In Search of Respect

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PHILIPPE BOURGOIS

The son of an Auschwitz survivor and wealthy mother from New York City, celebrated urban and medical anthropologist Philippe Bourgois is best remembered for his ethnographic studies of American inner-city life, including *In Search of Respect*, although he conducted his early research largely in Central America. His dissertation at Stanford was based on his research at a banana plantation on the Costa Rica-Panama border (which formed the basis for his first book in 1989, *Ethnicity at Work: Divided Labor on a Central American Banana Plantation*). His early ethnographic work also took him to Nicaragua, Belize, El Salvador, and Paris. Since the 1990s, however, he has focused on the urban United States, especially New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, on which his third and latest ethnography is based (*Righteous Dopefiend*, co-authored with Jeffrey Schonberg, 2009). Beyond his three ethnographies, Bourgois has authored hundreds of articles and edited a number of volumes, including two with celebrated anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes: *Violence in War and Peace* and *Violence at the Urban Marg*ins. His most recent work looks at how medical, psychiatric, and prison systems in the United States are used to manage, evaluate, and castigate Americans living in inner cities. This has also led him to various research projects for the National Institutes of Health and applied work evaluating state policies toward people with mental illness. After a long tenure at San Francisco State University (1988-1998), Bourgois helped found and chaired the interdisciplinary Department of Anthropology, History and Social Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine, where he taught for the next decade (1998-2007). He moved to the University of Pennsylvania from 2007-2016 and returned to California to direct UCLA's School of Medicine's Center for Social Medicine and Humanities.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Bourgois's second chapter focuses on three important histories that converge in the time and place of his research: that of Puerto Rico, that of East Harlem, and that of the so-called crack epidemic (including the federal and state government policies that were intended to address poverty and drug use, but actually exacerbated them instead). Although settled for thousands of years, Puerto Rico's modern history begins with Spanish conquest at the end of the 15th century. For the next 400 years, the island was a Spanish colony notable primarily for its military importance and sugarcane plantations, which were run on slave labor during much of the 19th century. In 1898, the United States conquered Puerto Rico and consolidated these plantations, forcing many Puerto Ricans into exploitative labor on them, while preserving the island's status as an important military center. Puerto Ricans became U.S. citizens in 1917, and the government began deliberately importing Puerto Ricans to the mainland as laborers; in conjunction with the demise of the Puerto Rican sugar industry in the 1940s and 1950s, these factors made Puerto Rican migration to the mainland U.S. accelerate drastically in the mid-20th century, with a large majority going to New York City. As Bourgois explains, many of the first generation of migrants found work in the manufacturing industry that had largely collapsed by the time their children came of age. At the time of Bourgois's research, 12% of New York City residents were Puerto Ricans. (As of 2010, the number is closer to 9%.) On balance, they remain New York's lowest-income group. Since Hurricane Maria devastated the island in 2017, migration from Puerto Rico to the mainland United States has accelerated once again. Originally a rural suburb of New York, East Harlem became a bustling immigrant area in the late 1800s, with numerous German, Irish, Jewish, and Scandinavian immigrants creating distinct enclaves in what is now the neighborhood. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, Italian immigrants dominated the neighborhood, but waves of Puerto Rican immigrants gradually moved into the neighborhood during the same period, becoming its majority group by the 1950s. Although some Italians still lived in the neighborhood during Bourgois's research in the second half of the 1980s—and the Genovese crime family was still operating, in fact out of Bourgois's block—by this time the neighborhood's reputation as "El Barrio" was cemented, and as of the late 2010s Puerto Ricans remain the area's plurality ethnic group, although rapid gentrification promises to transform the area and possibly displace many of its longtime residents. Nevertheless, it has long been the lowest-income and highest-crime neighborhood of Manhattan, although both of these measures have improved substantially in the decades since Bourgois's research. Finally, the "crack epidemic" began in the same year as Bourgois's research, 1985, with a huge media sensation quickly making the drug a household name. With the sudden influx of cocaine into the United States, in part the result of drug enforcement policies that attacked traffickers (and therefore made the relatively lightweight and easy-to-conceal cocaine a preferable alternative to marijuana). Smokable, cheap, fast-acting crack soon became an attractive product for dealers to sell, and the drug was almost immediately associated with inner cities and black and Latinx users, especially women. Violent crime in these areas increased significantly, as did incarceration rates, especially when the government mandated that crack

offenses—and the mostly black and Latinx men who committed them—would be punished 100 times more harshly than powder cocaine offenses. Crack began fading in the mid-1990s, as Bourgois discovered in his trips to New York between the publication of the first and second editions of his book, and the sentencing disparities were eventually lightened in 2010 (to a still severe 18-to-1).

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Philippe Bourgois's most recent book, *Righteous Dopefiend* (2009), looks at the experiences of San Francisco drug users in the decade since *In Search of Respect*. An extraordinary amount of ink has been spilled on both the crack epidemic and the War on Drugs. Notable works on the former include the 1997 compiled work *Crack In America: Demon Drugs and Social Justice*, edited by Craig Reinarman; personal narratives like *New York Times* journalist David Carr's account of his past crack addiction, *The Night of the Gun* (2009); and documentary work like photographer Eugene Richards's controversial, arguably voyeuristic 1994 book *Cocaine True, Cocaine Blue*. Books on the War on Drugs' political background include former undercover agent Michael Levine's *The Big White Lie: The Deep Cover Operation That Exposed the CIA Sabotage of the Drug War* (2012), which narrates the author's participation in American efforts to protect drug traffickers associated with U.S.-installed Latin American dictators, at the same time as the United States was supposedly fighting these same traffickers in the War on Drugs, and Gary Webb's incendiary work on the so-called *Dark Alliance* (1998). In his *Cocaine Nation: How the White Trade Took Over the World* (2010), Thomas Feiling covers cocaine's history, the rise of the crack epidemic, and the drug's contemporary appeal through interviews with those involved in its production, transportation, and trade. And Dimitri A. Bogazianos's *5 Grams: Crack Cocaine, Rap Music, and the War on Drugs* (2011) looks at the severe disparity between laws against powder and crack cocaine, the racial underpinnings of the War on Drugs, and their relationship to street culture as expressed through 1990s New York hip-hop. Important scholarly work on Puerto Rican history includes James L. Dietz's *Economic History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development* (1986), the volume *Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives* (edited by Carmen Whalen and Victor Vasquez, 2005), Cesar Ayala and Rafael Bernabe's *Puerto Rico in the American Century* (2009), and numerous volumes resulting from the extensive work of Hunter College's Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños. Early anthropological work on Puerto Rico includes renowned ethnographer Sidney Mintz's *Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life History* (1960) and the collaborative study in which he participated, *The People of Puerto Rico* (1956), formally authored by Julian Steward. One of the most important scholars of the inner-city United States is William Julius Wilson, who remains best known for his landmark work *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (1987). His students have proven the new standard-bearers in this field: sociologist Sudhir Venkatesh has published a number of books on the underground economy in the United States since 2000, most famously *Gang Leader for a Day* (2008), and Loïc Wacquant has taken up the issue of inner-city governance from a somewhat more theoretical perspective in works such as *Punishing the Poor* (2009). There is also a substantial scholarly literature about East Harlem in particular. According to Bourgois, Oscar Lewis's notorious 1966 study *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty—San Juan and New York* ultimately and unintentionally fed the American tendency to blame people for their own poverty and "scared a generation of social scientists away from studying the inner city." Since *In Search of Respect*, two prominent ethnographies have looked at East Harlem: Arlene Dávila's *Barrio Dreams* (2004), a study of economic and cultural changes in East Harlem amidst encroaching gentrification, and Russell Leigh Sharman's *The Tenants of East Harlem* (2006), which is narrated by seven different residents with various ethnic backgrounds and relationships to the neighborhood. Finally, the Nuyorican Movement has produced an enormous wealth of literature in both English and Spanish, starting with Jesús Colón's *A Puerto Rican in New York* (1961). The movement has produced numerous novels (like Giannina Braschi's 1998 *Yo-Yo Boing!* and Luis López Nieves's 2005 *Voltaire's Heart*), plays (most famously Miguel Piñero's 1973 *Short Eyes*), and especially poetry (such as the extensive work of Pedro Pietri and Lourdes Vázquez) and memoirs (such as Piri Thomas's 1967 *Down These Mean Streets* and the celebrated trilogy by Esmeralda Santiago).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*
- **When Written:** 1985-1995 (research 1985-1990)
- **Where Written:** New York City, San Francisco
- **When Published:** 1995 (first edition), 2003 (second edition)
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Academic Monograph
- **Genre:** Ethnography
- **Setting:** East Harlem, New York City; Puerto Rico
- **Climax:** N/A
- **Antagonist:** N/A
- **Point of View:** First person, including reported dialogue

EXTRA CREDIT

Eric Wolf and Philippe Bourgois. Bourgois's most important scholarly influence was likely his professor and mentor Eric Wolf, who is best remembered for *Europe and the People Without History*, but whose earliest work, like Bourgois's, involved ethnography in Latin America. In fact, Wolf's

dissertation research was part of the landmark collaborative study in Puerto Rico that led to the book *The People of Puerto Rico* (1956).

Philippe Bourgois's Motives. Bourgois credits the story of his father—who escaped from Auschwitz just before its liberation at the end of World War II—with driving him to focus on "institutionalized forms of social inequality and suffering." He sees the place of American inner cities, "out of sight, out of mind," as analogous to that of Nazi concentration camps.

PLOT SUMMARY

Anthropologist Philippe Bourgois's *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* is a five-year ethnographic study of Nuyorican crack dealers, drug users, and local residents in New York's East Harlem (or "El Barrio"). From 1985 to 1990, during the earliest years of the crack epidemic, Bourgois lived in El Barrio, hung out in crackhouses, and befriended people involved the underground economy. He learns about the interconnected social and economic factors that drive El Barrio's youth into the drug trade: the neighborhood's residents lack opportunities in the legal economy, face a long and enduring legacy of colonialism and racism, and seek to articulate their identities and win respect through an antiestablishment street culture. Mainstream American society then uses their struggles against them as evidence that they are unable to assimilate and do not deserve support or recognition from the public.

The book's 2003 preface notes the changes in El Barrio since the first edition's publication in 1995. Next, in the introduction, Bourgois explains how he ended up studying "the multibillion-dollar crack cyclone" that descended on New York in 1985 after realizing that the drug epidemic was an important symptom of El Barrio's poverty and New York's inequality. Because much of East Harlem's economic activity (including the drug trade) and many of its residents never show up on official surveys, Bourgois explains that the only adequate way to study this area is through qualitative observation. But qualitative research also poses significant challenges, like avoiding anthropology's "profoundly elitist tendencies" to ignore the concrete suffering of those they study and ensuring that the audience does not "misread [the stories in his book] as negative stereotypes." Bourgois wants to show how both structural factors and individual decisions contribute to the fate of the people he studies, and to develop "an alternative, critical understanding of the U.S. inner city" rather than simply offer a sensationalistic pornography of violence.

Bourgois begins Chapter 1 by explaining how his friendship with Ray, the leader of El Barrio's drug network, allowed him to safely access and perform research in crackhouse environments that would typically never welcome an upper-class white professor who did not use drugs. Indeed, everyone initially assumes that Bourgois is an undercover police officer. Bourgois's entire project nearly collapses when he accidentally reveals Ray's illiteracy to all of his friends and employees. Ray reacts strongly but later forgives Bourgois, which is an example of how he metes out "violence, power, and generosity" to control his business and reputation. But despite this expertise in controlling his image, Ray is completely unable to function in mainstream society because the underground and legal economies require different kinds of cultural capital. The drug trade clearly dominates in El Barrio, leading local residents, law enforcement, and wary outsiders to buy into a "culture of terror."

In Chapter 2, Bourgois looks at the neighborhood and colonial histories that intersect in the experiences of the people he studies. After Puerto Rico became a U.S. territory, a generation of its citizens migrated to New York City. The gradual decline of New York's manufacturing sector forced these immigrants' children (Bourgois's subjects) into menial or underground jobs. The concept of the rural **jíbaro** (who refuses to work for the state but is then forced to do so) comes to represent contemporary Puerto Ricans' sense of unjust displacement and antagonism towards the government and mainstream society. East Harlem has long been a poor immigrant neighborhood where each generation turns against the next; Bourgois witnesses conflict between Italians and Puerto Ricans switch to tension between Puerto Ricans and Mexican newcomers. Scholarly and popular literature about East Harlem has emphasized its poverty, violence, and rampant drug economy, which the Italian American Mafia did its best to promote in the first half of the 20th century. The government also perpetuated these problems in the neighborhood by demolishing huge swaths of it to build public housing projects and ramping up drug trafficking enforcement, which led smugglers to switch from trafficking marijuana to the less conspicuous cocaine.

