not too surprisingly, the community experienced its first major bank robbery.

The propensity of lower class groups to congregate in and near neighborhood commercial facilities and there engage in drinking, game-playing, and the like, was already well developed during this period. A major congregation point was “The Punch Bowl,” for many years a kind of earlier-day truckers’ stop. Even closer to present-day practice was the phenomenon of the corner variety store as a major hangout. Drake writes,

At the corner (near Meetinghouse Square) is a store known as Riley’s, which was (in the 1830’s), a popular place of resort. A bar was a component part of (the) grocery store, three cents being the price of a full drink, while the “two cent club” contented themselves with a modicum of gin. In the afternoons and evenings Riley’s store would be thronged, some making purchases, some drinking, others gossiping and others playing checkers...

This description of the corner store as an all-purpose neighborhood facility and hangout, could with the elimination of the gin and the substitution of cards for checkers, apply virtually without modification to twentieth century gang hangouts such as Ben’s or Rosa’s stores, to be described in Chapter Four. In fact, a major Midcity corner gang in the 1950’s—one cited but not analyzed in succeeding
chapters, hung out on precisely the same corner where Riley’s store had stood, and there engaged in much the same activities as did their lower class precursors more than one hundred years before.

1840-1880: A Small Industrial City—

Native and Immigrant Laborers

The period from 1840 to 1880 witnessed three developments which served further to move Midcity towards its future as an urban lower class slum. These were a marked increase in size, a significant shift in ethnic composition, and a new form of industrial power. During this forty year period the population increased by more than four times, growing from about 9,000 in 1840 to over 40,000 in 1880. This represented an average annual growth rate of 900 persons per year, compared to a rate of 100 persons during the previous period. Midcity thus changed from a town to a city, and was, in fact, so incorporated in 1846. No small part of this growth was due to an event of lasting consequence—a massive influx of Irish peasants fleeing the fabled famine of the 1840’s.

For more than 200 years the bulk of Midcity’s citizenry—upper, middle, and lower class—was English. The decade of the 1840’s witnessed the sharpest population increase in the city’s history—from 9,000 in 1840 to over 18,000 in 1850. The great majority of new residents were Irish immigrants, and the stream of Irish immigration continued in force for close to fifty years. To the English who owned and managed Midcity’s industrial enterprises the advent of the Irish appeared at first as a bonanza. The Indians had proved completely unsuitable as a source of low skilled labor; the abolition of slavery had dried up the supply of Africans; the Irish appeared to be, at last, the ideal solution. They spoke the English language—albeit a dialect which amused the English; as farmers they were accustomed to hard and demanding manual labor; and best of all, their condition of poverty and paucity of
schooling constrained them to accept with enthusiasm wages well below those of the still substantial group of resident English laborers.

What the English did not foresee was that within the century the Irish, through the exercise of acute political craftsmanship and the astute employment of bloc voting, would have wrested from them the political control of the city itself, and would be well on their way to assuming economic control as well. During the 1840’s, however, this eventuality was impossible to conceive; the primary apparent cost of the new immigrants, offsetting their utility as a low cost labor supply, was the possibility, soon realized, that their presence would entail a substantial expansion of health, welfare, and other services required of a city with a substantial impoverished lower class.

Virtually concurrent with the advent of a new and growing supply of manual labor was the advent of a new form of industrial power—the steam engine. Early in its history, as has been shown, Midcity had become a town of mills and small factories, due in part to the ready availability of water power. The basic patents which led to the development of the steam engine were taken out in the late 1700’s, and by 1840 this revolutionary device had developed to a stage where it was able to provide a practical source of industrial power. In Midcity, however, the “industrial revolution” was scarcely a revolution; a milling town since colonial days, the coming of age of the steam engine involved a relatively smooth transition from water to steam as a source of industrial power; once the first pioneering mill owners had proved the practicality of the new device, the others quickly followed suit.

The introduction of steam power, then, did not disrupt the basic economic pattern of Midcity. Quite the contrary, it strengthened an existing adaptation. The virtually concurrent advent of a superior new source of industrial power and a large new source of low cost labor to man the new facilities provided the basis for a reinforcement and expansion of Midcity’s basic ecological pattern—mixed commercial and residential facilities, with a wide variety of industrial and business enterprises dependent in large part on an ample supply of locally-resident low-
skilled labor. Many of the new immigrants quickly found employment in 
construction work, which served the dual purpose of inducting them into the role of 
low skilled urban laborers and providing them the low-cost housing their increasing 
numbers required. Old factories, new factories, old dwelling units and new housing 
for and by new laborers lay cheek by jowl.

One writer\(^{44}\) says of this period, “In the twenty years from 1850 to 1870 
Midcity enjoyed a great industrial and building boom... a segregation of residence 
and business... had not taken place; there was continued building of city row 
houses, and the invasion of Midcity Highlands by a large factory...foundries, textile 
mills, rope walks, piano works, clock companies, lumber and stone yards, indeed, all 
sorts of establishments, appeared...” The basic economic-ecological adaptation of 
Midcity in the 1950’s was essentially set by the 1850’s; the basic elements of the 
subcultural environment which engendered the street gangs of the 1950’s were 
clearly in evidence one hundred years earlier, and this environment, in turn, 
represented an orderly and sequential development from earlier patterns.

The social status class composition of Midcity during this period also showed 
a remarkable degree of continuity with that of earlier periods. Detailed records of 
all births between 1843 and 1849 provide specific information as to the occupation 
of each father and, in most instances, nationality information.\(^{45}\) These data permit a 
delineation of six occupational status levels; laborers and farmers, artisans and 
craftsmen, clerical and “traders,” merchants and proprietors, professionals, and 
“gentry.” During this period approximately 35% of Midcity’s fathers listed 
themselves as laborers; 40% as artisans or craftsmen; 5% as clerical workers or 
traders; 10% as merchants or proprietors; and 5% as professionals. Midcity also 
contained, during this period, 5% who designated themselves only as “gentlemen.” 
This occupational distribution of the 1840’s was remarkably similar to that of the 
1640’s. In terms of the more general social class categories used in the present 

\(^{44}\) Warner? See next page, “one quote by Warner...” 
\(^{45}\) Ref. to Vital Statistics of (Midcity); used sample of 3 initials (?% of all names) n=288 names, 
letters A, L, P.
work, this occupational distribution would indicate that about 75% of the community was lower class, 20% middle class, and 5% upper class,--a distribution remarkably close to that of the 1640's. At that time, as has been shown, the proportion of lower class persons was estimated at 75 to 80%, middle class at 15%, and upper class at 10%. Even the size of the several occupational categories, insofar as these are equivalent, show excellent correspondence over the 200 year period; for example, those listed as “farmers and laborers” comprised 35% in both periods. The major difference involved the presence of a “new” middle class in 1850; the 25% listed as clerks, merchants, and proprietors had no direct analogues in the 1650 listings.

One might suppose that the surprisingly stable figure of 75% for the lower class in Midcity might have resulted from an increase in the proportion of laborers consequent on the Irish immigration. This was not the case. Although the bulk of the Irish were laborers, their numbers relative to the English were as yet too small to show a significant influence of the statistics. The ethnic status of Midcity’s population in the middle 1840’s was, in approximate figures, English 75%, Irish 15%, Germans 5%, and “others” 5%. The bulk of the lower class was English (75%), and the bulk of the English were lower class (75%). Ninety-three percent of the Irish were occupationally lower class, and 73% of the Germans. A higher proportion of the English were, however, in the higher lower class occupations (45%) than was the case for the other ethnic groups; 30% were listed as laborers, compared to 80% for the Irish.

In the predominantly lower class community of the Civil War period, what were the residential circumstances of Midcity’s middle class minority? It will be recalled that an upper and middle class residential enclave was established in Midcity Highlands in the early 19th century. This community continued to maintain itself during the 1840-80 period, with some of the higher status “country-estate” families being replaced by less wealthy but still “solid” middle class families from Port City. The quote from Warner shows that the residential purity of the
Highlands had already begun, during this period, to be diluted by the incursion of commercial building. It was, however, the increasing size of the “new” middle class of clerical workers and small businessmen, called “lower middle class” by Sam Warner, which provided the basis of a second major attempt to establish a middle class residential area in Midcity. During the period between 1860 and 1873, according to Warner, private builders took advantage of newly filled-in land in Lower Midcity and open land on the edges of the Highlands left by departing country estate owners to construct tracts of housing especially geared to the tastes and incomes of this lower middle class group. These units were rapidly filled, but the residential tenure in Midcity of these early middle class suburbanites was, as will be seen, surprisingly brief.\footnote{Ref. to Warner, Street Car Suburbs.}

By the close of this historical period the low-skilled laborers of Midcity comprised a sizeable urban proletariat with a well-developed lower-class style of life. To the numbers of English, Irish, and German laborers were added a small but growing group of Negroes, the vanguard of a post-Civil War influx of Midcity’s second oldest ethnic group. Evidence of the lower class life style is furnished in the historical material by references to two of its classic characteristics—the utilization of public funds to support a variety of life activities and involvement in criminal behavior.