In Chapter 3, Bourgois looks at the history and business model of Ray's extraordinarily profitable crackhouse, the Game Room. Bourgois's friends Primo and Caesar, who work at the Game Room, only make slightly more than minimum wage and remain dependent on their mothers and girlfriends, admitting that they would gladly take legal work if they could get it. Labor conflicts (such as when Ray cuts Primo's wages and hours to hire Tony, another dealer) make selling crack even less glamorous.

In Chapter 4, Bourgois looks at what happens when each of his friends joins the legal economy. They are confined to "the least desirable [jobs] in U.S. society," from which they frequently get fired. His friends both resent and accept the perception that they are too lazy for high-quality jobs. When working at a mailroom, Primo considers his boss Gloria a threat to his masculinity and autonomy, even though she is actually trying to help him succeed in life. The contrast between street culture and the service industry also makes it very difficult for El Barrio residents to succeed in the workplace without feeling like they

are betraying their communities and trying to "be white."

In Chapter 5, Bourgois shows how the school system, which encourages El Barrio residents to assimilate to mainstream society, only further alienates them. Primo and Caesar act out at school because of "violent personal disruptions" in their childhoods. Primo's mother is illiterate and does not speak English, so he feels that his school is trying to usurp her authority. Caesar's mother is a heroin addict who spends decades in prison for murder, so he takes out his anger through violence toward other students. Primo and Caesar's behavior causes the school system to treat them as criminals, which leads them to act out even more.

In Chapter 6, Bourgois further demonstrates how El Barrio's dangerous environment encourages violent street culture and a toxic dynamic between men and women. Candy, Bourgois's closest female friend in El Barrio, shows how male-on-female abuse is normalized in the neighborhood. She is beaten by her father throughout her childhood and gang-raped by her boyfriend Felix and his friends. Soon after, Felix gets Candy pregnant and convinces her to marry him. For the next two decades, he brutally beats her almost daily, causing her to miscarry five times. But Candy does not see this as unusual—she blames herself up until she catches Felix sleeping with her sister and shoots him in outrage. When Felix goes to jail, he leaves Candy alone with five children and no money, so she begins selling drugs. By taking on this masculine persona, she in turn becomes one of the most respected figures on East Harlem's streets.

In Chapter 7, Bourgois turns to El Barrio's children, who are inevitably exposed to drugs and violence from a young age. Bourgois watches many of his young neighbors grow up to be drug dealers. Fathers are seen as having a "right to abandon" their families. This puts single mothers in a double-bind: they are seen as neglecting their children when they work, but freeloaders when they do not. And, in the public eye, they are associated with the crack epidemic far more than men, due to the perception that their working lifestyle means that they are neglecting and corrupting their children. Observing how the drug epidemic splinters families and damages young children, Bourgois convinces Primo to stop selling crack to pregnant women.

In Chapter 8, Bourgois delves deeper in how fathers in El Barrio justify their neglect. He argues that these men actually do more harm to their families when they are present than when they are absent, since most of them are violent. Caesar and Primo often take pride in ignoring their children, beating their girlfriends, and having sex with as many women as possible, though they hate their own fathers for the same behavior. At other times, they idolize nuclear families and wish they could be role models for their children. Yet Caesar and Primo inevitably cycle through short-lived, abusive relationships and end up abandoning their partners and children. This toxic cycle ensures that women in El Barrio learn never to trust or rely upon men.

In the book's conclusion, Bourgois considers what measures could be taken to address the social problems he encountered during his research. He views the drug trade as a mere symptom of American economic and racial apartheid, since the drug epidemic ultimately becomes mainstream white society's justification for declaring the urban poor and minorities as "undeserving" of dignified work and a middle-class life. State policies also make the problem an economic one, since people incur higher taxes and reduced eligibility for government assistance when they enter the legal workforce. Bourgois argues that drug decriminalization, improved working conditions, and livable wages would give inner-city residents the incentive to transition out of the underground economy.

In Search of Respect closes with two epilogues that trace Bourgois's friends' lives up to 1995 and 2003. Many of them remain involved with drugs and some end up in jail; others manage to transition into sobriety and conventional work, with a select few even moving out of East Harlem. Most notably, by 1995, Primo gets sober and transitions into the legal market, but still has to deal with unfair treatment at work and struggles in his personal life. By 2003, Primo "occasionally sniff[s] heroin," but is in the process of securing stable, respectable work as a self-employed contractor. Bourgois notes that the government has become harsher about everything—he himself gets ticketed for public intoxication and sees the overloaded and hopelessly inefficient court system firsthand when he flies back to New York to pay his $10 fine. The book ends on an ambivalent note—though Primo has come a long way, Bourgois's frustration with the legal system suggests that he is still pessimistic about the systemic barriers that stand in the way of people improving their lives.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Philippe Bourgois – A prominent American anthropologist best known for his studies of inner-city America, including *In Search of Respect*, which is based on his ethnographic fieldwork in East Harlem, where he lived, hung out at crackhouses, and befriended crack addicts and dealers from 1985-1990. Throughout the book, he struggles to balance his sympathy for the people he researches with a recognition of those people's counterproductive, harmful, and at times shockingly violent behavior. He also strives to maintain an objective perspective as a social scientist while also trying to mitigate the damage his subjects inflict on themselves and one another, for instance by trying to persuade dealers not to sell crack to pregnant women and trying to help his friends Primo and Caesar find work. Bourgois reflects throughout the book on his position as a

white man—usually the only white person around—in El Barrio. This leads many of the neighborhood's residents to grow suspicious of him, thinking he is an obvious undercover cop, or an exceptionally reckless crack addict. In the decades after his research, he continues to visit East Harlem, and especially Primo.

Primo – Bourgois's "closest friend on the streets" of East Harlem, the dealer who runs Ray's Game Room crackhouse, and, arguably, the figure at the center of the book. Primo is Luis and Felix's cousin, and Maria and Candy's boyfriend at different times. In his 20s, Primo struggles to find direction in his life: he makes little more than minimum wage selling crack but fails in all his attempts to switch to legal employment. He gets fired from one job when he falls asleep after using crack all night and loses another because he cannot adapt to mainstream office culture, which he considers emasculating (especially because his boss, Gloria, is a white woman). He is, in short, usually the last to be hired and the first to be fired. From his earliest days in school, he has been rejected by the dominant culture and turned to crime and street culture to try and exact revenge (his first source of income was stealing rich people's car radios, and he soon turned to burglarizing apartments). At the least, his job *dealing* crack at the Game Room gives him the stability he needs to quit *smoking* crack. He employs Benzie and Caesar as lookouts, out of a mixture of self-identification (they are struggling with addiction, like Primo used to) and expedience (because he can pay them in crack instead of cash, or give them less than he promises without them noticing). But when he is high and drunk, Primo admits that he is deeply anxious about his future and that drugs are ruining his life. Eventually, Ray cuts Primo's hours and wages, leading Primo to ramp up these problematic behaviors and further infuriate his long-suffering mother. He also has a son, Papito, with his ex-girlfriend Sandra, whom he has essentially abandoned. Primo's journey epitomizes both the gender politics of East Harlem and the double-bind that its residents are forced into by American politics, history, and cultural norms: they are shut out of the legal economy, which is their only chance of escaping the violence and poverty that surrounds them.

Ray – The original leader of the network of dealers and crackhouses that Bourgois studies. He offers Bourgois both access to this world and protection from its dangers. They build a "close and privileged relationship," but Bourgois accidentally threatens it when he unintentionally reveals in front of a large group of Ray's employees that Ray cannot read, an episode he discusses at the beginning of the book to demonstrate the street culture of machismo and violence that runs East Harlem's underground economy. Ray is exceptionally adept in this street culture—he has led his network since he and Luis taught Primo to steal car radios as a child, he carefully uses violence and gestures of friendship to control his employees, and he makes greater and greater profits through the years. Eventually, he even tries to open a real legal business. But this is where his lack of cultural capital gets in the way: unable to do the necessary paperwork, organize inspections, or pass city regulations, his attempted ventures—a laundromat, a bodega, and a social club—all fail. At the end of the book, he is ultimately successful when he uses his drug money to purchase and renovate abandoned buildings, and thereby turns himself into a landlord.

Luis – Ray's oldest friend and Felix's cousin. Luis is a dealer and exceptionally violent crack addict who is married to Wanda before his long stint in jail—although he actually has 12 children with four different women, none of whom he ever sees. He abuses his wife Wanda and eventually ends up in prison. When he gets released, surprisingly, he quits crack and takes on legal (if informal) work alongside his cousin Primo.

Caesar – One of Bourgois's most important confidants in El Barrio, aside Primo, who is Caesar's best friend and employer. A violent and unstable crack addict, Caesar nevertheless ends up working at the Game Room when Primo needs a new lookout. He tends to spend his wages on intense crack binges, but otherwise, he usually shows up for work. When high, he tends to go on lengthy rants about topics ranging from his hatred for Ray and African Americans to his love for crack and pride in being irresponsible and "hassling customers." Primo continually tinkers with Caesar's pay—when, how much, and whether in crack or cash—in an attempt to control him, but this never quite works. Like Primo, Caesar has difficulty finding legal work—not only does he also lack the necessary cultural capital, but he also remains addicted to crack. He tells Bourgois about suffering abuse when growing up alongside his cousin Eddie, especially at the hands of his grandmother, which led him to in turn violently attack animals, his teachers, and other students, as well as rape girls at school. In adulthood, he continues to take pride in the violence he commits, even though he recognizes its horrible toll: his own sister was murdered, and he sometimes has emotional breakdowns when he remembers this fact. Although he is dating and has children with Carmen, he sleeps with as many women as possible. By the end of the book, he has quit dealing drugs—but still uses them—and continues to live with Carmen and her children, whom he abuses badly.

Candy – Wife to Felix and mother of Junior and Jackie, Candy is the only woman Bourgois truly befriends during his time in El Barrio and becomes his main source for his writings on gender and family. She lives in fear and horror for many years, at the hands of her father and then her husband, who both beat her severely and frequently. In fact, Felix and a group of his friends gang-rape her in their teens (which is not unusual in East Harlem) and later Felix gets her pregnant and marries her. She never saw Felix's years of abuse as wrong, given that she grew up expecting the same from her father. However, when she finally gets fed up with Felix's infidelity and shoots him—on top of all his abuse, he has slept with her sister twice—those around

Candy interpret her behavior as an "ataque de nervios." Felix soon goes to prison and, after some suicide attempts and stints in psychiatric hospitals, Candy undergoes a complete transformation: needing money for her children and finally free of Felix's threats, she becomes one of East Harlem's most respected crack dealers, helps other women (like Wanda) cope with their abusive partners, and starts sleeping with multiple men, including Primo. In a sense, she inverts the gender roles that always confined her, performing masculinity "better" than her husband ever could. However, Bourgois notes that she remains stuck under patriarchy, both because she continues to blame women when their husbands mistreat them and because she "follow[s] in [Felix's] footsteps: selling drugs, neglecting her children, and flaunting her sexual conquests." Instead of freeing herself from patriarchy's script of masculinity, she simply adopts it. This in turn leads those around her to criticize her for being an irresponsible mother (even though she is selling drugs for her children's sake, and Felix was always a far worse parent). She eventually gets arrested, but Ray bails her out and the charges get dropped. When Felix gets out of jail, they repair their relationship and Candy takes on legal work, although she continues getting welfare under a different social security number.

Felix – One of Ray's oldest friends, Primo's cousin, Candy's abusive husband, Esperanza and Luis's brother, and the founder of the Game Room. He ignores the business side of the Game Room, preferring to build up his ego and sleep with teenaged addicts in exchange for crack. When Felix ends up in jail, Candy sells the crackhouse to Ray, which is how Primo ends up running it. He meets Candy when they are teenagers, and then gang-rapes her, gets her pregnant, and marries her. For years, he beats her severely almost every day, trying to force her to remain dependent on him in order to solidify his position as the head of the household. Twice, Candy finds him sleeping with her sister and attacks him—the second time, fed up with his years of abuse and infidelity, she shoots him. While Felix is in jail, Candy becomes one of East Harlem's most respected dealers, doing his job better than he ever could. However, during this time, their children Junior and Jackie get involved in the darkest aspects of street culture. After Felix gets out of prison, he turns himself around: he starts treating Candy with respect, and he begins working in off-the-books construction jobs. His story exemplifies the paradox of gender relations in El Barrio—Bourgois suggests that the men of El Barrio violently insist on leading their households even though women are the only ones who do anything in the household, due to men's irresponsibility and inability to find stable work. For Bourgois, this is a product of traditional Puerto Rican rural gender ideology struggling to adapt to the urban environment and service-oriented labor market of New York.

Benzie – One of Primo's lookouts (a nickname for Benito), who is so cruel to the Game Room's customers that Primo fires him and replaces him with Caesar. Benzie actually has a legal job maintaining boats, which he quits to work at the Game Room and spend more time using crack. Nevertheless, during his time at the Game Room, Benzie manages to quit crack, and after leaving the Game Room he gets a new job in food preparation, which allows him to leave East Harlem and move to the suburbs. He eventually wins a lawsuit and uses the money to start an underground marijuana business.

Carmen – Caesar's girlfriend and Maria's sister (not to be confused with Bourgois's briefly mentioned neighbor who is also named Carmen). Carmen and Caesar stay together much longer than Primo and Maria do, although Caesar frequently beats Carmen and her two children from a previous relationship. She eventually forces him to go to rehab, after which he resumes living with her and using crack.

Maria – Primo's girlfriend and sister to Carmen (Caesar's girlfriend). When she gets pregnant, she is thrilled because it gives her "a romantic escape," something to care and hope for when her life is otherwise miserable. She eventually kicks Primo out of her apartment when he cheats on her, although they maintain a good relationship in the years after—he sends her child support money and tries to support her and their son when she moves to Connecticut with Carmen and Caesar.

Willie – A lookout at the Game Room, crack user, and close friend of Primo's. He is the only person in Ray and Primo's network who graduates high school, and he spends some time working for the military afterwards. Despite this experience, he has difficulty finding respectable legal work—for instance, as an animal-lover, he signs up for a job with the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and then discovers that this job involves collecting the corpses of animals who have been euthanized. Unable to find other work, he turns to the underground economy, although by the time of Bourgois's second Epilogue in 2003, he has rejoined the military and moved to the suburbs.

Primo's Mother – A woman who grows up in a small village on a Puerto Rican plantation and then moves to New York City, where she lives in a housing project in El Barrio and sews garments for an off-the-books garment subcontractor. She laments her sense of alienation in New York, especially due to her informal work and the language barrier she faces, while reminiscing nostalgically about the sense of community she always found in Puerto Rico. She recognizes that, as a woman, she has more autonomy in New York, but also that this shift in gender roles makes Nuyorican men overcompensate in an attempt to hold on to their traditional role as a patriarch. She is deeply disappointed by her son Primo's laziness and refusal to get a conventional job or an apartment of his own. At the end of the book, she grows terminally ill.

Gloria – Primo's white liberal boss at the magazine where he briefly works in the mail room. She is worried about him answering the phone or interacting with customers because of

his accent, which shows how racism is embedded in the dominant corporate culture—something that makes it even harder for inner-city residents and people from minority groups to break into the legal economy. Bourgois sees some of her actions—like her advice that Primo go back to school and her strict instructions about how to carry out tasks—as well-intentioned attempts to help Primo succeed in the office. However, given his frame of reference based in street culture, Primo rejects Gloria's behavior as insulting to his masculinity, personally affronting, and even flirtatious.

Papito – Primo and his ex-girlfriend Sandra's young son (not to be confused with a dealer also named Papito who is briefly mentioned in Chapter 5). He loves and is always thrilled to see his father, who was briefly a caring and dedicated father, until his night shift threw off his schedule and he got more and more involved with drugs. However, Primo continually disappoints Papito, like when he skips Papito's birthday after spending his money on drugs instead of a birthday present.

Little Pete – Another one of Ray's dealers, and one of Primo's close friends. Bourgois interviews him and Primo about their families, and Little Pete admits he is an absent and unsupportive father, but that he avoided drugs during the brief time he lived with his girlfriend and son. After Bourgois's research, Little Pete gets shot, arrested for selling crack, and then sent to prison.

Junior – Felix and Candy's son, and Jackie's brother. During his research, Bourgois watches Junior switch from wanting to become a police officer to transporting drugs and working as a lookout for the Game Room. By the time of the book's publication, he is 20 years old, with two children and a year in prison under his belt.

Wanda – Luis's wife, whom he abuses brutally and who falls deep into addiction after Luis goes to jail. This leads Wanda and Luis to lose their children, whom Felix and Candy subsequently adopt. She internalizes blame for Luis's actions, and suggests that women's behavior is responsible for men's abuse in general. However, she later divorces Luis while he is in prison. As of Bourgois's 2003 Epilogue, Wanda is "exchanging sex for crack under the elevated railroad tracks on Park Avenue."

Tony – A dealer who works at the Game Room. When Ray becomes suspicious of Primo and Caesar's behavior, he hires Tony to run the Game Room part time and cuts Primo's hours. Tony and Primo hate each other, and Ray cuts both of their salaries, knowing they will not work together to try and get their money back. At the end of the book, Tony remains a dealer in the neighborhood, although he has risen up to manage other lower-level dealers.

Abraham – An elderly, one-eyed, alcoholic man whom Primo "adopts" as a surrogate grandfather and hires to work at the Game Room. Abraham cleans the Game Room and pretends to be senile and collect quarters from the game machines when the police show up, in order to dissuade them from investigating the crackhouse. He dies between the end of Bourgois's fieldwork and the book's publication.

Esperanza – Felix's sister, whom Bourgois repeatedly interviews for the 2003 Epilogue to his book. She struggles with how to address the neighbors' severe child abuse and tells Bourgois that the police are trying to use his book to manipulate her son, who is incarcerated and never actually appears in the book, into confessing to a crime.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Jackie – Felix and Candy's daughter, and Junior's sister. At age 13, her boyfriend and some of his friends kidnap and gang-rape her. The men in Jackie's family have little sympathy for her. According to Bourgois, this exemplifies the depth of patriarchy and normalization of violence in El Barrio.

Eddie – Primo's cousin, who went to school with him and experienced similarly adverse conditions there, in addition to abuse from his grandmother. In adulthood, he becomes a bus driver.

TERMS

East Harlem (El Barrio) – The neighborhood where **Philippe Bourgois** lived and conducted his research for *In Search of Respect* in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Located in Upper Manhattan, East Harlem (called "El Barrio" by many of its Latinx, especially Puerto Rican, residents) includes everything north and east of 96th street and 5th Avenue. It has been Manhattan's poorest and most crime-ridden neighborhood for many decades and gone through successive waves of immigration, most significantly Italians in the early 20th century and Puerto Ricans in the decades afterward. During Bourgois's research, the neighborhood becomes a center of the crack cocaine trade in New York. The people Bourgois befriends and studies are largely New York-born and raised descendants of parents who migrated from Puerto Rico to East Harlem.

Ethnography – Anthropology's principal method, a form of long-term intensive qualitative research in a particular place, among a particular group of people. The kind of writing produced out of ethnographic research (like **Bourgois**'s book) is also called an "ethnography."

Crackhouse – A building, residence, or storefront where crack is sold and used. **Bourgois** lives near and studies two that **Ray** owns: the Game Room, on his block, and the nearby La Farmacia.

Crack – A smokable form of cocaine, often heavily diluted or adulterated with other substances, that is cheaper because of its low cocaine content but stronger and shorter-lasting

because it is smoked rather than snorted. Crack arrives in and takes over the East Harlem drug scene during the late 1980s, and virtually all the people **Bourgois** profiles in his book are addicted to it or buy and sell it.

Powder Cocaine – The ordinary version of cocaine, a strong stimulant drug, which is usually taken by insufflation (snorting) into the nose. While it is the same substance as crack, it is usually slower-acting and more expensive, and so perceived as less dangerous. **Primo**, for instance, considers it a positive turn of events when he gives up smoking crack and begins snorting power cocaine and heroin instead.

Heroin – An opioid drug commonly used recreationally, which can lead to severe addiction, especially among those who inject it. **Primo** and **Caesar** frequently snort powdered heroin, often as speedball in combination with powder cocaine. In his preface to the book's second edition, Bourgois notes that heroin has become more popular and crack less so in the decade following his initial research.

Marijuana – A smokable drug derived from the cannabis plant that is much more pervasive, but much less dangerous and addictive, than cocaine, crack, or heroin. Although it is now legal and regulated in much of the United States, it was uniformly illegal at the time of **Bourgois**'s research, and marijuana arrests imperiled many people in El Barrio. The author notes that many drug dealers and users switched from marijuana to cocaine, crack, and heroin in the mid-1980s because the United States Drug Enforcement Administration stepped up its search for traffickers, and those three drugs are much stronger and more valuable per unit of weight than marijuana.

Speedball – A combination of powder cocaine and heroin, usually snorted or injected, that merges the cocaine's strong stimulant effect with the heroin's strong depressant effect. Because it combines these opposite effects, speedball can be particularly dangerous, much more so than either of its components taken alone. **Primo** and **Caesar** frequently snort speedballs during their conversations with **Bourgois**, who notes that they are often overtaken by alternating rushes of energy (from cocaine) and relaxation (from heroin).

The Underground Economy – The off-the-books work, markets, and economic practices through which many East Harlem residents make a living. In fact, such work is the only way for them to do so, since most would not be able to survive in Manhattan on their officially reported incomes. **Bourgois**'s initial goal is to study the underground economy, which during the period of his research turns out to revolve around crack sales. But underground economic activity also includes, for instance, bartending and construction and garment subcontracting work.

Street Culture – The distinct "beliefs, symbols, modes of interaction, values, and ideologies" of inner-city residents that emerge in opposition to, and as an alternative to, the mainstream culture that excludes people like Nuyoricans in East Harlem. Based in concepts of masculine power over women, public displays of ability and prowess, entrepreneurship, and social hierarchy, street culture often stresses individual success and responsibility. However, it also often takes an explicit political stance against the dominant culture that uses these same concepts to exclude inner-city residents from the formal economy and leads people to act in ways that actually undermine their autonomy. This is **Bourgois**'s fundamental insight about street culture: by embracing it, the people he meets fracture their families through involvement with drugs and violence, sacrifice the ability to succeed in the "upper-middle-class white world" and way of thinking that run the contemporary American economy, and lose respect from the public.

Positivism – In the social sciences, a now-unpopular theoretical approach that tries to explain social and cultural phenomena in terms of predictable, underlying laws, and fundamentally believes that objective, often quantitative data can be used to uncover these laws. **Philippe Bourgois** rejects this approach in his study of East Harlem, where official statistics fall far short of describing reality, and only qualitative research can explain what motivates people to work in the underground economy.

Pornography of Violence – A term commonly used in anthropology to describe literary, artistic, or scholarly work that sensationalizes violence, thereby exploiting the people it depicts for the sake of its audience's enjoyment. In his Introduction, **Philippe Bourgois** struggles with how to write about the violence that he witnesses without either minimizing its severity or falling into this "pornographic" mode of narration that would prevent the reader from empathizing with the people he researches.

Inner City – A term that, while literally referring to the core of an urban area, in the United States is usually a euphemism for a low-income urban area occupied primarily by people of color (especially African American and Latinx people). From this euphemistic usage, it became a formal term for such areas in the social sciences. El Barrio is an example of an inner-city area, although one with an extreme version of the issues usually associated with inner cities.

Lookout – A low-level crackhouse employee who is responsible for watching out for police and potentially violent customers or situations. At the Game Room, most of the lookouts **Primo** hires are crack addicts whom he knows he can pay in drugs and believes he can more or less rely on—however, all but **Caesar** prove too unstable and get fired.

Nuyorican – A portmanteau combining the words "New York" and "Puerto Rican," which refers to the large community of Puerto Rican-descended people who live or have roots in New York City. Most of the people **Bourgois** studies are Nuyoricans.

Cultural Capital – A sociological term for the knowledge,

habits, and style that are considered valuable and associated with the upper-middle and upper classes in Western societies—and therefore with people's ability to join these classes. According to **Bourgois**, one of the reasons East Harlem residents have so much trouble in the formal economy is because they never learn how white people expect them to act—for instance, **Primo** hates his boss **Gloria** because she tells him what to do, and **Candy** shows up to court in a red bodysuit, infuriating the judge, when her attorney tells her to dress up for her appearance.

Speakeasy – An illicit, secret, or unlicensed bar. These were common during alcohol Prohibition in the United States, and the Game Room used to be one.

The Game Room – The crackhouse on **Philippe Bourgois**'s block in East Harlem, and the primary site where he conducts his research on the crack trade. **Ray** owns the Game Room, but **Primo** runs it and employs **Caesar** as a lookout and **Abraham** to clean and ward off police by pretending to be senile. The Game Room appears to be a small arcade—but its pinball machine is actually full of crack, which Primo sells to the various customers who flow in and out. Bourgois notes that it is far from an ideal work environment: it has neither air conditioning nor heating, smells horrible, and only has a few small, decrepit stools to sit on.

La Farmacia – **Ray**'s other, more profitable crackhouse, besides the Game Room. La Farmacia's name is Spanish for "the pharmacy," as it really is a one-stop-shop for any imaginable kind of drug. Located in the building where Ray grew up, which has since become completely abandoned, La Farmacia is next to and linked to the Social Club (an illicit bar), which Ray also runs.