This period was marked by a substantial expansion in social welfare enterprises, an expansion characterized both by an increasing tendency for civil agencies to assume welfare functions formerly in private hands, and by the enlargement and consolidation of existing welfare facilities. In 1840 Midcity instituted a “poor farm” on a 200 acre plot recently abandoned by a group of artists and intellectuals who had attempted unsuccessfully to establish a communal agricultural colony thereon. In 1860 the Martin Luther Orphan’s Home was established, and in 1866 the Midcity YMCA. In 1868 the now venerable Midcity Charitable Society merged with the Midcity Dispensary to form a general-purpose
health and welfare facility for the poor. In 1871 a commercial hotel (formerly a country estate) was converted into a “sanitorium for the needy classes.” The basic shape of the modern social welfare structure was thus clearly discernable by the period of the Civil War. This period also witnessed the re-appearance in the repertoire of lower class behavior of a form which had been absent for over 150 years—combat between male bands of different ethnic status. Following the departure of the Indians in the late 17th century, the street brawls of Midcity’s male laborers pitted only Englishmen against Englishmen. The advent of the Irish reintroduced the ethnic factor ... 47

In their daily lives the Irish had little direct contact with the small middle class community of Midcity Highlands; in their areas of residence, their recreational activities, and particularly in the circumstances of their work they were exposed to the language, the values, and the customs of the indigenous English lower class subculture. It was this variant of American culture, rather than a dimly experienced middle class variant, that was, for the Irish, the American way of life. The Irish did, of course, as did all other ethnic groups, impart a particular ethnic flavor to this basic subcultural tradition, but it’s essential elements—low-skilled labor, low-cost housing, sporadic employment, sporadic husbandship, extensive drinking, gambling, and fighting, and all the rest—remained, as practiced by the Irish, true to the fundamental subcultural tradition.

Certain aspects of Irish peasant culture were parallel to and concordant with the American lower class tradition, and this, along with the fact that there was no language difference to impede acculturation, enabled the Irish to adopt the native lower class tradition rapidly and thoroughly. So well did they learn and practice this tradition that the middle class English of Midcity were quite convinced that it represented an inherent racial characteristic. As will be shown further in the next section, the residents of Midcity Highlands firmly believed that the propensity of the Irish to drink, to gamble, to fight, and to leave the mothers of their children

47 A page of this chapter is missing. Text is continued from the next available page.
represented an ineradicable property of the “stock,” and this in the face of the highly conspicuous fact that a very substantial proportion of the Midcity Irish, in a remarkably short span of time, shed in turn the recently learned patterns of the American lower class subculture and adopted the mores, customs, and modes of thought of the native middle class.

The habit of attributing to “race” or “stock” a whole range of behaviors which in fact were a consequence of cultural learning continued to be prevalent among the middle class. Even as late as the 1960’s there was a marked tendency to believe that the most modern practitioners of the classic lower class tradition—the Negroes—behaved as they did because of something that was unique or peculiar to their particular race, or ethnic background, or ethnic experience. This belief was maintained just as firmly in the case of the Germans in 1830, the Irish in 1850, the Jews in 1890, and the Canadians in 1910—each of which, in due course, converted the majority of their numbers into solid middle class status.

1880-1910: A Classic Urban Slum—

English, Irish, Jews and Negroes

In the two hundred years during which the English were its dominant national group, Midcity had developed, in generalized form, most of the typical characteristics of the urban lower class community. In the thirty years between 1880 and 1910, during which the English became a minority for the first time since colonial days, most of these characteristics assumed the specific form they were to maintain for the next half century. One characteristic which became firmly established during this period was that of class stability through ethnic replacement—a phenomenon whereby the basic character of a social class subculture remains essentially stable while the ethnic identity of those who manifest it undergoes significant change. This phenomenon almost always appears to the contemporary observer as an unambiguous manifestation of fundamental and
even disruptive social change (“twenty years ago, before this new group started to come in, things were completely different...”); in the perspective of history the phenomenon appears, quite the contrary, to represent a stable and consistent social process.

The population of Midcity in 1880 was approximately 40,000; by 1910 it had increased to something over 80,000. Some years before the start of this period (in 1867), in the flurry of enthusiasm over metropolitan consolidation that swept the area shortly after the Civil War, Midcity relinquished its 200 year-old status as a self-governing local unit and become a district of Port City. She regretted this move almost at once, and shortly after “annexation” had been supported by a substantial vote, there began a series of abortive efforts to return all or parts of the community to self-governing status—efforts which have continued up to the time of writing.

The nature and circumstances of Midcity’s lower class during this period, as well as those of its middle class minority—can best be approached through a brief examination of its four major ethnic groups—the Irish, the Jews, the Negroes, and the English. By 1900 those Irish who were descended from the earlier immigrants represented the third generation of American residence, and the second of American nativity. New immigration continued to increase the numbers of Irish during the late 19th century, but the bulk of new immigration was over by the twentieth. In 1910, seen as perhaps the zenith of the “melting pot” epoch, over two-thirds of Midcity’s inhabitants were native-born Americans (68%, compared to 85% in 1950-60), and another 10% were English Canadians.

The social status of the original Irish immigrants was quite homogeneous; all but a few were peasant-laborers. The sixty years between the original Irish reflux and the turn of the century saw the development of three major social divisions. One group, rapidly advancing itself primarily through commercial enterprise (primarily in the construction field) moved first from the flats and shanties of lower Midcity to the new lower middle class residential developments in and near the Highlands, and finally left Midcity entirely to settle in the newer middle class
residential suburbs some three to seven miles to the south and west. For the new Irish middle class, Midcity had served as a stepping-stone to higher status. A second group chose to cast its fate with the community, there to undertake the task of wresting from the English their long-established political power. This story has often been told. Beginning in the late 1800's the Irish of Midcity produced a series of brilliant political leaders who moved from control of local precincts to become ward bosses and thence to city-and state-wide offices. One of these men serves as the virtual archetype of this pattern, and was the central figure of a best-selling novel. In 1880 he was a grammar school pupil in Lower Midcity, in 1912 boss of Midcity Ward 17, in 1914 mayor of Port City, and in 1935 governor of the state. The politically active and bloc-voting constituencies of these men did not follow the middle class trail westward; instead they comprised a solitary, neighborhood-oriented population of lower class I and II persons. They remained active as manual workers in construction, in factory work, and in the growing number of service and distribution industries.

A third and sizable group of Irish adopted the familiar patterns of the lower class III subculture. They remained in and near Lower Midcity, and competed for the lowest skilled jobs with the Negroes who were moving into this area. The “shanty” Irish of the lower class III neighborhoods provided steady patronage for the many barrooms of Midcity Center, the bulk of the clients for the welfare agencies, the major clientele for Midcity’s Irish lower class I and II policemen, and an ample supply of low-skilled labor for Midcity’s commercial enterprises.

The Irish of Midcity thus recapitulated the “separating out” process experienced by their English predecessors, in that they evolved out of a relatively homogeneous immigrant-generation subculture a set of well-differentiated life styles based on differential social status. The experience of the westward-moving suburbananites conforms, of course, to the conventional American Dream of upward social movement; of far greater significance to the later history of Midcity was the
continuing existence of a sizable group of Irish who adhered to a stable and well-developed lower class III subculture.

The major new ethnic group to take up residence in Midcity during this period was that of Eastern European Jews. The influx of Jews, mainly from Russia and Poland, got underway just about forty years after that of the Irish, with pogroms rather than famine the major spur to emigration. Both groups shared in common a background of political and social discrimination by European governments. For most of the new Jewish residents, Midcity was the second stop in a series of moves to increasingly “better” neighborhoods, and represented a definite step up over the central Port City district, which served as their first American locale of residence. The Jews moved into Midcity slowly and in limited numbers—especially when compared with the flood of Irish during the previous period. An 1880 report cites “fifty-eight Russian Jews” as having taken up residence in three Midcity wards; by 1910 the total number of Jews in Midcity was about 2,000, or less than 5% of the population.

Of all the ethnic groups to come to Midcity, the Jews, as a group, stayed for the shortest time and left behind the smallest residuum of persons at the lower status levels. Moreover, even during the historical period when the external character of their lives most closely approximated the urban lower class pattern, the Jews did not manifest that pattern in as “pure” a form as did their English and Irish neighbors. For example, an ancient abhorrence of drunkenness and an equally ancient tradition of nuclear family solidarity militated against any ready adoption of two of the key features of lower class III life—customary heavy drinking and the female-based household. A particular set of subcultural characteristics which cannot be detailed here (high valuation of scholarship; familiarity with and skill in European commercial practice; concept of intensive and rational pursuit of specific life goals; stress on worldly rather than otherworldly achievement; perception of the individual as personally responsible for his own destiny) enabled the Jews, in the face of (or perhaps aided by) considerable exclusionary sentiment and practice, to
enter the professions and commercial world in force, and to convert the bulk of their numbers into substantial middle class status in the space of two generations.

However, despite the fact that the seeds of destruction of the Jewish lower class subculture were already planted, and that even during its golden age it did not attain the degree of purity achieved by the English, Irish, and Negroes, the occupational circumstances, language patterns, and many customary practices of the Jews fell well within the established lower class tradition. The Jews may not have excelled in the Saturday night spree or the establishment of fatherless families, but they did, during this period, closely resemble their lower class Midcity neighbors in pursuing predominantly low-skilled occupations, inhabiting “cheap” housing, and maintaining it in forming tough and active street corner gangs, speaking the lower class variant of American English (with Jewish coloration: “money I ain’t got,” instead of “I ain’t got no money”), engaging quite actively in theft and a variety of other illegitimate commercial practices, and producing their share of hustlers, boosters, con-men, card sharps, pool-sharks, pimps, and prostitutes.48 As will be seen, the language used by middle class observers to characterize the life style of these lower class Jews was very similar to that applied to the English, Irish, and other lower class groups.