Bodega – A Spanish word with many meanings that, in New York, specifically refers to a corner grocery store that sells simple food and household items, as well as (in El Barrio) drug paraphernalia.

FIRE Sector – An acronym for Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate, the industries that take over New York's economy after the decline of the manufacturing industry. As the parents of most of **Bourgois**'s Nuyorican subjects worked manufacturing jobs, the shift to FIRE means they are forced to transfer to service work that requires a different set of skills and kind of cultural capital.

Ataque de Nervios – Spanish for "attack of nerves," a term for a sudden emotional outburst common among El Barrio women. As a gendered, culturally bound term, "ataque de nervios" signifies that retaliation against an abusive partner or unfulfilling home life is acceptable for women within certain parameters. For instance, when **Candy** shoots her abusive, cheating husband **Felix**, her family explains her behavior as an "ataque de nervios" and accordingly does not blame her for it.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Philippe Bourgois's *In Search of Respect* is the result of the years-long intensive ethnographic research the author conducted in order to "build an alternative, critical understanding of the U.S. inner city." From 1985-1990, a period now retrospectively considered the beginning of the "crack epidemic," Bourgois moved to El Barrio, or East Harlem, a largely impoverished and historically Puerto Rican neighborhood of his native New York City. He chooses ethnography because the phenomena he wants to study are illegal and therefore resistant to being known through official or general statistics: to understand El Barrio's crackhouses, underground economy, and street culture, Bourgois must win, sustain, and respect people's trust as a friend and confidant. Although many see Bourgois as bravely taking on a dangerous project, his research is risky not because he might get hurt in El Barrio—this assumption is actually part and parcel of the racism he is trying to combat. Rather, the danger he must avoid lies in both the practice and the reception of ethnography: anthropologists can easily abuse the trust they build, and the public can easily misinterpret his research, using it to either sensationalize people's suffering or portray those people as evil and unworthy of help.

Bourgois chooses a qualitative ethnographic methodology to address the failures of conventional quantitative studies in American inner-city environments. He notes that official statistics undercount inner-city residents, since many lack official addresses, live in illegally overcrowded apartments, or fear contact with the government. And since 54% of the households surrounding his own report no official income (yet still manage to survive), official surveys clearly do not show what inner-city people really do for work. Bourgois succinctly points out the absurdity of conventional, quantitative research on the underground economy when he asks, "how can we expect someone who specializes in mugging elderly persons to provide us with accurate data on his or her income-generating strategies?"

Accordingly, Bourgois realizes that the only way to really understand Americans who live in inner cities and participate in the underground economy is to gain their trust, which his ethnographic participant-observation method allows him to do. Rather than simply showing up unannounced to ask questions,

Bourgois moves into the neighborhood and spends most of his nights hanging out with crack dealers. Initially, his acquaintances believe he is an undercover cop, drug addict, or "dirty sexual pervert." But he works hard to win their trust and eventually grows close to them, even making lifelong friends like Primo. These personal connections also create ethical dilemmas for Bourgois, who must choose between helping his friends and remaining as objective as possible. But, since he rejects the positivist conception of a neutral researcher, he usually chooses the former. He helps his friends transition to legal work and quit drugs, for instance, and convinces them not to sell crack to pregnant women. Bourgois's research method gives him access but also accountability to his subjects: his life becomes intertwined with theirs.

Through his fieldwork, however Bourgois grows critical of his discipline (anthropology) and its method (ethnography), which he thinks can badly distort the truth. First, he struggles with the problem of reflexivity: while anthropologists must acknowledge their privilege, this often becomes "profoundly elitist" and "narcissistic." While he sees how his whiteness and class status affect the data he is capable of gathering, he does not let this fact obstruct the central purpose of his research: to understand his subjects' suffering and possible measures to resolve it. Bourgois also notes that anthropologists often ignore data that does not fit with their picture. In the 1980s and 1990s, although far less so today, anthropologists tried to show the "order and community" in the places they study (but ignored marginal behavior) and picked "exotic" field sites (instead of their own homeplaces). Bourgois breaks with both of these tendencies: he tries to show how a marginal culture develops in New York City, the place where he grew up. Finally, Bourgois critiques anthropologists' tendency to get caught up in intellectual debates, using people's life stories as evidence for academic theories, while avoiding those people's suffering and concrete needs. In fact, Bourgois's friends in East Harlem simply assume that this is his goal: when he tells them he wants "to give something back to the community," they assume he is lying and really just trying to write "a best seller" for money and fame.

Bourgois sees anthropological research as dangerous not only because it *relies on* interpretation, but also because it is *open to* interpretation from its readers. This is especially true when dealing with a topic as politically sensitive as American inner-city poverty. For instance, in his 1966 study of El Barrio, *La Vida*, the well-intentioned Oscar Lewis proposed that a "culture of poverty" is responsible for intergenerational suffering. Ever since, Bourgois explains, conservatives have reinterpreted this theory to argue that poor people choose their own poverty, are to blame for it, and therefore are "unworthy" of assistance. These voices use Lewis's book to fight against the precise solutions he advocated, and Bourgois is afraid that people will do the same thing with his book. He therefore explicitly preempts this kind of interpretation, explaining that he aims to show both the structural causes of his friends' suffering and the self-destructive effects of their choices. Bourgois must neither gloss over ignore inner-city residents' suffering, nor sensationalize it so much that his book becomes a "pornography of violence" read for enjoyment or shock value.

Bourgois's book thus represents a delicate balancing act: he wants to truly explain the conditions of inner-city America, which requires him to choose a risky qualitive method. To do justice to his crack-using and -dealing subjects, he must use their stories to start a conversation about the United States' responsibility for the conditions of its inner cities and capacity to improve them. But, by sharing these stories, he risks helping the public gawk at and morally reprimand the poor, a tendency that originally contributed to the failed policies that multiplied El Barrio residents' suffering.

THE CRACK TRADE AND THE UNDERGROUND ECONOMY

Bourgois's initial motivation for studying El Barrio was his desire to understand what he calls the underground economy: the semi-legal and outright illegal industries that dominate El Barrio's streets, and in which many of its residents participate at one time or another in their lives. While the public tends to see drug dealing as a bad choice made by malicious people, Bourgois shows that it is in fact the natural option for youth growing up in El Barrio: not only is it the highest paying job available, but it is actually more dignified than the legal work residents can find, and it is so common on the street that children are exposed to it from an early age. Bourgois accordingly shows that, despite the enormous risks associated with drug dealing, it is actually a rational choice for many El Barrio residents, and that the best ways to eliminate the dangers of drug dealing are to decriminalize drugs and create viable options in the legal economy.

Bourgois argues that the crack trade is fundamentally like any other business, "overwhelmingly routine and tedious" except for the constant danger surrounding it. The best way to make money as a crack dealer, after all, is making consistent sales to regular customers, like in any other sales job. Accordingly, the people who do the best in East Harlem—like Ray and Primo—are quite business savvy. Ray is a "brilliant labor relations manager" and controls his displays of affection, use of violence, and family relations in order to maintain a tight grip over his network. He makes the Game Room extraordinarily profitable using the same methods as any other shrewd businessman: he turns his workers against one another, fires the more erratic lookouts, and even decides to keep Bourgois around because his white face dissuades potential robbers. The decisions about who to keep around, then, are fundamentally about personnel management. This is all why, to Bourgois, crack dealers are in fact exemplars of the American economic spirit:

they are self-reliant, motivated, profit-seeking entrepreneurs, and their business operates on the same principles as the legal economy.

According to Bourgois, people become crack dealers not because they turn their back on mainstream society, but because mainstream society has turned its back on them: they chose the underground economy because they cannot find and retain dignified employment. Bourgois does the math and determines that the average dealer makes $7-8 an hour—by no means the windfall of cash most people associate with drug dealing. Even though he is a successful dealer, Primo continues to use his mother and girlfriend's food stamps, which betrays that he is scarcely making a living. In an effort to improve their lot, he and Caesar talk constantly about their desire for "legit" jobs. The problem is simply that they consistently end up in the lowest-level entry level jobs, with little autonomy or chance of ever advancing. Nevertheless, many well-intentioned people in the community try to push El Barrio residents toward bottom-level service work, "ripping their self-esteem apart [...] to build them back up with an epiphanic realization that they want to find jobs as security guards, messengers, and data-input clerks." Besides these programs' dishonesty about what makes a dignified life, they are often straightforward scams: at one point, Primo's mother signs him up for a program that charges the family $2400 more than initially promised. While all of the people Bourgois interview have engaged in legal employment to some extent during their lives, then, this work is usually for minimum wage and almost always undignified. For instance, Willie loves animals, so he signs up to work at a shelter—but ends up having to collect the corpses of animals who have been euthanized. Given the horrible jobs they are limited to, the people Bourgois befriends quit and return to illegal work out of a "refusal to be exploited in the legal labor market." They choose to deal crack, in other words, because it truly is their best job prospect.

The difficulty in bridging the underground and legal economies also hinges on El Barrio residents' illiteracy in the ways and codes of the formal economy, and their legal employers' illiteracy in street culture. Even though Ray and Primo are excellent crack dealers, they completely fail in the legal economy because they lack "cultural capital": the knowledge, practices, and assumptions of the mainstream society. Accordingly, Ray's legal businesses fail because he does not know how to get permits or pass inspections. Primo tries to go above and beyond in his job by answering the phones and throwing out out cluttered files he is asked to organize. He thinks he is helping, but people recoil when they hear his Nuyorican accent on the phone and he ends up throwing away important documents, so ultimately gets fired for these behaviors. At the end of the book, however, Ray finally does find a way into the legal economy: he buys abandoned buildings and becomes a landlord. In the vast majority of situations, however, underground workers' lack of cultural capital makes it very difficult for them to move into the mainstream culture that is dominated by "upper-middle-class white" concepts of respectability, trustworthiness, and appropriate behavior.

For Bourgois, El Barrio's flourishing underground economy is a sign of its residents' economic isolation and cultural rejection from the mainstream white world. While they do consciously choose their illegal, dangerous, and socially counterproductive jobs, they do this not because they are sadists or psychopaths, but rather simply because their social contexts genuinely leave them no other option. The solution to the growth of the drug trade and its concomitant violence in East Harlem is therefore, for Bourgois, not to criminalize and persecute drugs, but rather to offer the people involved with them alternative paths to financially stable, socially respectable work with growth potential. This requires investments in education and better communication between dominant and street cultures, rather than efforts to make inner-city residents embrace their position at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder.

POVERTY, HISTORY, AND PUBLIC POLICY

Although many Americans are quick to blame poverty on a lack of effort or moral fortitude, Bourgois argues that historical factors and institutional failures are the primary sources of El Barrio's poverty and its residents' lack of opportunities. Yet the common American narrative tying personal responsibility to economic outcomes in fact drives much of the mistaken policy that entrenches and multiplies poverty in the American inner city. Accordingly, Bourgois attempts to combat this narrative, revealing the true and far more complex factors that lead to urban poverty, without suggesting that the people he interviews are anything less than fully responsible for the violence and suffering they create.

Bourgois suggests that El Barrio's endemic poverty is the product of a number of intersecting historical factors. El Barrio has virtually always been an impoverished neighborhood, except for a short phase in the 1700s-1800s when it served as a "countryside retreat for wealthy New Yorkers." Since then, one group of immigrants after another have moved to the neighborhood for its proximity to their low-wage jobs, and each group of such immigrants has turned against the next—German and Irish immigrants discriminated against Jews, who discriminated against Italians, who now discriminate against Puerto Ricans, who are beginning to discriminate against Mexicans during the period of Bourgois's research. In the mid-20th century, Puerto Rican drug gangs begin taking control over the neighborhood, which had long served as an Italian mafia stronghold.

Similarly, Bourgois's Nuyorican subjects are conditioned by their history: their families have been subjugated and displaced for generations. First enslaved by the Spanish, and then forced

to work on rural plantations that were taken over by the United States, the ancestors of the novel's protagonists moved to New York to escape adverse economic conditions in Puerto Rico but ended up not much better off, as vilified manufacturing sector workers. Nevertheless, these displaced older generations of Puerto Ricans fared better than their children, who have to face the evaporation of East Harlem's manufacturing sector as such work is outsourced internationally. They are instead forced to work in non-union, socially subservient service positions in "FIRE" (Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate).

Nevertheless, Bourgois argues, American politics does not much care about history—it prefers to treat poverty as an individual rather than systematic problem, one that individuals are responsible for resolving on their own rather than one that relates to the structure of society as a whole. Bourgois by no means wants to argue that the people he studies should not be morally blamed for choosing to deal and use drugs, abuse their families, and so on. Rather, he wants to show that these decisions are conditioned by social factors, which can be transformed by government policies. In short, while American "common sense" says that people's personal failures cause their poverty, Bourgois argues that poverty is the root cause of personal failure. However, policy remains married to the belief in personal responsibility, and therefore a sense that there is something unfair about providing opportunities to the poor. Even the people Bourgois studies internalize this belief. For instance, Primo firmly believes that "if I have a problem it's because I brought it upon myself," even though he and those around him realize that those born into more favorable circumstances share none of their problems. As a result, when he has trouble finding work—albeit during an economic recession—Primo blames himself and falls into a deep depression, which leads him to *stop* looking for the work he needs. In Primo's case, as in many others, personal failures stem from poverty, not the other way around.

As a result of the assumption that poor people are responsible for both their own poverty (due to moral failure) and getting themselves out of poverty (through hard work in the respectable legal economy), the policies aimed at the poor actually end up entrenching rather than helping those who are impoverished. The welfare system, for instance, punishes those who seek to switch over to legal work. One of Bourgois's closest friends in El Barrio, Candy, keeps two social security numbers so she can work without losing her welfare, and when Primo starts sending child support money to his ex-girlfriend, it does not increase his income because the amount he sends is deducted from her welfare payments. Tax policy punishes the poor, too: Primo prefers to work illegally because, when he does get a legal paycheck, the government comes after him for back taxes. The state evicts whole families from apartments when any single family member commits a crime, punishing the innocent and destabilizing communities. But most of all, growing up in El Barrio means learning to see crime and delinquency as normal. Crime is everywhere on the streets, and teachers treat students as potential criminals from a young age, "unconsciously process[ing] subliminal class and cultural messages to hierarchize their students." As children, people like Primo and Caesar reject school—along with its potential to integrate them into mainstream society—because it rejects them. While schools fail, prisons multiply, and have become the primary institution caring for African-American and Latinx youth in the years since Bourgois's research. Such policies not only prevent many people from participating in the legal economy (by keeping them in prison and making it harder for them to get work after release), but also shatter their families in the process and waste government resources that could be better spent economically supporting those trying to escape poverty.

In Bourgois's eyes, "middle-class standards of individual freedom" simply should not be the priority for individuals surrounded by impoverished family and community contexts. While Bourgois insists repeatedly that he refuses to ignore his subjects' responsibility for the damage and crimes they commit, he also believes that it is necessary to demystify the historical and institutional factors that sustain poverty in neighborhoods like El Barrio. This, he argues, can give Americans a clear picture of the solution they have overlooked for too long: providing meaningful poverty relief programs, rather than allowing them to continue eroding, as they have for decades.

STREET CULTURE AND DRUG USE

Bourgois notes that life in El Barrio is not structured around the cultural norms that prevail in the rest of the United States, but rather follows a distinct "street culture" developed in opposition to the mainstream. He defines this culture as a system of "beliefs, symbols, modes of interaction, values, and ideologies" within which El Barrio residents can seek the dignity and respect denied to them in society at large. Indeed, the drug dealers Bourgois befriends are seeking this kind of status within their communities—hence the book's name, *In Search of Respect*—but, in doing so, actually undermine themselves, their communities, and their chance to succeed in the dominant culture. For Bourgois, then, street culture epitomizes how El Barrio residents' search for dignity proves self-undermining, and drug use in turn epitomizes the contradictions of street culture.

Street culture emerges from what Bourgois calls America's entrenched "racial and class-based apartheid"—because the mainstream culture denigrates poor El Barrio residents, they develop an alternative culture that instead denigrates the mainstream. American society's "apartheid" is clearly demonstrated in the vicious responses of those on all sides when he, a white man from the upper classes, crossed into El Barrio. Everyone he meets, from the police to his neighbors, is

initially suspicious of his motivations and presence, and his friends who live elsewhere in New York refuse to visit his new apartment and worry about his safety. As he puts it, "most people in the United States are somehow convinced that they would be ripped limb from limb by savagely enraged local residents if they were to set foot in Harlem."

Street culture bases dignity on power in the local community, conceived through criteria like shows of masculinity, status symbols (cars, girlfriends, drugs), and the ability to command assent through violence. Autonomy—going one's own way and refusing to listen to conventional authority figures—is paramount. A key figure of street culture is the **jíbaro**, a formerly derogatory term for rural Puerto Rican plantation workers who "lived outside the jurisdiction of the urban-based state," which Nuyoricans have turned into a source of pride. The rejection of conventional state and economic power becomes a defining feature of this jíbaro, Nuyorican street culture, and Bourgois's friends repeatedly refer to themselves as jíbaros.

While street culture is a powerful form of resistance that allows El Barrio residents to develop a collective identity, Bourgois shows how it also undermines the collective itself, fracturing people's lives and turning mainstream society further against them. For instance, street culture clashes with office culture, the latter of which requires people to interact tactfully and dutifully carry out their boss's orders. This leads many residents of El Barrio to lose their legal jobs. But the best example is clearly drug addiction. Crack tears people from their families, leads people like Primo and Caesar to ruin their families and friends financially to fund their addictions, and feeds violence. For instance, Primo spends his money on drugs instead of buying his son Papito a birthday present. For Bourgois, the epitome of this issue is the pregnant drug users he meets, who justify their use by suggesting that they smoke crack in a way that will not harm—or will even help—their babies. And society at large tends to associate street culture with the perceived failures of inner-city residents. The mainstream sees street culture as a mark of incapacity and inferiority, and uses this belief to justify discriminating against El Barrio residents. This in turn further entrenches their poverty.

For Bourgois, street culture therefore gives way to an unfortunate paradox: precisely because people "are seeking an alternative to their social marginalization, […] they become the actual agents administering their own destruction and their community's suffering." Perhaps the deepest irony is that street culture gets taken up and recycled by the mainstream: Bourgois notes how the terms "'cool,' 'square,' or 'hip'" entered the public vocabulary, much like hip-hop gained wide appeal. Despite this interplay between street culture and society at large, however, it remains a concrete disadvantage to its participants when they try to make it in the mainstream.

GENDER ROLES AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

In the final three chapters of his book, Bourgois focuses on another profound contradiction in the lives of the people he befriends in El Barrio: they deeply believe in the patriarchal nuclear family in theory and completely reject it in practice. Violence against women and children is disturbingly commonplace in El Barrio, one of many symptoms of a traditional rural patriarchy struggling to maintain male dominance in a modern urban environment dominated by a service economy that welcomes men and women alike as workers. Ultimately, the women who are wounded by the machismo of the men in their lives nevertheless continue to believe in patriarchy, and Bourgois shows how this state of affairs throws them into a double bind: first, it forces them to perform all the functions that sustain life (earning income, caring for children, maintaining homes and family relationships) while their husbands and boyfriends shun responsibility, and secondly, it blames them for overstepping their roles as women precisely when they do take on these responsibilities.

The last portion of Bourgois's book focuses on the violence and inequalities that govern gender relations in El Barrio. Domestic abuse is shockingly common—Candy tells Bourgois that her husband, Felix, beats her nearly every day from the time they meet (when she is 13, when he also gang-rapes her) until she shoots him (in retaliation for his repeatedly sleeping with her sister). Primo and Caesar proudly admit participating in gang rapes, and Ray and Luis use rape to maintain control over their neighborhood. Candy's inability to recognize that her relationship is profoundly unhealthy shows how deeply patriarchy is ingrained in life in El Barrio. And child abuse follows: most of Bourgois's friends recall being mistreated as children, and many women leave their families' houses due to abuse in their early teens by eloping with men who in turn become abusive.

Bourgois highlights how this violence is an outgrowth of the patriarchal principle that men must be the rulers of their nuclear families. This idea is deeply ingrained in Nuyorican culture because the recent ancestors of the people Bourgois studies lived in large, traditional agricultural families in Puerto Rico. Men were the breadwinners and, the more children they had, the better their financial status (because kids could work in the fields and the additional cost to keep them was negligible). In contrast, contemporary life in El Barrio does not require men to be in charge. The economy is based largely in service jobs that are both traditionally and currently dominated by women, and having more children now means financial liability rather than gain. Bourgois accordingly sees a difference between the older generation, exemplified by people like Ray who are proud to have as many children as possible, and the younger generation, exemplified by people like Primo who see no inherent point in having a lot of children (but end up doing

so anyway). Patriarchy also proves a barrier to Bourgois's research, because it makes it very difficult for him to interview women without making their husbands jealous.

Ultimately, patriarchy's pervasiveness in El Barrio allows men to skirt precisely the responsibilities they claim through it. Although they are supposed to be the breadwinners, the El Barrio men Bourgois interviews reject legal employment and choose to sell drugs instead. Though this is better-paid work than what they could otherwise get, it becomes a problem when they spend their income on drugs and alcohol, rather than their families. In addition, these men are also almost never loyal to their wives and girlfriends, despite their belief in the nuclear family. Luis ignores his wife Wanda and 12 children (with four different women), instead spending his days trading crack for sexual favors from teenage addicts. Felix cheats on Candy perpetually and expects no consequences. Furthermore, men in El Barrio almost never support their biological children. Rather, if they support any children at all, they will support the children of their current wife or girlfriend (regardless of their biological fathers). Many of the people Bourgois interviews, however, take *pride* in failing to contribute to their families, and see themselves as clever because they live off their mothers' or girlfriends' food stamps and income.

After she shoots her husband Felix, who subsequently goes to jail for four years, Candy undergoes a profound transformation, becoming more masculine than any of the men around her: she becomes the neighborhood's most successful dealer and takes on a number of male lovers (including Primo) whom she controls with violence. However, this infuriates all the men around her, who both feel emasculated and insist that she is a bad mother for selling drugs (something they, as fathers, do themselves) and refusing to submit to the control of a single romantic partner. While these behaviors are expected of men, they are transgressive when performed by a woman: they signify that Candy is challenging the power men take for granted. No matter how hard she tries to provide for her family, El Barrio's enduring patriarchy will treat her as an incomplete woman until she takes on a man, and then justify that man's mistreatment of her, no matter how severe.

The double standard in El Barrio's gender dynamics is so severe that Bourgois inverts the usual complaint about broken families: the problem is not fathers' absence from the lives of their children, wives and girlfriends, but rather their *presence*—which creates violence, instability, and the worst possible role models for their children. Bourgois argues that women are, slowly but surely, winning power in El Barrio—something Candy's rise to notoriety exemplifies, even though she continues to firmly believe that men should have power over women. However, this slow shift toward equality is possible in large part because of the crisis in patriarchy in a contemporary New York that decreasingly gives men power just for being men, and the profound violence that embroils El Barrio women and children is this patriarchy's way of lashing out, men using violence to try and restore their old, unquestioned power.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

JÍBARO

The term "jíbaro" shows how generations of Puerto Ricans have had to reform their identities, concepts of pride, in response to the changing economic and political conditions that have forced them from one form of work and lifestyle to another. These continuous transformations and pressures, according to Bourgois, are one of the greatest obstacles to El Barrio residents' chances at upward mobility and success in the legal economy.

A cultural trope that has become a basis of Nuyorican identity, the word "jíbaro" originally referred to rural Puerto Ricans who refused to work on colonial Spanish plantations and therefore "lived outside the jurisdiction of the urban-based state." When Puerto Rico later became an American colony, the United States took farmers' land and redistributed it to large corporations, and the term "jíbaro" came to refer precisely to those who *did* work on plantations for wages. Then, Bourgois explains, a generation of Puerto Ricans migrated to the urban United States, and for them "jíbaro" became a "symbol of Puerto Rican cultural integrity and self-respect." Primo, for instance, repeatedly insists that he, his family, and his friends are "jíbaros."

Throughout its history, however, "jíbaro" is also a derogatory term denoting supposedly uneducated, backward, working-class, rural Puerto Ricans. It connotes economic informality and resistance to the state, which makes it a salient way for those who participate in street culture and the underground economy to identify themselves and draw connections to their parents' and grandparents' lives in Puerto Rico, but also a way for those in the dominant culture to stereotype and dismiss El Barrio residents as incapable of assimilating to mainstream society.

However, the "jíbaro" concept also shows how differing notions of cultural capital allow those at the bottom to valorize the same characteristics that those at the top decry—jíbaro values emphasize the same kind of entrepreneurship, individual achievement, personal responsibility, machismo, unflappable pride, and patriarchal family structure that are deeply embedded in mainstream society, which is why Bourgois argues that the drug dealers (or underground entrepreneurs) he meets in East Harlem exemplify the American economic ethos, rather than contradicting it.