Although no detailed occupational breakdown of Midcity’s Jews is available for this period, such data is available for the Jewish community of a nearby and similar lower class district. These distributions, for the year 1910, probably approximate those of Midcity ten or fifteen years before, since the social status of the Jews in the neighboring district was slightly lower than that of Midcity Jews. These data, based on a 1910 police census of 712 male Jews, show that 78% of the adult males were employed in manual occupations corresponding to the bottom five

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48 A detailed picture of lower class Jews in New York’s Lower East Side during the 1890-1910 period is presented in Gold, Michael, “Jews Without Money” (Publisher), 1930. Gold presents in detail the picture of a classic urban lower class community, with a full repertoire of lower class roles—saloonkeepers, teamsters, hucksters, gamblers, gangsters, sailors, migrant workers, pimps, prostitutes—all filled by Jews.
categories of the federal census. While the bulk of these were lower class I and II, almost one-third (31%) pursued characteristically lower-class III occupations such as teamster, stevedore, factory operator, and laborer. Many Jewish women also worked as factory operatives during this period. Lower class I and II occupations included those of carpenter, plumber, butcher, machinist, painter, paperhanger, shoemaker, and tailor. The 22% non-manual occupations reflected life-styles just barely, if at all, different from that of the lower class workers. One-quarter were junk dealers, another quarter salesmen, and clerks, and one-half small storekeepers. Thus, despite the relative brevity of their adherence, as a group, to lower class ways, the American subculture initially learned and practiced by the Jews of Midcity was that of the lower class, as it had been for their Irish predecessors.

Following the abolition of slavery about one century prior to the start of this historical period, the number of Negro residents of Midcity waxed and waned, but remained quite small. In 1880 the Negroes were thinly scattered throughout Midcity, with numbers ranging from 2% to 4% of its three major political wards. Around 1895 the major Negro community of Port City, located near the city center since Civil War days, began to move to Lower Midcity. By 1910 this area contained 5,100 Negroes, about 22% of the population. Most of these people moved into dwellings vacated by upwardly-mobile Irish and Jews. About half of these Negroes were employed in the lowest occupational categories, with the average wage described as under twelve dollars a week. Some significant part of Midcity’s growing Negro community was, however, in the process of assuming middle class status along with their Irish and Jewish fellow citizens, and this group formed the basis of the long-established Negro middle class community which, in the 1950’s, was occupying the houses of the departed English, Irish, and Jewish middle class in Midcity Highlands.

49 Reference to Woods’ data.
For the English of Midcity, the period from 1880 to 1910 marked the end of an era. The English had won control of the community from the Indians, and there established a lower class subculture reflecting the classic English tradition immortalized by Dickens and Booth. Early in the previous period, it will be recalled, the English still comprised a clear majority (75%) of the community, with a clear majority of these (75%) lower class. The position of the English in Midcity—the middle class minority as well as the lower class majority—was directly affected by the increasing numbers and influence of the more recent arrivals from Europe.

The English middle class, as has been seen, at first perceived the advent of the Irish as a boon. Commercial enterprises established or expanded through the use of low cost Irish labor further enriched the already prosperous and provided new wealth for many more. By 1880, however, as the first generation of American-born Irish was reaching maturity, the English began to sense a serious threat to their position in the community. Their commercial dominance was still secure, since the relatively few Irish-run business enterprises were quite small, but Irish power in the realm of politics was real and growing. The first mayor of Midcity had been one of the middle class English, and the community’s major political offices had remained a perquisite of Midcity Highlands. As the second-generation Irish politicians moved rapidly to gain and consolidate power through ethnic bloc voting and efficient political organization, the English were confronted with the prospect of a community run by Irish lower class I politicians to promote the interests of an Irish lower class II and III constituency.

By 1885 the threat was perceived by the English to be of sufficient gravity as to warrant specific countermeasures. One of these was the establishment, within a relatively short space of time, of a set of exclusive “gentlemen’s clubs”—bearing names such as “The Elm Hill Shakespeare Society,” “The Dudley Club,” and “The Midcity Club.” These clubs were established partly in an attempt to counter the solidarity of the Irish by instituting an equivalent kind of organizational system, and partly to draw clear and conspicuous lines of demarcation between themselves.
and the growing Irish middle class which was beginning to move in along the fringes of the Highlands.

The efforts of the English to retain dominance in Midcity were futile. They were overwhelmed, in the end, by the political skill of the Irish and by the sheer weight of numbers. The middle class community itself had always been small, and the English lower class, whose earlier numerical predominance might have provided the basis for a successful counter to Irish power, were also, at this time, beginning to retreat before the Irish. The increasingly futile attempt by the English to maintain their position in Midcity lasted for about 15 years—until 1900. By this time, the very heart and citadel of middle class Midcity—Midcity Highlands, with its gracious homes and ordered Victorian existence—was under attack from diverse quarters. The first factory to violate its walks and groves was the harbinger of others, and industrial smokestacks and massive masonry walls were now visible from the verandas of middle class homes. Slowly but with growing momentum the rising Irish middle class bought and built first near and then in the Highlands district. This was hard enough to endure—but the crowning blow came in 1900, when that most exalted of all status symbols, a house in Midcity Highlands—was attained by a small number of prospering Russian Jews.

This was the final straw. Their citadel breached and infiltrated, the English broke ranks and ran, and within a remarkably short time abandoned the community completely to the Irish and Jews. The speed with which the English fled from Midcity Highlands was almost as great—but not quite—as that with which the Jews fled from the Negroes 40 years later. Although by 1900 the English had almost completely abandoned their residential tenure and political interests in Midcity, they did maintain their local commercial interests for some time afterwards—as did the Jews when they in turn underwent a similar experience. In 1900 the now venerable First Church in one of the last collective enterprises of Midcity’s English middle class, printed the first and last issue of “the Midcity Magazine,” a valedictory gesture representing a sad farewell to Midcity and the glories of its
illustrious past. Almost all the merchants and tradesmen of the community took out ads in this magazine; of some 50 advertisers, about 85% had English names (Putnam, Griggs, Sawyer), 10% Irish (Coughlin, Collins), and 5% German. All of the Irish advertisers were in the construction field.

The departure of the lower class English from Midcity was less precipitous than that of the middle class, but almost as complete. The earliest group to leave in force was the lowest-skilled laborers of lower class III. These men and women were unable to compete with the flood of Irish laborers who were willing to work for much lower wages. Capitalizing on what resources they had—a superior command of American culture and a slightly higher level of labor skill—many took up residence in the growing ring of factory towns on the perimeter of Port City—towns still largely free of the Irish.

Not long afterwards the higher status English manual workers also began to leave Midcity. Several processes were at work. The large pool of low-skilled Irish laborers attracted to the community commercial enterprises geared to the use of low skill labor. As their numbers increased, the enterprises employing craftsmen and highly skilled laborers began to move away, and many of their workers followed them. Further, as the immigrant Irish learned the ways of the industrial city, as they did with considerable rapidity, they began to come into competition with the resident English for the higher skilled jobs. English residents of lower class I and II status began to feel increasingly disadvantaged in a community whose political was passing to Irish politicians whose love for the English was less than overwhelming. Some additional number of the lower class I English, in addition, in the process of following the route to higher status achieved by so many of their compatriots, left Midcity for communities better adapted to middle class life circumstances. The lower class English who remained in Midcity were, after 250 years, so well entrenched in a lower class life style as to approximate a “pure” lower class III subculture. In relatively small numbers, they continued to live in the low-rent
districts of the community, and to work with, live among, and intermarry with their more recently arrived neighbors.

Quite remarkably, by an ironic twist of history, the departure of the bulk of English laborers did not leave Midcity bereft of an English Protestant lower class. During the very period when the ranks of the older English lower class were becoming thin, Midcity experienced a new influx of lower class Englishmen—an influx second in scope only to that of the Irish. These people came from the eastern provinces of Canada, and were referred to as “Provincials.” In religion, locale of British origin, and general culture these new arrivals were virtually identical with the old English lower class. This was scarcely accidental. As will be recalled, during the pre-revolutionary period a substantial number of Midcity residents, in common with many others, choose to leave a country which had so small a sense of honor as to revolt from their mother country. Many of these “Tories” or “Loyalists” took up residence in the still-loyal Maritime Provinces; changing economic circumstances along with a gradual softening of anger produced an initially small but continually expanding re-immigration to the United States. The first colonies of Provincials settled in Port City around 1850; up until 1905, however, few had come to Midcity. Then between 1885 and 1905, the community experienced “a tide of Canadian movement.” By 1905 there were approximately 15,000 Provincials in Midcity—between 15% and 20% of the population.50

Virtually all of the new English were lower class. Not only did they duplicate the ethnic characteristics of the old English lower class, but they closely approximated their social status circumstances as well. A contemporary writer, noting the “varied classes” among the Canadian workingmen, indicates that Provincials were found at levels I, II, and III of the lower class. Their distribution among these levels, it would appear—was close to the all-community distribution of the 1950’s. The bulk were found in lower class II, with smaller and approximately equal numbers in lower class I and III. The majority of Midcity’s Provincials came

50 Reference to Canadian chapter in Woods.
from Nova Scotia; the next largest groups came from Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick; the fewest from Newfoundland. The same writer notes, “The great middle mass of them do fairly good work in the less skilled employments, averaging from $15.00 to $18.00 a week.” Lower class I Provincials worked as foremen in machine shops, skilled carpenters and cabinet makers, street-car motormen; many lower class I women went into nursing. Lower class III Provincials worked as operatives in casting foundries, as pile-drivers, as lumbermen, as fishermen. Many Provincial women worked as factory operatives.