The jíbaro identity, however, meets significant resistance when Puerto Ricans move to New York City. For one, the old rural Puerto Rican emphasis on having as many children as possible—which becomes a source of paternal pride and gives families more agricultural workers—ultimately proves counterproductive in the urban environment of New York City, where children must be supported and sent to school. As a result, people like Ray take pride in fathering as many children as possible, but then refuse to support or see those children. In other words, he preserves the jíbaro gender ideology in a new situation where it is untenable. Similarly, the "jíbaro" emphasis on informal business dealings outside the sphere of the state, usually led by autonomous and self-reliant men who protect themselves and their families with force, is completely inadequate to the service-based, bureaucratic economy in which most second-generation Nuyoricans find themselves. Although Primo and Caesar's fathers found stable work in the manufacturing sector, when they come of age, New York is dominated by service jobs in what Bourgois calls the "FIRE Sector" (Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate). Similarly, although Ray runs an excellent crack business, he does not have the cultural capital necessary to deal with government bureaucracy, and so has no idea how to get a driver's license or start the legal businesses he so desperately needs to launder his drug money.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Cambridge University Press edition of *In Search of Respect* published in 2010.

Introduction Quotes

"Man, I don't blame where I'm at right now on nobody else but myself."

Related Characters: Primo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

The epigraph to Bourgois's introduction is a quote from Primo, his closest friend in El Barrio, which reveals the way that even marginalized drug dealers conform to the American tendency of thinking in strictly individualistic terms. Though they recognize the lack of opportunities and prejudice they face in mainstream society due to America's colonialist treatment of Puerto Ricans as an underclass, those immersed in the drug trade still blame themselves for their successes and failures.

This contradiction allows Bourgois to make two important arguments about the relationship between East Harlem crack dealers and the rest of society. First, although mainstream society treats inner-city residents as selfish criminals whose economic activities contrast with capitalistic values, Bourgois shows that people who work in the underground economy actually share quite a bit in common with conventional entrepreneurs. They are highly motivated and individualistic—the only difference is the type of goods they sell. Inner-city street culture valorizes individual achievement and masculine self-reliance just like mainstream American culture.

Secondly, Bourgois uses this quote to hint at the "structure-versus-agency debate" that becomes one of the central questions in his book. Whereas many researchers focus on historical or social factors and overlook personal responsibility and poor decision-making when discussing drug addiction and violence, many other observers try to conveniently forget structural factors and wholly blame poor people's troubles on their own decisions (their agency) in an attempt to sway public opinion and influence the government to withdraw social support for these communities. Bourgois struggles with how to carve a middle ground between these two extremes—whereas structural injustice exposes people's limited options, personal agency also plays a role in why people make harmful decisions. People and their environments are both responsible for El Barrio's problems and both require improvement—even if Primo seems to think he is wholly to blame for his spot at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder.

Cocaine and crack, in particular during the mid-1980s and through the early 1990s, followed by heroin in the mid-1990s, have been the fastest growing—if not the only—equal opportunity employers of men in Harlem. Retail drug sales easily outcompete other income-generating opportunities, whether legal or illegal.

The street in front of my tenement was not atypical, and within a two block radius I could—and still can, as of this final draft—obtain heroin, crack, powder cocaine, hypodermic needles, methadone, Valium, angel dust, marijuana, mescaline, bootleg alcohol, and tobacco. Within one hundred yards of my stoop there were three competing crackhouses selling vials at two, three, and five dollars.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

When he first introduces El Barrio's pervasive underground drug trade, Bourgois is careful to juxtapose it with the legal market in order to emphasize how the two overlap. El Barrio drug dealers never make a conscious choice to pursue a life of crime over a career in the legal economy, but rather continually jump back and forth between the two and end up in underground lines of business only because the legal economy does not provide them a dignified and stable path to an economically self-sufficient future. Since the legal market discriminates against them and only offers them the worst possible jobs, drug dealing becomes the only "equal opportunity employer" that gives tangible economic opportunities to anyone willing to sign up.

Bourgois also points out the abundance of drugs in his neighborhood simply to demonstrate how they set the tone of El Barrio's public space. Because of the allure of the underground economy, drugs and violence are ubiquitous. While this does not mean that everyone is constantly in danger, residents and outsiders alike get that impression, which feeds into the narrative that El Barrio is a dangerous place to be avoided. It also leads children to be socialized into the drug culture and replicate their parents' mistakes.

> The street culture of resistance is predicated on the destruction of its participants and the community harboring them. In other words, although street culture emerges out of a personal search for dignity and a rejection of racism and subjugation, it ultimately becomes an active agent in personal degradation and community ruin.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8-9

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Bourgois offers his central thesis about the concept of inner-city street culture that, along with his insights about the underground economy, forms the analytical core of his book. While this culture comes out of inner-city people's desire to respond to their exclusion from dominant culture, articulate their identities on their own terms, and create a sense of dignity within their communities, ultimately it proves counterproductive. This is because street culture's means of resisting the dominant culture end up harming and undermining the very urban communities in which it is centered. Drugs, violence, and masculine pride are the tools of the trade; the efforts of men in El Barrio to establish themselves in the world end up perpetuating danger in their communities. Street culture is therefore a devil's bargain that paradoxically both resists and supports the dominant culture: through refusing the dominant culture, it builds the unique character of inner-city communities, but by introducing drugs and violence into these areas, it reinforces the same stereotypes and racist insults that mainstream culture uses to marginalize inner cities in the first place.

> In short, how can we expect someone who specializes in mugging elderly persons to provide us with accurate data on his or her income-generating strategies?

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

One of Bourgois's central concerns in the introduction is justifying the qualitative, intensive research method (ethnography) he used to study the lives of East Harlem residents. Many researchers, policymakers, and commentators might ask why qualitative research is necessary on this subject, since there are already numerous quantitative surveys and statistical analyses that supposedly explain what makes East Harlem a poor neighborhood. But Bourgois completely rejects the notion that quantitative data can give an accurate picture of life in El Barrio, precisely because the kind of things that *define* life in El Barrio inherently resist to measurement. People avoiding the police or illegally living with a loved one will not answer the census, for instance, and people who sell drugs or "specialize in mugging elderly persons" will not "provide us with accurate data on his or her income-generating strategies." Since 54% of the households in Bourgois's area of East Harlem report no official income, it is clear that there is much more going on behind the scenes that merits closer scholarly investigation. At the same time, surveys and statistics are ineffective because the people who conduct them do not have the trust of the people in the

neighborhood, and so cannot access the truth. This mutual distrust is why Bourgois feels ethnography is necessary in East Harlem, and why he spends years building a rapport with El Barrio residents and researching the same underground economy that many statisticians might claim to understand through much more cursory methods.

> The difficulty of relating individual action to political economy, combined with the personally and politically motivated timidity of ethnographers in the United States through the 1970s and 1980s have obfuscated our understanding of the mechanisms and the experiences of oppression I cannot resolve the structure-versus-agency debate; nor can I confidently assuage my own righteous fear that hostile readers will misconstrue my ethnography as "giving the poor a bad name." Nevertheless, I feel it imperative from a personal and ethical perspective, as well as from an analytic and theoretical one, to expose the horrors I witnessed among the people I befriended, without censoring even the goriest details. The depth and overwhelming pain and terror of the experience of poverty and racism in the United States needs to be talked about openly and confronted squarely, even if that makes us uncomfortable.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17-8

Explanation and Analysis

Bourgois explains that, given American culture's focus on trying to prove the poor's moral unworthiness and use this as a basis for denying them assistance and political rights, as well as the way social science research has been misinterpreted to contribute to this crusade, anthropologists have been understandably careful about only portraying positive representations of the poor. But Bourgois believes that they have gone too far in the other direction, since they ultimately choose to erase or minimize the poor's suffering in order to suggest that everything is alright with them, and blame structural and historical factors entirely for poverty while downplaying instances in which poor people act against their own self-interest. To Bourgois, this amounts to not taking the poor seriously as human agents, which negates the true purpose of the research (reducing poverty) for the sake of representing the poor more favorably to the public. Bourgois clearly thinks that getting to the truth of the matter is far more important, and for him neither the structural nor the individual factors behind El Barrio's poverty, violence, and rampant drug abuse can be forgotten. He has trouble reconciling the two, of course—he offers the example of watching a pregnant friend smoke crack and realizing that the history of U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico does nothing to explain or improve moments like these. But Bourgois still believes that no reasonable academic explanation, especially one that hopes to have an influence on policy, should overlook either half of the structure/agency question.

> Furthermore, as the anthropologist Laura Nader stated succinctly in the early 1970 s, "Don't study the poor and powerless because everything you say about them will be used against them." I do not know if it is possible for me to present the story of my three and a half years of residence in El Barrio without falling prey to a pornography of violence, or a racist voyeurism — ultimately the problem and the responsibility is also in the eyes of the beholder.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

As Bourgois continues to think through the dangers of his research, in particular, as well as anthropology in general, he wonders to what extent he truly can control the reception of his book. He has already noted that some work, like Oscar Lewis's 1966 study of El Barrio (*La Vida*), tried to develop detailed theories of how and why multi-generation families remained in poverty. These studies were ultimately misinterpreted by the public, who used them as evidence that the poor were not merely deprived of opportunities, but rather lacked the personal, familial, and cultural essence that they needed to succeed. In short, Lewis's well-intentioned notion of a "culture of poverty" allowed people to reframe the debate about inequality to argue that people were poor because of their own defects, and were therefore "unworthy" of receiving government assistance or public support. Despite Lewis's attempts to help poor people by studying them, the knowledge he produced about the poor was "used against them."

Nadler's warning, and Bourgois's fear, is that those in power have a vested interest in keeping poor people impoverished, because it means avoiding the redistribution of power and resources and having an easy scapegoat whenever they need to deflect criticism. The second concern is that these

powerful interests—who easily defeat poor people in the political arena—will deploy any knowledge created about poverty to their detriment. In short, Bourgois fears that he might be giving East Harlem's treasured secrets to its worst enemies by publishing this book. While he neither explicitly endorses nor explicitly denounces this cynical hypothesis, recognizing that this is his greatest worry at least allows the reader to understand which information Bourgois chooses to include, explain, modify, and plea for in *In Search of Respect*.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ My mistake that night was to try to tell the police officers the truth when they asked me, "What the hell you doin' hea'h?" When they heard me explain, in what I thought was a polite voice, that I was an anthropologist studying poverty and marginalization, the largest of the two officers in the car exploded:

"What kind of a fuckin' moron do you think I am. You think I don't know what you're doin'? You think I'm stupid? You're babbling, you fuckin' drug addict. You're dirty white scum! Go buy your drugs in a white neighborhood! If you don't get the hell out of here right now, motherfucka', you're gonna hafta repeat your story in the precinct. You want me to take you in? Hunh? . . . Hunh? Answer me motherfucka'!."

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Chapter 131

Explanation and Analysis

Although this sounds like the tone a police officer might ordinary take towards an inner-city resident of color, surprisingly this is how they treat Bourgois, who is one of few white people in East Harlem. While most of Bourgois's eventual friends and acquaintances in the neighborhood initially thought he was a police officer, the police almost always think he is an addict—a particularly nefarious one, since he chooses to come to a predominantly Latinx and black neighborhood to buy his drugs. Nobody believes the actual reason he is there; if the police and El Barrio residents agree on anything, it is that the neighborhood is not glamourous enough for a well-off white professor to waste his nights and weekends in.

This exchange testifies to the crucial role Bourgois's whiteness played in his research. It wins him suspicion from the people he studies, who see him as an incorrigible outsider. His whiteness ultimately protects his friends, whom potential robbers avoid because Bourgois looks like a cop. It also utterly confounds the police, who almost never see white men in the neighborhood (besides a few elderly Italian longtime residents). Yet even though the same officers see him over and over during five years on the same block, and he even starts going to community relations meetings, Bourgois notes that the police never notice him. Not only are the officers hostile and untrusted in the community—they are deeply incompetent, too. Curiously, the officer tells Bourgois to "go buy [his] drugs in a white neighborhood," which suggests the police are more interested in maintaining the racial separation of American inner cities—a segregation so extreme and violent that Bourgois does not hesitate to call it "apartheid"—than truly figuring out who is and is not breaking drug laws. They immediately connect someone who looks out of place with the criminality they know to be endemic to the area, as though drugs are the only reason anyone would ever visit El Barrio. The officer's suspicion and hostile tone attests to the "culture of terror" Bourgois says infects everyone's view of public space in El Barrio, from law-abiding residents to the police and drug dealers themselves.

❝ Most people in the United States are somehow convinced that they would be ripped limb from limb by savagely enraged local residents if they were to set foot in Harlem. While everyday danger is certainly real in El Barrio, the vast majority of the 110,599 people—51 percent Latino/Puerto Rican, 39 percent African-American, and 10 percent "other"—who lived in the neighborhood, according to the 1990 Census, are not mugged with any regularity—if ever. Ironically, the few whites residing in the neighborhood are probably safer than their African-American and Puerto Rican neighbors because most would-be muggers assume whites are either police officers or drug addicts—or both—and hesitate before assaulting them.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Chapter 132-3

Explanation and Analysis

As he elaborates on how the highly-visible drug economy and violence in East Harlem creates a "culture of terror," Bourgois insists that there is a huge gap between the

perceptions of the public and law enforcement, and the reality that people are very unlikely to be randomly assaulted or shot in El Barrio. Even his liberal, educated, wealthy, white friends—in fact, *especially* them—are frightened because of this reputation and refuse to go to East Harlem. In a sense, then, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Everyone believes that East Harlem is violent, so those who go there show up ready to defend themselves, and peaceful people who do not live there avoid the neighborhood (those who do avoid the streets). But, just like narratives about the poor, this fairy tale about the neighborhood's danger is based solely on the most publicized and shocking facts, not the most representative ones. In reality, the danger is high for drug dealers and users, but relatively low for those not directly involved in the drug trade, and even lower for those who look out of place in the neighborhood.

❝ Primo, Benzie, Maria, and everyone else around that night had never been tête-a-tête with a friendly white before, so it was with a sense of relief that they saw I hung out with them out of genuine interest rather than to obtain drugs or engage in some other act of *perdición*. The only whites they had ever seen at such close quarters had been school principals, policemen, parole officers, and angry bosses. Even their schoolteachers and social workers were largely African-American and Puerto Rican. Despite his obvious fear, Primo could not hide his curiosity. As he confided in me several months later, he had always wanted a chance to "conversate" with an actual live representative of mainstream, "drug-free" white America.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker), Maria, Benzie, Primo

Related Themes:

Page Number: Chapter 141

Explanation and Analysis

El Barrio residents' reactions to Bourgois's attempts to befriend them show the depth of the racial and economic gulf in American society. Not only do the Nuyoricans who soon become Bourgois's close friends live in a neighborhood with almost no white people, but they have virtually never *interacted* with a white person who was not trying to punish or control them. This has scarcely improved over the decades since Bourgois's book was published, and also functions in reverse, since few white children at suburban schools have Latinx or black friends from poor inner-city neighborhoods. This segregation contributes to the antagonistic gap between mainstream and street culture, the drastic inequities between the government resources (like education funding) that poor minority and suburban white neighborhoods receive, and the pervasive bias that makes it exceptionally difficult for inner-city residents to convince the middle- and upper-class white people who run the mainstream labor market to take them seriously.

In short, Bourgois's research is not a one-way street—just as he discovers the culture and community of the East Harlem crack trade, the people he befriends in the process learn about the exclusionary mainstream American culture that Bourgois represents. The ethnographic encounter, then, is a cultural *exchange*, not merely a study of one culture by a neutral researcher.

❝ My long-term goal has always been to give something back to the community. When I discussed with Ray and his employees my desire to write a book of life stories "about poverty and marginalization" that might contribute to a more progressive understanding of inner-city problems by mainstream society, they thought I was crazy and treated my concerns about social responsibility with suspicion. In their conception everyone in the world is hustling, and anyone in their right mind would want to write a best seller and make a lot of money. It had not occurred to them that they would ever get anything back from this book project, except maybe a good party on publication day. On several occasions my insistence that there should be a tangible political benefit for the community from my research project spawned humiliating responses.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker), Ray

Related Themes:

Page Number: Chapter 146

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Bourgois reflects on how the people he befriended in East Harlem reacted to the broader vision of his ethnographic research project. While he is explicit about his hope to eventually improve the conditions he studies, the people in El Barrio find this comical or even disingenuous. Bourgois hopes that "a more progressive understanding of inner-city problems by mainstream society" might help formulate policies that are more understanding and favorable toward inner-city people. Still, he recognizes the validity in his subjects' cynicism—from their perspective,

white outsiders have never done much to improve their lives, and it is naïve for one professor to think he can do better.

The very fact that Bourgois's subjects are so skeptical of his project speaks volumes about the way they view self-interest and individual endeavor: for most of them, the very concept of working for the betterment of others is foolish at best, and disingenuous at worst. If "everyone in the world is hustling," then the only reasonable explanation for Bourgois's presence is that he wants to take East Harlem residents' stories and write a book for his own personal benefit.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ To summarize, New York-born Puerto Ricans are the descendants of an uprooted people in the midst of a marathon sprint through economic history. In diverse permutations, over the past two or three generations their parents and grandparents went: (1) from semisubsistence peasants on private hillside plots or local haciendas; (2) to agricultural laborers on foreign-owned, capital-intensive agro-export plantations; (3) to factory workers in export-platform shantytowns; (4) to sweatshop workers in ghetto tenements; (5) to service sector employees in high-rise inner-city housing projects; (6) to underground economy entrepreneurs on the street. Primo captured the pathos of these macrostructural dislocations when I asked him why he sometimes called himself a jíbaro:

Primo: My father was a factory worker. It says so on my birth certificate, but he came to New York as a sugarcane cutter. Shit! I don't care; fuck it! I 'm just a jíbaro. I speak jíbaro Spanish. Hablo como jíbaro [I speak like a jíbaro].

Related Characters: Primo, Philippe Bourgois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: Chapter 251-2

Explanation and Analysis

In his second chapter, Bourgois surveys the complex histories that have shaped the people he studies: the history of American colonialism in Puerto Rico, the history of East Harlem as an ethnic enclave, and the history of drug use and abuse in the United States (especially as it shifted toward cocaine and crack in the 1980s). Here, he notes the series of social transformations that Nuyoricans and their ancestors have undergone in just a few generations. Forced to face radically new labor, housing, and cultural conditions every few decades, the population Bourgois studies is left uprooted and with attitudes toward work and society that no longer fit the labor they are expected to perform and roles in society they are expected to fulfill. The concept of the jíbaro is a key means by which Bourgois's subjects define their identity, both positively as Puerto Ricans and negatively in relation to the state and mainstream society. Just as the so-called "jíbaros" lived "off the grid" under Spanish colonialism and became wage workers in slave like conditions under American colonialism, Bourgois's Nuyorican subjects are caught between work outside the confines of the legal market (the underground economy) and the most menial, exploitative mainstream jobs imaginable.

❝ "Everybody is doing it. It is almost impossible to make friends who are not addicts. If you don't want to buy the stuff, somebody is always there who is ready to give it to you. It is almost impossible to keep away from it because it is practically thrown at you. I f they were to arrest people for taking the stuff, they would have to arrest practically everybody."

Related Themes:

Page Number: Chapter 270

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Bourgois references a quote from a 1951 report on East Harlem, noting that the situation is essentially the same forty years later—the only distinction is the *kind* of drugs that are available and principally used. Throughout the last century, as this quote and Bourgois's analysis show, East Harlem has remained largely dependent on the drug economy. Largely the result of Italian organized crime in the first half of the 20th century, drugs were present in every corner of the neighborhood and visible to children from a young age. This normalized illicit substances and made the drug trade a prestigious occupation in the area, a trend that endured even as the neighborhood transitioned from mostly Italian to majority Puerto Rican.

There is another dimension to Bourgois's decision to include these old sources, however: he also wants to show the historical continuity in scholars' and the public's view of East Harlem as a drug-infested, poverty-ridden neighborhood. Bourgois argues that this is not only an

exaggeration partially based on the proximity between East Harlem and the wealthy Upper East Side, but also a factor that perpetuated the disenfranchisement of East Harlem by, for instance, driving government policy and influencing who would be willing to live where.

Chapter 3 Quotes

It is only the omnipresent danger, the high profit margin, and the desperate tone of addiction that prevent crack dealing from becoming overwhelmingly routine and tedious.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: Chapter 377

Explanation and Analysis

One of Bourgois's most important theses about the crack trade is that, despite outsiders' view of it as a glamorous, exciting, and high-paying profession, in reality it is closer to a "routine and tedious" sales job. It is dangerous and unpredictable, and crack's street price is inflated, but almost none of this profit goes to the dealers themselves. In fact, most dealers choose to sell crack not because they believe they will get rich quickly, but because they simply have no better option. They ultimately spend a lot of time in filthy, derelict crackhouses in order to make a meager living. And yet, these conditions are preferable to the low-level, often humiliating work they are limited to in the mainstream economy, most of all because drug dealing provides them with a certain level of autonomy and respect in their communities that they would not otherwise be able to access. Again, by showing the continuities rather than the oppositions between underground and mainstream work, Bourgois demystifies crack dealers, showing them not as scheming criminals but as disenfranchised workers making a risky bet for slightly more than minimum wage. With arrests being relatively uncommon (at least during the period of Bourgois's research), crack dealing is like an ordinary job with a different set of (lower probability, greater magnitude) occupational hazards.

In the five years that I knew Primo he must have made tens of thousands of hand-to-hand crack sales; more than a million dollars probably passed through his fingers. Despite this intense activity, however, he was only arrested twice, and only two other sellers at the Game Room were arrested during this same period. No dealer was ever caught at Ray's other crackhouses, not even at the Social Club on La Farmacia's corner, even though its business was brisker.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker), Ray, Primo

Related Themes:  

Page Number: Chapter 3109

Explanation and Analysis

After outlining the structure of Ray's crack network and discussing Primo and Caesar's positions within it, Bourgois turns to what has become, in the years after his book's publications, by far the greatest occupational hazard associated with the crack trade: getting arrested. For decades, until the 2010s, this meant getting a legal sentence associated with having 100 times more cocaine than a dealer or user had crack. Indeed, spending decades in jail for small amounts of crack continues to be quite common. When released from prison, people are then branded felons, deprived of their right to vote, and generally unable to obtain legal employment.

However, although many Americans now see the draconian enforcement of drug laws as a defining feature of the crack epidemic, Bourgois makes it clear that, during his research, crack dealers and users had little reason to fear the law. Not only were laws more relaxed, but more importantly, the police were wildly incompetent—between his two arrests, Primo never went to jail, and the second case against him fell through because the police confused Primo and Caesar. The dealers have the neighborhood's trust, not the police—whom they can therefore consistently outsmart.

Chapter 4 Quotes

Contrary to my expectations, most of the dealers had not completely withdrawn from the legal economy. On the contrary—as I have shown in Chapter 3, in discussing the jobs that Willie and Benzie left to become crack dealers and addicts—they are precariously perched on the edge of the legal economy. Their poverty remains their only constant as they alternate between street-level crack dealing and just-above-minimum wage legal employment. The working-class jobs they manage to find are objectively recognized to be among the least desirable in U.S. society; hence the following list of just a few of the jobs held by some of the Game Room regulars during the years I knew them: unlicensed asbestos remover, home attendant, street-corner flyer distributor, deep-fat fry cook, and night-shift security guard on the violent ward at the municipal hospital for the criminally insane.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker), Benzie, Willie

Related Themes:

Page Number: Chapter 4115

Explanation and Analysis

As in Chapter 3, Bourgois continues to emphasize the continuities rather than the contrasts between the underground economy and its legal counterpart. While many people unacquainted with the East Harlem crack trade might reasonably assume that drug dealers shun legal work, this is a misconception—people decide to sell crack because they are unable to advance in the mainstream labor market, not because they do not want to do so. Their jobs are not only uncomfortable or difficult, they are downright dangerous, undignified, or exploitative. They also tend to be underpaid and lacking any clear path for advancement. Their decision to sell crack is not due to a nebulous cultural or personality factor that other groups lack; it is rational. Few middle-class Americans would agree to perform the jobs to which El Barrio residents are relegated, and might also choose to sell crack given that the pay is better, the conditions are less unpleasant, and (most of all) there is some potential for advancement in the business hierarchy, rather than an endless future of fry cookery or asbestos exposure on the horizon.

The contrast between Ray's consistent failures at establishing viable, legal business ventures—that is, his deli, his legal social club, and his Laundromat—versus his notable success at running a complex franchise of retail crack outlets, highlight the different "cultural capitals" needed to operate as a private entrepreneur in the legal economy versus the underground economy.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker), Ray

Related Themes:

Page Number: Chapter 4135

Explanation and Analysis

Bourgois confronts the paradox of brilliant crack dealers like Ray: although underground and legal entrepreneurship require a similar set of skills and activities (accounting, pricing, sales, labor relations), dealers have profound trouble transitioning into legal business. While entrepreneurship is similar in both spheres, Bourgois concludes that it operates in different cultural frameworks—street culture and the mainstream—which, in turn, have different ways of marking competence, power, status, and trust. Whereas the underground economy runs on physical force, personal relationships, and cash, the legal one requires documentation, formal bureaucratic processes, and financial legitimacy. Ray is an expert at the former but incompetent in the latter—beyond actually being illiterate, he cannot figure out how to apply for government documents or schedule inspections. By focusing on the social scientific concept of "cultural capital" (which refers to the values, attitudes, and attributes tied to status and class mobility) Bourgois shows how "American apartheid" is not only material but also, more insidiously, operates in terms of norms, ideas, and ways of self-presentation—the ones the dominant classes follow and expect from the rest, versus the ones that people like Ray learn in El Barrio.