The appearance of these English Provincials in Midcity—or rather, their reappearance, since many of the immigrants were descended from Loyalists who had left the same or nearby communities a little over a century before—guaranteed the continuity of an English Protestant lower class in Midcity despite virtually complete departure of the old. Many of the immigrating Provincials were highly-motivated to rise socially and by the second generation—following in the footsteps of their English ancestors and Irish predecessors, had converted some significant part of their numbers into middle class status, and, in their turn, left Midcity. However, more in line with the Irish than English precedent, some substantial portion of the Provincials did not so alter their status; as shown in Chapter One, about 15% of Midcity’s population in the 1950’s had Provincial backgrounds; these people, the mixture of earlier and more recent migrants, remained in Midcity as an indigenous English Protestant lower class.

Thus, by 1910, the basic shape of Midcity’s social class and ethnic composition was essentially “set” for the next half century. Most of the Germans, whose numbers had never been large, left the community just about the time of the major Provincial immigration; a relatively small group of Italians also entered Midcity during this period, but did not form a sizable Italian community. For the first half of the twentieth century Midcity was a predominantly lower class community of English, Irish, Jews, and Negroes.
The process by which the various immigrant groups took up residence in Midcity, adopted and practiced a lower class way of life, and in the course of time experienced a “separating-out” process whereby some portion of the group adopted middle-class ways while another continued in the lower class tradition—was repeatedly illustrated during the 19th century. It also appeared that the different national groups manifested different potentials with regard to their rate of “conversion” from lower to middle class status. Relative to the Germans and Jews, larger proportions of the English, Irish, and Italians retained lower class status. However, despite the abundance of the historical evidence that each national group possessed the capacity to adopt both lower and middle class subcultures, many observers during this period maintained the conviction that adherence to lower class life was in some fashion directly linked to the particular national, ethnic or racial background of a particular national group. This view had considerable currency even at the time of writing—primarily with reference to the Negroes, who in the 1950’s comprised a minor but increasingly conspicuous proportion of the urban lower class. Readily admitting that large numbers of English, Germans, Irish, Jewish, and others moved from lower to middle class status in the course of time, proponents of the position maintained that the Negro case was of a different order, and that a heritage of slavery, widespread racial discrimination, overly rapid urbanization, and other factors made the linkage between Negro and lower class status closer and more compelling than in the case of the other groups.

In light of this position it is enlightening to consider statements made by contemporary observers during the 1880-1910 period about three of Midcity’s groups—the Irish, the Jewish, and the English. The following statements were made in 1910 about the national group which in the 1960’s produced an eminent American president:

Of the Irish it should be reiterated...a latent germ of unprogressiveness and even degeneracy taints the air and cripples the social institutions of (Lower Midcity). They live in cheap surroundings in the squalor of the low-rent district. The relief agencies are at one in proclaiming drunkenness, shiftlessness, and poverty as powerful influences in their lives. The problem
of wife-desertion is particularly vexing; that there is an absence of virility in this stock demands frank recognition. The number of arrests among people other than the Irish is small; this race furnishes the major portion of the crime, most of which consists in drunkenness. In unarrested crime the Irish again furnish the bulk of drinking and fighting. Crime and malicious mischief is on the increase, and there is a spirit of lawlessness which argues badly for the future...The homes of the Irish are (far from) exemplary, and many of the children are at the same time insubordinate and weak morally as well as physically. Drunken fathers and mothers leave their children to get their education in the street...they lack the type of education which will turn out children capable of being really productive members of society. It is the lament of all that the years from fourteen to seventeen with both boys and girls are practically wasted. Three quarters of the pupils leave at the end of the grammar grades. The matter of petty larceny among these boys deserves special mention. The moral tone of the young people, as indicated by their corner gangs, is low and vulgar, or even worse. 

The parallel between this catalogue of characteristics and those associated with lower class Negroes in the 1950’s is striking. Attributed to a “latent germ of unprogressiveness” and a racially-inherent “absence of virility in this stock” are dependency on public welfare, occupancy of badly-maintained slum housing, high rates of crime and delinquency, prevalence of drinking and violence, low concern for education, high drop-out rates, child neglect, fatherless families, disrespect for law and order, immorality, and vulgarity.

The Jews also, during their relatively brief sojourn in the slum districts of Midcity, were represented as manifesting key characteristics of the lower class subculture out of racially-inherent propensities. The Jewish communities in Lower Midcity and a nearby district were described, in 1911, in these terms:

The Jews have established a colony which shows the same stench in the houses, the same overcrowding of rooms, the same dirty yards, which one finds in (a central Port City slum district). The Jewish colony seems peculiarly dirty and dismal. The passage ways of the tenements are dark, filthy, and permeated with fetid odors, while the litter on the floor, the torn-out wallpaper and kicked-out banisters bear witness to the presence of tenants carelessly content with squalor. The apartments are decked out with well-worn old furniture and the colored advertisements of the local dealers. The people are mostly small shopkeepers and junk dealers, and some work in a small raincoat factory...Jews furnish some of the less responsible (factory)

51 Reference to origins of statements. Cite authors in Woods. Not all in sequence.
operatives and carry on the hard and dirty forms of work. Their children are filling the schools and kindergartens, where they are characterized as chiefly dirty, ignorant of the language, brilliant at figures, slow at other things. The Jews break the city ordinances by keeping their shops open on Sunday, letting their customers in the back doors, and violating the rules governing peddling. Even the laggards (among the Irish) are cleaner than the Jew; the Irish children become soiled with the dirt of the street, but they are really clean compared with those races which are inherently dirty...

This representation is not as faithful to the classic form of the lower class III subculture as was the case for the Irish; although dirty, content with squalor, ignorant, and slow, the Jews do fill the schools, and are brilliant at figures. The major emphasis here is on dirtiness as a characteristic (and racially inherent) life condition, but also associated with being Jewish are illegal behavior, slum residential conditions, room overcrowding, low-skilled manual labor, and occupancy of the less responsible jobs.

One might suspect that these middle class writers, most (but not all) of whom were of English background, would be less apt to link lower class characteristics with national background in the case of the Provincials, whom one of the writers characterized as “bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.” This close affinity, however, did not save the life style of their fellow Englishmen from being characterized in terms similar to those applied to the other lower class groups, or from the implication that these were in some specific way related to national background. The following refers most explicitly to the lowest status English Canadians:

There is among (the Provincials) a large proportion of slack, careless, and little-to-be-trusted workmen. They are not liked by their fellow workmen. When there are several of them in a shop they tend to be very clannish, and are accused of being sneaky and behindhand. As well might be imagined...the newcomers act as strikebreakers, and the Unions dread this body of Canadian labor force ready to be tapped on the slightest provocation. When they marry they make their home in neighborhoods of others of their kind, who thus form a little colony. They generally rent an apartment and acquire the restless habit of moving from one flat to another...They disregard local duties and refuse to assume religious or civic bounds. Expenditures on clothing are unusually large; for appearance counts for much. On the whole
the manner of life is unequal, uneven, oscillating between penury and extravagance...Police lists show a considerable number of Canadian arrests for drunkenness, for assault, and for disturbing the peace, which are characteristic crimes. The crime against the family is desertion, of which there are many instances noted by police and charity workers.

The Provincial emerge from these statements as exhibiting lower-class characteristics in a somewhat purer form than the Jews, and somewhat less pure than the Irish. They are slipshod and undependable as workers, are clannish at work, and congregate in all-English “ghettos.” Like the image of present-day lower class Negroes, they splurge on non-essentials and are strapped for necessities. They are restless nomads, moving from flat to flat. Like the image of the Irish, they exhibit a propensity for lawless behavior, drunkenness, violence, and fatherless families. The authors of these statements were not bigots; on the contrary, they were highly educated, liberal, and socially-conscious men dedicated to the reform uplift, and ultimate elimination of the lower class populations of Port City. What is striking about their statements is their failure to perceive the high degree of uniformity in the life conditions of the several ethnically-differentiated lower class populations they were describing, and their consistent propensity to attribute these conditions not to basic similarities in occupational and other economic circumstances, but rather to something directly associated—either through biological or social heritage—with the peculiar circumstances of the particular racial, national, or ethnic background of each group.

The period from 1880 to 1910 offers an excellent illustration of the process of class stability through replacement. In the face of a set of rather complex and extensive class-ethnic developments, (Irish develop three divisions; lower class Jews come in; lower class Negroes come in; new English lower class replaces old), the overall social class composition of Midcity was, at the close of this period, virtually identical with that of the 1640’s, the 1840’s, and the 1950’s. As measured by

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52 Backgrounds of authors given in S. Warner, Ed., Ward’s Zone of Emergence, Preface. Passages showing almost identical characteristics appear in 1960’s with reference to Kentucky Mountain “hillbillies” in Midwestern cities. See, for example (Haberman thesis).
occupational figures, the approximate size of the lower class was 75% and 25% of the middle. Forty-five percent of the male manual laborers held jobs at the lower skill levels and 30% at the higher; 20% of middle class occupations were categorized as clerical and proprietary and 5% as professional. Comparability with earlier and later figures is high—not only with reference to the lower class middle class ratio, but also with reference to intra-class status levels.53

This period also affords an excellent illustration of the ecological-economic processes which operated to produce the remarkable degree of social class stability. The major industrial, commercial, and housing developments of this period served, in essence, to reinforce the basic features of Midcity's established ecological-economic adaptation—mixed commercial and residential land-use, multiple and diversified commercial enterprises, and extensive commercial use of local resident low-skilled labor. Moreover, developments affecting each of these features illuminate a process by which a set of deliberate if not coordinated efforts to recreate a set of conditions congenial to the life circumstances of lower class I and middle class III populations were defeated by the operation of stronger forces operating to sustain the predominantly lower class II and III character of the community.

Midcity in the 1880’s and ‘90’s experienced, according to Warner, a substantial building boom. Extensive construction of both residential and commercial units was undertaken; such construction did not, however, materially affect the business-residential mix, nor the wide variety found among both commercial and residential structures. New commercial buildings were large, medium, small, and of many different kinds; new housing units were large, medium, and small, and of many different kinds. A 1910 observer writes, “Although the appearance of the principal streets belies it, (Lower Midcity is) largely

53 These figures are based on the municipal police census of adult (over 20) males conducted in 1912 and covering Midcity’s three major political wards, as presented in Woods, op. cit., pages 46-7 and 68. Percentages for the three wards were Professionals, 3, 4, and 7%; clerical and proprietary, 25, 19, and 22%; “skilled” labor 33, 30, and 34%; “unskilled”, 40, 47, and 47%.
residential. The factories, breweries, and stores are located (on main thoroughfares) while the side streets are closely set with a variety of old one-family houses, three-deckers, and large tenements.”

This period witnessed two further attempts to establish middle class housing enclaves in Midcity—one in Lower Midcity, another in a newly developed neighborhood in the western part of the community. Private real estate developers in the 1890’s, as today, were unenthusiastic about the construction of housing designed for the tastes and incomes of lower class II and III populations, and hoped to attract the growing urban middle class to newly developed sections of Midcity. Both of these developments, while at first peopled by the middle class occupants for whom they were designed, were soon abandoned by them and altered to fit the circumstances of the lower class occupants who took their place. Warner writes “...by 1900 all of Lower (Midcity)...underwent a shift from lower middle class to a working class district...New low income families, in order to keep rents down, were converting single houses to multiple use, and doubling up in existing multiple dwellings. After but a few years as an acceptable middle class neighborhood these parts of Lower Midcity were becoming a slum.”

Concomitant with the construction of residential units geared to higher social status levels were several attempts to introduce industries which required substantial numbers of skilled craftsmen of the lower class I variety. Among these were a number of piano factories which required trained and specialized workmen. Most of these enterprises ended in failure; the set of residential and occupational circumstances which were well adapted to the life circumstances of a low-skilled, generalized, sporadically-occupied labor force were poorly adapted to those of specialized, highly trained, stability-oriented craftsmen. The lower class II and III workers of Midcity, who were mostly “generalists,” adapted well to the here-again-gone-again commercial atmosphere of Midcity—to be discussed further—and could quite readily, after suitable periods of rest and recuperation, find similar work in

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other nearby enterprises if the fuel-and-lumber yards or small factories in which they worked closed down or went out of business. The specialized lower class I craftsmen, on the other hand, were “locked into” a particular type of enterprise; their fate was bound to that of the furniture or piano factory in which they performed specialized tasks such as cabinet making or piano stringing; if and when such enterprises closed down, these men were left with substantial long term financial obligations (e.g., house mortgage) and few prospects for employment in the only type of work for which they were equipped. The operation of processes inhospitable to lower class I and middle class populations was circular; close proximity of lower class III populations made local residence undesirable for those of higher status; difficulties in keeping trained workers contributed to the failure of enterprises geared to higher skill levels; loss of local jobs forced lower class I populations to locate elsewhere and relinquish their property holdings to lower status occupants; increased proportions of lower class III persons further handicapped the residential and work circumstances of higher status populations.

One contemporary observer writes:

> The most important cause of the disintegration of ward life was the decided change which came over the character of local industries about a decade ago (1900). High grade industries located near a desirable residential community automatically attract and build up a high grade of population; conversely, industries employing a low grade of operative tend to call low grade help into nearby dwellings; and these pull down the local life to their own level...In (the past 15 years) more than 10 high grade factories were discontinued...The failure of the (Midcity) Piano company in 1900 was a bitter blow...men were paying for their homes on the strength of the future of the factory...when the blow came they lost all their savings...A proportion of the forepeople and skilled workers went to pieces morally and never recovered...family life was pulled down...

> The growing movement to unionize manual labor also played a part in the process which served to keep Midcity a lower status community. The viability of most Midcity’s industrial enterprises was geared to the continuing availability of low rent facilities and low cost labor. The few enterprises which were successfully unionized around 1900 were those described as “high grade,” and which employed
higher skilled workers. Saddled with increased labor costs, many of these businesses folded completely; others left Midcity for communities better adapted to the preferences and life conditions of higher skilled labor.

By the close of this period the ecological-economic character of Midcity was essentially set for the next half-century. A wide variety of commercial enterprises, mostly small, and dependent on the availability of locally-resident low-skilled labor; a wide variety of housing units mostly in the low rent category, situated near and among the places of work of their low-skilled occupants. Cary and Tead write, “...the supply of cheap, unskilled labor which is afforded in quantity offers no small inducement to a certain type of manufacturer.” They cite, among such industries, “belting, carpet and oil-cloth factories, over half of whose employees live in the district”; “a large manufacturer of drug products” which “draws heavily on the local population”; shoe factories, also drawing on local labor; and most of Port City’s breweries, employing many Irish in low-skilled jobs, “at least 60% of whom live in the immediate vicinity.” They also included foundries, factories, and machine shops where work on metal products is carried on, and woodworking establishments.

The same authors also point to the growth and continuing expansion of a type of commercial enterprise which draws heavily on low-skilled labor, and whose prevalence in Midcity played a major part in assuring its future status as a lower class community. These were the service industries, which played so large a part in the economy of the 1950’s. Cary and Tead write:

Largest in point of numbers is a series of firms which manufacture, cleanse, or distribute, articles of immediate service in the necessary business of housekeeping, such as food, laundry, coal, and wood...The district is strategically located to be a center of vast distribution. Unfortunately, however, these industries employ a relatively unskilled grade of worker...baking, the handling and delivery of coal, ice and laundering do not call for skill...These relatively low grade industries are reinforced by a considerable group of rag and second-hand shops.
The authors note, with regret, the close relation between service industries and lower class populations, and accurately prophesy: “It is this group (of industries) which seems likely to fix the status of the ward in the future.”

A final important feature of Midcity’s economic adaptation should be noted—a process whose dynamics became increasingly visible during this period, and which continued to operate actively up to the time of writing. Midcity provided an economic climate which enabled the community to serve as an experimental arena for low-cost, low-risk, small-scale entrepreneurial enterprise. It is most significant that the identical set of social and economic circumstances which served to maintain and reinforce the lower class status of one sector of the population served at the same time to enable another sector to relinquish that status and move toward a higher one.

These economic circumstances made it possible, during this period as during others, for a laborer well supplied with ambition but with limited resources to capitalize on a particular set of local conditions: a labor force which was low-skilled, locally resident, and sporadically employed and employable; an ample supply of commercial sites and structures of various types, many with low rentals; and personal familiarity with the community and its human and economic resources. The concurrent existence of these conditions made it possible for many of the more ambitious wage-earners to move from the status of employee to employer at relatively low cost and with relatively low risk. This climate of opportunity was particularly attractive to second-generation ethnics—many of whom set themselves up in small-scale businesses such as grocery or “variety” stores, small retail shops (clothing, shoes, hardware, etc.), small shops in the construction field (painting, carpentry, stone-and-cement work, plumbing, etc.), wholesale supplies (wagon or auto parts, plumbing supplies, electrical equipment, etc.), trucking and hauling, lunchrooms and taverns, and many more.55

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55 Reference to Martin Study 1967.
Some of the many enterprises thus undertaken were successful; many were not, and the would-be proprietors resumed their places among the ranks of the wage-earners. The relatively low cost of going into business on one's own provided relatively easy access to managerial status for the enterprising wage-earner; this also meant that the cost of failure was relatively low, and it was this “low-risk” quality which made it possible for a man with limited capital to try and to fail without suffering a destructive blow to his personal pride and financial resources. Among those who were successful, the most common pattern was the expansion of initial operations and/or a move to larger quarters in Midcity; a further step, for those whose success continued, was to leave Midcity entirely and establish themselves in higher status communities. Such departures, as already mentioned, served to sustain the predominantly lower-class character of Midcity’s economic adaptation.

One consequence of Midcity’s serving as an arena for low-cost, low-risk entrepreneurial enterprise was to impart to its commercial complexion a kind of here-again-gone-again look, as small shops and stores scattered throughout the community would come to life, operate for a limited period, close down, remain vacant for a while, reopen under different auspices, and so on. The quality of intermittency which characterized Midcity’s commercial life on the “management” level was paralleled by, and articulated with, the quality of sporadicity which characterized life on the level of labor. As in the case of class stability and ethnic replacement, such intermittency gives to the contemporary observer a strong impression of great flux and change (“ten years ago it was all completely different”), while in fact the intermittency itself is a stable, recurrent, and regular quality of community life.

It is important to emphasize at this point the capacity of the economic environment of the urban lower class community to provide a major mechanism for achieving higher social status, since such communities are so frequently seen only in terms of their capacity to maintain and reinforce lower status. The aspiring
proprietors who capitalized in the low cost labor and commercial facilities of Midcity were not well-financed capitalists coming in from the outside to exploit and victimize an indigenous lower class population; on the contrary, the majority of those who availed themselves of these opportunities came directly from the ranks of that population itself, and shared similar life circumstances. The phenomenon of upward social movement through low-rent, small-scale entrepreneurship was visible among lower class Negroes at mid-century.56

The developmental process which served, during this period, to sustain and reinforce conditions favorable to the presence of lower class populations also served to sustain and reinforce a wide range of behavioral practices characteristic of lower class life. Indicative of this range were several features of direct relevance to youth gangs and their behavior—the patterning of youth crime, the programs and rationales of social welfare agencies, and the nature of the gangs themselves. The existence and basic forms of each of these had been well established during previous periods; during this period, however, the actual language used to describe and explain them took the form it was to maintain for the next half-century.

Data previously presented have shown that the forms of crime engaged in by Midcity’s earlier lower class residents were quite similar to those of the 1950’s, and that a pattern of customary criminal behavior centering on drinking, stealing, and fighting was well established by the 1880-1910 period. Data available for the first time during this latter period also indicate that the volume of such crime did not differ markedly from that of the 1950’s. Cary and Tead, after stating that in 1910 the distinction for the largest number of juvenile arrests comes to this part of the city (viz., Lower Midcity)—a statement whose language is almost identical to statements frequently made in the 1950’s—furnish data which provides the basis for the following figures: male court cases formally adjudicated in 1910-1911, 232; number of male children of school age, 3755; rate per thousand, 61.8. Although both

56 Appeal to Negroes to become entrepreneurs which figured in “black power” movement of 1960’s also a major feature of programs by Negro leaders in 1870’s, 1910’s, and at other times.
offense and population statistics for 1960 were computed on a somewhat different basis, they are sufficiently similar to those of 1910 as to afford a rough comparison with those of 50 years before. 1960 figures for the same part of lower Midcity were: number of male court cases formally disposed of, 40.4; number of males 7 to 17, 672; rate per thousand 60.1.\textsuperscript{57}

Despite the fact that the 1910 rate of 61.8 was computed on a somewhat different basis from the 1960 rate of 60.1, these figures would indicate an extraordinary degree of stability in the volume of youth crime over a 50 year period. These findings do not support a conviction widely held during the 1950’s that the volume of such crime had reached unprecedented levels, but rather support the notion that similar kinds of lower class populations tend to generate similar volumes of crime. Furthermore, in light of the tendency fashionable in the 1950’s to attribute increasing urban crime rates to increasing numbers of Negroes, it is significant to note that the proportion of Negroes in the district under consideration was 22.5% in 1910 and 81.8% in 1960.

It is also of more than passing interest that these authors, in an effort to account for the prevalence of juvenile delinquency in Midcity, availed themselves of what continued to be, in the 1950’s, the classic explanation afforded by the conventional wisdom. This explanation states, quite simply, that juvenile delinquency is caused by bad parenthood; restated and ramified in many forms, it even appeared in the 1950’s as the considered conclusion of extensive scientifically-oriented research ventures. The classic explanation was phrased by Ordway and Tead as follows:

Perhaps even more influential in promoting (juvenile) lawlessness is the breakdown of family life. Parents no longer exercise the same degree of care and control over children that used to obtain. The father sees little of his sons, the mother is often away, children are more and more on the street day and night. The present-day type of parent no longer teaches children to respect people as such. No child would do the things, nor adopt the attitude that many children do, had he been taught to respect human nature...

\textsuperscript{57} On statistics. 1960 statistic is ’59, ’60, ’61 average; 3 census tracts almost coterminous with 1910 ward boundaries; comparability good because detailed crime statistics in 1910.
This statement also incorporates the concept, still current in later years, that the present period somehow represents a serious deterioration of a formerly correct mode of parental behavior. It is particularly striking to see phrases such as “the present-day parent no longer teaches his children to respect...” applied to the 1910 period, for it was precisely this period which served for many 1950 observers as that now-vanished golden age when parents acted as they should, children were thereby immune from delinquent behavior, and which throws into stark relief the sorrowful degeneration of present times.

These authors also included in their explanation another notion which has remained fashionable—the idea that in some former time urban communities were close-knit, neighborly, and solidary, while today they have become impersonal and disorganized:

Schools and shops are entered, windows broken, destructive mischief devised, often without anyone observing...This situation ... is ... reinforced by the breakdown of neighborhood life. Children now commit depredations on those living in sight of their own windows, and are unrecognized. The multiplication of tenements and the fashion of frequent moving have killed the old community spirit. People no longer live among neighbors and friends, and children lose all sense of that common unity of feeling which under ordinary circumstances would be outraged over the violation of family ties...

This statement is equally classic. To the “breakdown of the family” is added “the breakdown of the old community spirit.” Such classic explanations would merely provide amusing examples of the perpetual rediscovery of the sad deterioration of present-day morality if it were not for the fact that thousands of persons in each generation perceive this rediscovery as a startling new revelation, and ascribe a quality of dangerous urgency to the ameliorative measures which are thenceforth proposed.

By 1910, therefore, the patterning of youth crime, its general rate of occurrence, and the set of conventional explanations adduced to account for it, had all approximated their modern form. Similarly, by 1910 both the philosophy and
structure of social welfare enterprises designed to alter the character of youth crime as well as many other forms of customary lower class behavior had also become essentially set. Illustrative is the approach to the youth gangs of Midcity, seen in 1910 as an alarming social problem. Cary and Tead write:

The recreational assets (of Lower Midcity) are meager and ill-adapted. There are...25 saloons, pool rooms, four moving picture shows, three public dance halls...Anything like a well-organized plan for meeting the real needs for recreation of 23,000 people has never been dreamed of, much less contemplated. Who should be surprised that boys and girls run amok the police so frequently? Social clubs (viz., street corner gangs) are in vogue here as elsewhere. In fact these organizations seem to represent the natural medium through which the group instinctively asserts itself. Under wise, understanding oversight their potential power might be directed along definitely constructive lines...But such oversight will depend on the conscious coordination of recreational assets through some (social) agency.

With a few minor changes, the language, conceptions, and program proposals of these statements could have been taken directly from any number of statements made by Midcity social workers in the 1950’s. The basic elements of this approach—the importance of recreation as an influence on gang behavior, the deleterious effects of “unwholesome” recreational forms and the beneficial effects of “wholesome” forms, recognition of the “natural” character of street gangs, proposals to “redirect their energies into constructive channels,” emphasis on the need for warm and understanding adult leadership, and the urgent stress on the need for “coordination” among many and diverse social agencies—all remained essentially unchanged in letter and spirit during the following fifty years.

The form of the organizational units through which middle class professional and volunteer workers endeavored to alter the mores of Midcity also represented a logical evolution from earlier forms. By the 1900’s, as shown in Chapter One, the almshouses, workhouses, sanitoria, orphan’s homes, and charitable associations of the 1880’s had developed into an extensive network of organizations whose daily business was customary lower class behavior and its consequences. Circumstances attending the inception of one such organization, the settlement houses, are of
particular relevance to the issue of middle class and lower-class relations in Midcity.

Midcity’s first two settlement houses were founded within a year of one another. The language used to describe the founding of one is illuminating:

In the fall of 1895 three people, possessed of an ardent desire to be of service to their fellow-men, took up residence in a part of (Midcity) where the poor were herding together in increasing numbers. A home was made to which the neighbors were invited...Classes were established for children as well as a kindergarten, and Ben Adhem house had begun its work...Mothers are taught to raise their children to become wholesome and healthy adults; there are classes in crafts where the boy is taught to work off his energies in legitimate ways...

The other settlement house was founded a year before as an outgrowth of a day nursery for working mothers established by a philanthropic daughter of one of Port City’s socially prominent families, and was still active in the 1950’s. It is most significant that this new mechanism for ensuring contact between middle and lower class people began to flower in Midcity at almost the same time that the last of the older English middle class residents were taking their leave. These enterprises were called “settlement” houses because their middle class personnel actually “settled” among the lower class residents of Midcity, as did their progenitors among the Indians. If one assumes that “the welfare of the lower class as an organized concern of the middle class” described as well in evidence by the early 1800’s continued to be a cogent concern for most middle class people and an intense concern of a few, the settlement house appears as a logical if not inevitable development. In the 1600’s the second minister of Midcity’s First Church earned enduring fame for his efforts to bring Christianity and civilization to the pagan and primitive Indians; he was distinguished in that he actually went out of Midcity to settle among the objects of his missionary efforts. In the 1900’s middle class Protestants, animated by very similar motives and with very similar objectives, came in to Midcity to settle among its people and bring to them the classic middle class message of sobriety, order, and economic responsibility.
The lifelong efforts of the early Congregationalist minister ended in failure. Few were converted, and of those few most returned to their own ways once the missionary had departed. The fate of his spiritual descendants was, for the most part, similar. The quality of “intermittency” which characterized the lives of Midcity’s lower class residents as well as its commercial life was also characteristic of its many middle class “settlers” whose mission in Midcity was to alter the ways of the indigenous population. Wave on wave of workers and Projects in the fields of recreation, mental health, education, work training, and social reform came to Midcity charged with energy, enthusiasm, and optimism, carried on their activities for varying periods of time, and then, for the most part, left the community much the same as it was when they came.58

The relatively minor impact of all these efforts did not serve, however, to deter continuing efforts to alter the life conditions of Midcity’s lower class. Quite the contrary. As one Project moved out, another, or even two more, moved in. As the “special education” teachers despaired at the painful slowness of their progress, as the remedial mental health workers retreated to relocate in more “receptive” communities, as the “demonstration projects” in the control of crime, the inhibition of unwed motherhood, neighborhood betterment and the neighborhood organization of “the people” terminated their efforts, others took their places. Serving in part to sustain these efforts was an institutionalized disregard for the history of previous efforts, and a persisting reluctance to evaluate honestly the effects of their own. New Projects and workers came in force in the 1930’s, the 1940’s, the 1950’s, and the 1960’s under varying auspices (in later years with substantial Federal support) and with differently phrased objectives. They will continue to come for many decades, and in the meantime, the form and flavor of the lower class life pattern will retain, in most essential respects, its basic character, in Midcity or elsewhere.

58 Far greater effect was registered by those projects aiming to improve the physical health of Midcity residents.
The Persistence of a Lower Class Subculture in Midcity

Nearly two hundred years before the 1950’s, a decade of youth gangs and gang delinquency, a member of one of Midcity’s eminent Colonial families played an active part in the charged ideological discussions which eventuated in the revolt to the colonies from England, and which produced, as part of the justification of that revolt, the famous proposition that “all men are created equal.” His subscription to the philosophy which engendered this principle was no idle one; he gave his life in its defense. A major purpose of those who established the United States as an independent nation was to found a new form of society in which the traditional distinctions of rank and station so characteristic of European societies would be minimized or eliminated. And yet, in the Midcity of the 1950’s, an established set of social status levels was as relevant as any time in the past. What happened to the lofty vision of the founders of the republic, and what happened to the American dream of equality and a classless society?

For present purposes, the flowing rhetoric of the revolutionary ideologies must, unfortunately, be transmuted into the stilted terminology of contemporary social science. In these pedestrian terms, the basic question becomes—How can one account for the existence of a distinctive lower class subculture in Midcity and for its persistence for more than three centuries? For the subculture has retained strength and vigor in the face of an explicit national ideology massively and adamantly opposed to its very existence; in the face of a host of programs aimed deliberately and directly at its elimination; in the face of major modifications in the racial and national origins of its citizenry; and in the face of profound shifts in the character of the technological order.

The questions of “origins” and “persistence,” although intimately related, may be addressed separately. The question of origins is essentially historical, and the extensive historical analysis it requires may be sidestepped, at this point, by a simple answer. The lower class sub-culture of Midcity, in its generic if not specific
form, was brought to the community from England, where it had evolved over a very long period of historical development common to most of Europe.

The question of the persistence of this English-derived sub-culture, and of its effective adaptation to the changing circumstances of a new land and new historical periods finds direct analogies in the field of biological evolution. Given substantial changes in environmental conditions, what processes enable a complex and highly-organized organic form to maintain its viability? (A classic case of success in such a process is man; of failure, the dinosaur). The present section will abstract a set of more general principles and processes in an attempt to explain the persistence of Midcity’s lower class subculture.

This chapter has traced selected events in Midcity’s history through four historical periods, ending in 1910. It would be possible to continue the accounting of historic events for the period from 1910 to the 1950’s, when Midcity had achieved the social character described in Chapter One; however, very little of what happened during this period had any marked impact on the ecological, economic or social circumstances which made Midcity an urban slum, nor did the events of this period reveal any particularly new kinds of processes contributing to the persistence of the community subculture. Midcity’s population continued to grow, reaching a peak of 113,000 in 1950 and then, in common with most similar eastern urban districts during this period, began to decrease. Some of the older commercial enterprises declined or moved away, but others of similar character took their places. Notable among these were the breweries, which were forced out of business during the prohibition period, returned upon repeal, and gradually, during the ‘40’s and ‘50’s, merged with national companies or went out of business as mass media advertising, mechanized production techniques, unionized labor and other developments made the economic climate of Midcity increasingly uncongenial to this type of enterprise.

Between 1910 and 1940 Midcity’s Negro population gradually increased, and followed the precedent of the Irish and Jews in that the growing number of higher
status residents moved into the “better” sections of the community. In 1940 Negroes comprised 14% of Midcity; in 1950, 22%; and in 1960, 43%. The actual rate of increase, contrary to general impression, was slower between 1950 and 1960 than during the previous decade. This lower rate of increase, however, eventuated in a relatively higher proportion of Negro residents, since the spread of Negroes into new sections was accompanied by an out-movement of white residents, resulting in a net loss of population. As had often been the case in the past, the increase in the size of the Negro populations was seen by the older residents as enormously disruptive, and as producing a radical change in the character of the community. In fact, this particular ethnic movement changed the community subculture to a considerably lesser degree than had several earlier movements; the Negroes who moved in were English speaking, totally “American,” long-term native residents and manifested a lower class subculture similar in many respects to that of most of those who moved out.

The process of “class stability through ethnic replacement” thus continued to operate efficiently during this period as it had so often in the past, as did the other major processes which served to insure the continuity of Midcity’s lower class subculture. The following sections will examine these processes under two major headings: economic-ecological processes and adaptivity and stability-maintaining processes. Discussion of the first set of processes will center on the actual nature, at a given point in time, of the currently-existing articulation among the multiple elements of Midcity’s social, economic, and subcultural adaptation; the second set of processes involves a number of mechanisms which operated to preserve a high degree of subcultural stability in the face of changing conditions. The two sets of processes are, of course, organically inseparable, but will be artificially separated here for purposes of analytic treatment.
Economic and Ecological Articulation: 

The Keystone of Subcultural Persistence

It is impossible, in addressing the question of the persistence of Midcity’s lower class subculture, to attribute causative primacy to a single factor or set of factors; over the centuries there had developed in the community a most intricate and complex system based on an intimate articulation of a variety of economic, ecological, residential, and subcultural conditions. It is clear, however, that among these intimately interrelated conditions, those which may be termed “economic” played a role of the utmost importance. As has been shown, Midcity from its very beginnings combined both residential and commercial facilities, and both these aspects of community life continued to flourish in the 20th century. The specific character of Midcity’s system of business and commercial enterprise was integrally related to its social and cultural adaptation. Four features of this system were of particular relevance. There was a great multiplicity of separate enterprises; these enterprises where highly diverse in nature; they varied widely in size; the life span of given types of commercial enterprise as well as that of particular units showed wide variation. Each of these characteristics—multiplicity rather than limitation, diversity rather than homogeneity, variety rather than uniformity in size and life span—were of long duration, and each contributed in some significant fashion to the existence and persistence of the lower class subculture of Midcity.

Midcity in the 1950’s contained some 2,500 different commercial enterprises—about 15% of the total number in Port City; these were extraordinarily diverse in character. Of the approximately 2,500 firms listed in the Port City Directory, about 1,500 (60%) dealt in services and 1,000 (40%) in goods. The range of services was wide; the Directory lists the 1,500 service enterprises under some 165 specific categories. On the basis of a more general categorization distinguishing 20 types of service, something over half of these enterprises fell under three categories: Cleaning, Maintenance, and Repair (500 enterprises); Health Services (200); and Personal Grooming (170). Included under the first category, in
approximate numbers, were 100 laundering and cleaning concerns, 60 automobile service stations, and 25 garages. The “cleaning” figures do not, of course, include the many Midcity women who did housecleaning on a “daywork” basis as private contractors. The “Health” category, in addition to individual medical and nursing practitioners, included the six large hospitals already mentioned as well as about 25 nursing or rest homes. “Grooming” enterprises included 80 barber shops and beauty parlors. Other “service” enterprises which employed manual and/or low-skilled workers were restaurants and taverns (150), trucking and moving companies (30), and construction (100).

Firms dealing primarily in economic “goods” covered an equally wide spectrum, and included firms engaged in manufacturing, distributing, jobbing, wholesaling, and retailing. Retail stores included approximately 170 meat and grocery stores, 60 local neighborhood “variety” stores, and 50 drug stores. There was little evidence of any specialization in manufactured goods; approximately 60 different kinds of manufactured products were produced by the 120 shops and factories of Midcity. These included shoes, boxes, auto parts, electronic equipment, plastic products, brooms, furniture, machinery, mattresses, tools, and many more. Even a cursory inspection of the character of Midcity’s many and diverse commercial enterprises reveals that they provided many employment opportunities for persons at all levels of the lower class—including the lowest skilled workers at the lower class III level.

The size of these varied kinds of commercial concerns also varied widely. On the one hand were several enterprises employing large numbers of workers—such as a plant manufacturing nationally distributed shoes and which employed about 2,000 workers, and the half-dozen large hospitals, each employing 500 to 1,000 non-medical personnel. On the other hand were small stores, shops, and service facilities run primarily by one person with one or two employees. The bulk of Midcity’s commercial enterprises, however, fell into the “medium” size category—with scores of firms maintaining staffs on the order of 10 to 100 persons. As already mentioned,
the life-span of these diverse enterprises also showed considerable variation. On the one hand were firms which had been doing business in Midcity for a century or more; on the other hand were the scores of small and medium size enterprises which recurrently took the plunge into the volatile, here-again-gone-again commercial climate of the community, and went out of business after two, three, or five years of operation.

How did these particular characteristics of Midcity’s commercial world contribute to the maintenance of its lower class subculture? A central reason has already been cited in connection with the several historical phases. Some substantial portion of the commercial enterprises which were located in Midcity required for their effective and economical operation a readily available locally-resident and mutually-reinforcing process: the presence in the community of this type of enterprise attracted the kinds of people whose occupational capacities and predilections were in accord therewith; the presence in the community of this type of worker attracted and kept commercial enterprises requiring this type of labor supply.

But the articulation of the commercial and subcultural worlds of Midcity was more complex and deviously contrived than is implied by this simple statement of symbiotic interdependence. It will be recalled that persons at all three levels of the lower class, as well as the lower levels of the middle class, were reported among Midcity’s population, and that the majority of its residents were of lower class II status. The nature of Midcity’s commercial system was such as to provide local employment opportunities for persons at all these status levels—with the social-status composition of the locally-employed work force resembling, in general, that of the residential community. This did not mean, of course, that the staff of each concern was 10% middle class, 20% lower class I, 50% lower class II, and 20% lower class III (See Table 7.1, Chapter One)—although some of the larger concerns did in fact approximate this distribution. One concern might employ 50% lower class I workers and 10% lower class III; another might employ 60% lower class III
employees and 10% lower class I. On an all-unit basis, however, the cumulative social-class composition of Midcity’s locally-employed labor force in the 1950’s approximated the 75% lower- 25% middle-class ratio maintained by the residential community for over two hundred years.

Commercial concerns which maintained a successful adaptation to the labor force circumstances of Midcity were those whose task requirements and operating procedures could be accommodated to the capabilities and customary forms of occupational behavior of low-status employees. First, some significant proportion of the tasks to be performed could be executed by low-skilled “generalists”—that is, persons who could perform the job within acceptable limits of adequacy with a minimum of specialized training (e.g., sweepers, washers, loaders, sorters, pick-and-shovel workers, stackers, stock boys). Second, it was necessary that such jobs be primarily manual, requiring relatively little “brainwork” and/or “paperwork.” Third, it was important that the incumbents of such positions be acclimated to subordinancy—with experience in being on the receiving rather than the giving end of orders. Fourth, the enterprise had to be geared to the “sporadic” character of customary low-status occupational behavior. For example, personnel departments had to be equipped to handle a relatively high turnover rate, as employees moved into and out of particular job slots. Company practice with regard to such matters as punctuality, reliability, proportion of “goofing” to “working” time, acceptable degrees of sobriety, and amount of tolerated pilfering had to be quite loose and flexible. Scores of enterprises in Midcity had in fact effectively incorporated a whole set of practices, policies and orientations toward their low-status employees which were probably beyond the capacity, if not the comprehension, of the many

59 See “Work” section of “Family, School and Work” Chapter.
60 See Leibow, Elliot Tally’s Corner: A Study of Negro Street Corner Men. 1967 for a good discussion of how an employer of lower class III males includes an estimate of the amount of routine theft expected of his employees in determining their wage levels. A survey reported in President Johnson’s Crime Commission Report (1967) indicated that 20 to 30% of 473 companies reported “serious” problems with employee theft; social status of employees was not indicated.
predominantly white-collar enterprises operating in Port City’s financial district and suburbs.

In addition, inter-personal relations within particular concerns were generally organized so as to take advantage of the kinds of interaction patterns already existing among the several social status levels of Midcity’s multi-status community life. Occupational activity was so arranged that workers at a particular status level were customarily in contact with others at another appropriate level. For example, the direct supervisor of lower class III manual laborers was most often a lower class I foreman, rather than, say, a middle class administrator. As in the case of the “tough” army sergeant and companies consisting primarily of lower class II and III enlisted men, one of the usual areas of competence of lower class I males is that of “handling” lower class III subordinates—a task requiring knowledge and skills seldom possessed by middle class persons.

The “residential” aspect of Midcity’s commercial-residential pattern in many ways resembled the commercial aspect, and was articulated with it not only spatially but functionally. The four features applied quite directly to its residential pattern as well. The dwelling units of Midcity were many in number, extremely heterogeneous in type, and varied greatly in size and age. There were, in the 1950’s, almost 29,000 housing units in the community—something over ten times the number of commercial enterprises. As already shown (Chapter One), the range of variation was wide. The majority were rental units, but about 15% were owned by their occupants. Most were older units, but a substantial amount of housing-project construction dated from World War II and after. There were multi-unit and single-unit structures. Rentals as well as house costs clustered around the “low” end of the scale, but within this range there was considerable variation.61 Many units were close to, and quite a few even part of, commercial units employing local labor. Residential facilities available in Midcity were thus adapted quite directly to the

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61 See Table 14.1, Chapter 1.
occupational circumstances, incomes, housing preferences, and customary forms of residential behavior of a predominantly lower-class, multi-status-level population.

Many features of the occupational behavior of the lowest status sectors of the population characterized their residential behavior as well. Prominent among these was the quality of “sporadicity”; residents tended to remain in a given unit for only limited periods of time, and a truck being filled with furniture was a common sight in many neighborhoods. However, in most instances the new apartment was only a few blocks away from the old. Persons in the lower class I minority, who favored “steady” work in long-term jobs, were able to buy, and generally to maintain carefully, modest single or two-family units near their places of work.62

The historical account has emphasized the point that a major aspect of the articulation between Midcity’s residential and commercial worlds was their spatial proximity. The dependence of commercial enterprises on a low-skilled labor force which was “locally resident,” and the tendency of the low-skilled laborers to live near their places of work have been cited as playing an important part in the maintenance and persistence of Midcity’s lower class subculture. It is evident that this circumstance was virtually necessary during Midcity’s first 250 years, when transportation was difficult and expensive. It is equally evident, moreover, that living and working nearby became less of a practical necessity when street railways became common after the Civil War, and considerably less necessary when automobiles became common after World War I. Nonetheless, as shown in the previous section, the large majority of Midcity’s laborers lived near their places of employment during the 1880-1910 period, despite the availability of public transportation. But what of the automobile? The widespread ownership of private automobiles has been seen by some as creating the conditions for an extremely mobile labor force—one whose place of work becomes less and less dependent on its locale as well as the availability of gasoline—and electrically-powered public

62 The percentage of renters in lower class I neighborhoods was however, considerably higher than in most, and generally more homogeneous, in lower class I areas.
transportation, on the traditional tendency of Midcity’s workers to live close to their places of work.

It would appear that while the workers of twentieth century Midcity were considerably less closely tied to local employment than in past years, their propensity to work locally was still pronounced. The theoretically high mobility afforded by the automobile was seriously limited, in practice, by the relatively low rate of auto ownership. Despite a popular notion that most slum residents own cars, however poor they might be, about 80% of the households in lower class III neighborhoods reported in 1960 that no automobile was available to them. Moreover, the proportion of residents of lower class III areas who reported that they got to work by means other than the automobile was about 75%, compared to about 50% for a middle class Port City district. There was also a rough relationship between social status and the proportion of those who reported that they walked to work; in one of Midcity’s lowest status areas, over one third reported that they walked to work, compared to less than one-twentieth in one of the highest status areas.

One obvious reason for the continuing pattern of local employment is budgetary. Maintenance of an automobile can take a large bite out of a limited income, and even the relatively low cost of public transportation must be taken into consideration when debating a local versus a more distant job. But also of considerable importance is the matter of preference. As discussed elsewhere, the low status residents of Midcity, during earlier as well as more recent times, maintained a strongly parochial orientation to life. Whenever possible, they preferred to live and work in the same general area—as well as to play, fight, drink, steal, and find entertainment. One exception to the pattern of close local employment was found among the many lower class III females who did housework by the day in private homes in other communities. It was precisely this group, however, which was least likely to own an automobile or to have one available. This meant, for the most part, the use of public transportation, and since most of these
women were reluctant to pursue a complicated or lengthy route to their places of work, also contributed to a preference for work as close to Midcity as was possible. Similarly, of the 70% of the residents of lower class III areas who utilized transportation to get to work, about 65% utilized public transportation... much of it to places within Midcity or in adjacent low-status communities. Eighty-six percent of Midcity’s workers were employed in the Port City Metropolitan area, and of these, 83% worked in municipal Port City itself. Thus, while technology to a considerable extent reduced the necessary degree of closeness between residential and occupational locations, the important link between place of work and place of residence continued to be vital in the age of the rapid transit system and throughway.