It's like they hear my voice, and they stop…There's a silence on the other end of the line.

Everyone keeps asking me what race I am. Yeah, they say, like, 'Where're you from with that name?' Because they hear that Puerto Rican accent. And I just tell them that I'm Nuyorican. I hate that.

Related Characters: Primo (speaker), Philippe Bourgois

Related Themes:

Page Number: Chapter 4136

Explanation and Analysis

When Primo finds a line of work that provides him the autonomy he desires and does not require him to work at the bottom of the increasingly feminized corporate hierarchy, he embraces the opportunity and starts offering "Mr. Fix-It Services." He begins making calls and trying to arrange clients, but runs into an obstacle he later faces again when he starts taking phone calls in the mail room at his magazine job. As soon as people hear him speak—whether ordinary individuals talking on their home landlines or corporate clients looking to do business—they immediately dismiss him for his Puerto Rican accent.

As a marker of his race, class, and inner-city origins, Primo's accent starts him off in every professional encounter with negative cultural capital due to the expectations of mainstream business culture. In this environment, it is expected that the standard worker will be unmarked by any particular racial, class, gender, or regional difference—the norm is a college-educated white male who speaks a generalized American English. Because Primo is far from this, he constantly has to explain himself in professional situations and deal with racism from white people who question his capability simply due to the fact that he is Puerto Rican and from East Harlem. Facing this continuous barrier to his business, it is unsurprising that Primo gives up and goes back to selling crack.

❝ It almost appears as if Caesar, Primo, and Willie were caught in a time warp during their teenage years. Their macho-proletarian dream of working an eight-hour shift plus overtime throughout their adult lives at a rugged slot in a unionized shop has been replaced by the nightmare of poorly paid, highly feminized, office-support service work. The stable factory-worker incomes that might have allowed Caesar and Primo to support families have largely disappeared from the inner city. Perhaps if their social network had not been confined to the weakest sector of manufacturing in a period of rapid job loss, their teenage working-class dreams might have stabilized them for long enough to enable them to adapt to the restructuring of the local economy. Instead, they find themselves propelled headlong into an explosive confrontation between their sense of cultural dignity versus the humiliating interpersonal subordination of service work.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker), Willie, Primo, Caesar

Related Themes:  

Page Number: Chapter 4141

Explanation and Analysis

Bourgois emphasizes that, although the parents of the people he befriends in East Harlem were largely poor and working-class, the generation he studies faces a new problem that makes them, downwardly mobile in status. While their fathers worked in blue-collar manufacturing jobs, Primo, Willie, Caesar, and their cohort cannot access these industries that no longer exist in New York City. Accordingly, the "macho-proletarian dream" that defined work for them is no longer achievable, and they must choose between accepting a low-paid office job, a minimum-wage service job, or pursuing one of the only two "macho-proletarian" options left: construction or selling drugs. Bourgois's description of this transformation in New York's labor market and its effects on East Barrio residents is crucial, not only because it helps explain why young people turn to the crack trade, but also because it shows that it is unrealistic to expect people to simply choose the jobs that are available to them without considering those people's desires and cultural values. For El Barrio's young men, it is much more dignified to make $8/hour selling crack than working as a clerk. Given that none of their available options guarantee an escape from poverty, the relatively respected crack trade is the obvious path forward.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ The male head of household who, in the worst-case scenario, has become an impotent, economic failure experiences these rapid historical structural transformations as a dramatic assault on his sense of masculine dignity.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: Chapter 6215

Explanation and Analysis

In the previous chapters, Bourgois examined how "rapid historical structural transformations" shuffled economic chances and notions of cultural belonging among two generations of Puerto Rican farmers—the mid-20th century generation that migrated to New York (and whose men mostly worked manufacturing jobs), and their Nuyorican children (Bourgois's subjects), who were forced to adapt to

a service economy. In the last three chapters, however, Bourgois begins to look at what this same whirlwind history of urbanization means for gender relations and familial structures. While the agricultural economy favors men (especially in Puerto Rico), the service economy does not. Accordingly, in New York, traditional concepts of patriarchal masculinity—the notion of a man's ownership of and absolute power over his wife and family—begin to break down. The new generation's inability to find work adds insult to injury, as does the sole provision of welfare checks to women. Having lost economic control over their wives, girlfriends, and children, Bourgois suggests that East Harlem's men are unsure of how to assert their masculinity, and often turn to violence against their families as an attempt to reassert the control they have lost. While these historical factors partially explain the violence against women in El Barrio, Bourgois makes it clear that they do not explain away the individual decisions that each abusive man must be held accountable for taking.

❝ Primo's mother, however, is dissatisfied with the autonomy she "gained" by uprooting herself to New York. Part of that dissatisfaction is related to the individual isolation that pervades much of the U.S. urban experience. It also stems from being forced to define rights and accomplishments in individualistic terms. She longs for the women/family/community solidarity of her hometown plantation village in Puerto Rico.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker), Primo's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: Chapter 6241-2

Explanation and Analysis

The generations of Puerto Rican men who immigrate to New York and grow up there generally lack the absolute power over their families that was held by their ancestors from the rural Caribbean. On the other hand, Nuyorican women have gained significant autonomy in comparison to their mothers and grandmothers who live in Puerto Rico. Namely, they have achieved a particular kind of economic autonomy: they can work, own property, and raise kids on their own. Nuyorican women have essentially won the control over themselves that men once had over them.

Bourgois is critical of this autonomy, however, as he and the Nuyorican women he interviews consider these freedoms to be limited by an American cultural perspective. For white people in mainstream society, whose collective worthiness tends to go unchallenged, it might make perfect sense to think of oneself as an individual. But Nuyorican women, beyond having to navigate conflict between mainstream and street cultures in their communities, are often also forced to support networks of family members while being isolated by language barriers, domestic work, and a lack of public space. After interviewing Primo's mother, Bourgois concludes that the mere achievement of economic autonomy is not enough and is certainly not an unquestionable good when it requires sacrificing the small community unit in which most women lived in Puerto Rico.

❝ As the historian Michael Katz and many others have noted, U.S. policy toward the poor has always been obsessed with distinguishing the "worthy" from the "unworthy" poor, and of blaming individuals for their failings.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Chapter 6243

Explanation and Analysis

This insight into American culture is one of the primary concerns that shapes the way Bourgois structures his book. Because he knows that, in the past, social scientific research on the American urban poor has been turned against that population, he constantly reminds the reader that his subjects' moral failures are reasons to improve their lives, not reasons to abandon them to the whims of the market. This latter attitude, Bourgois explains by citing research such as Katz's, is a special artifact of American individualistic capitalism, in which poverty is equated with moral failure and the government ends up punishing the poor instead of helping them. While Bourgois believes that a government's job is to care for its citizens—and therefore to treat the poor sympathetically and supportively—many Americans believe the government's job is to support the market, backing those who become wealthy through capitalism and ensuring that those who do not succeed in the market adequately suffer. The irony, Bourgois points out, is not only that success and failure in capitalism depend upon uncontrollable factors, and are unrelated to individual moral worth. It is also that the underground drug entrepreneurs he studies *are* successful, shrewd capitalists—their poverty has nothing to do with a lack of business savvy.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ Candy went back to defining her life around the needs of her children. The irony of the institution of the single, female-headed household is that, like the former conjugal rural family, it is predicated on submission to patriarchy. Street culture takes for granted a father's right to abandon his children while he searches for ecstasy and meaning in the underground economy. There is little that is triumphantly matriarchal or matrifocal about this arrangement. It simply represents greater exploitation of women, who are obliged to devote themselves unconditionally to the children for whom their men refuse to share responsibility.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker), Felix, Candy

Related Themes:

Page Number: Chapter 7276

Explanation and Analysis

After Candy gets fed up with her abusive husband Felix (who has sex with her own sister), she shoots him, and he ends up in jail for unrelated reasons. Candy is left alone for the first time in her life, but she also realizes she is now free from the extraordinary restrictions Felix put on how she could live her life. She decides to start dealing drugs to feed her children and, partially because nobody will mess with a woman who shot her own husband, becomes one of the most respected and effective dealers in East Harlem. Men fear her, but they also denigrate her for what they perceive as a lack of femininity—it is dangerous for a woman to be dealing drugs when she should be caring for her children), and they believe that Candy should find another man.

Candy's rise to drug-dealing fame could be interpreted as an inversion of gender roles—spited by a man, she becomes more masculine than all the men she knows, just to prove that they do not control this domain. Bourgois carefully notes, however, that El Barrio men choose to deal drugs for themselves, while Candy does it because she needs to support her children and feels she has no other choice. She needs a job she can work while her children are sleeping and does not want to threaten her eligibility for welfare by working legally. When she quits drugs and the trade, she does it for the same reason: she no longer needs the money enough to warrant the danger, and she wants to be a good mother for her children.

Because Candy only fulfills the archetypes of masculinity in order to care for the children that her husband neglected and financially abandoned, Bourgois considers it incorrect to think of her story as one of a woman's liberation. Instead, as he explains here, she (like so many other women) is simply forced to go to new extremes in order to make up for the work that the men in her life refuse to do.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ Based on my relationship to the fathers who worked for Ray, public policy efforts to coax poor men back into nuclear households are misguided. The problem is just the reverse: Too many abusive fathers are present in nuclear households terrorizing children and mothers. If anything, women take too long to become single mothers once they have babies. They often tolerate inordinate amounts of abuse.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker), Ray

Related Themes:

Page Number: Chapter 8287

Explanation and Analysis

Much like Bourgois's discussion of the underground economy, he approaches the topic of El Barrio fathers by citing his extensive firsthand research experience in order to subvert the conventional narrative. The problem is not the absent fathers, but rather those who stick around. The pervasiveness of domestic violence in El Barrio is such that many children, and a large proportion of wives and girlfriends, are safer the further their father, husband, or boyfriend stays from the household. Becoming a single mother, Bourgois explains here, is just a potential solution to the problem—not the problem itself. In fact, the very notion that a full nuclear family would magically resolve the suffering of El Barrio women and children is, in fact, a blind appeal to the same patriarchal principles that men in the neighborhood cite to justify their abuse. Organizing public policy around these principles would betray the assumptions of those who set the policy agenda and perpetuate the assumption that irresponsible men will suddenly take responsibility for their families if they are given power and support. Bourgois makes it clear that supporting women—for instance, by offering affordable public childcare—is a much better option. There is, in short, nothing better about a present but useless father than an absent but useless one.

Chapter 9 Quotes

Substance abuse is perhaps the dimension of inner-city poverty most susceptible to short-term policy intervention. In part, this is because drugs are not the root of the problems presented in these pages; they are the epiphenomenonal expression of deeper, structural dilemmas. Self-destructive addiction is merely the medium for desperate people to internalize their frustration, resistance, and powerlessness. In other words, we can safely ignore the drug hysterias that periodically sweep through the United States. Instead we should focus our ethical concerns and political energies on the contradictions posed by the persistence of inner-city poverty in the midst of extraordinary opulence. In the same vein, we need to recognize and dismantle the class- and ethnic-based apartheids that riddle the U.S. landscape.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 319

Explanation and Analysis

After living in El Barrio and studying the drug trade for five years, perhaps surprisingly, Bourgois determines that drugs are not the real problem. They are only the symptom of American inner cities' social ills and serve as a means for people to cope with their misery and lack of opportunities. It is true that drugs exacerbate the same problems people take them to solve, much like street culture counterintuitively entrenches and multiplies the disadvantages of its practitioners. Just as the public often panics hysterically at stories about El Barrio's violence (even though nobody reading or hearing the story would likely be in danger if they wandered into the neighborhood), media outcries about the horrors of drugs like crack miss the point. From Bourgois's perspective, people choose drugs because they feel that their lives with drugs are better than their lives would be without them. Bourgois suggests that the moral outrage should center not on the fact that people buy, sell, and use drugs, but rather on the fact that society has marginalized some of its members to the point where the drug trade genuinely appears to be their best pathway forward in life.

Almost none of the policy recommendations I have made so far are politically feasible in the United States in the short or medium term. I only attempt to raise them for discussion in the hope that in the inevitable ebbs, flows, and ruptures around popular support for new political approaches to confronting poverty, ethnic discrimination, and gender inequality in the coming years, some of these ideas could be dragged into the mainstream of public debates, and that maybe bits and pieces of them could be instituted over the coming decades in one form or another. Once again, on a deeper level, the U.S. common sense, which blames victims for their failures and offers only individualistic psychologically rooted solutions to structural contradictions has to be confronted and changed. We have to break out of the dead-end political debates between liberal politicians, who want to flood the inner city with psychiatric social workers or family therapists, and conservatives, who simply want to build bigger prisons, cut social welfare spending, and decrease taxes for big business and the wealthy.

Related Characters: Philippe Bourgois (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 325

Explanation and Analysis

Although Bourgois's in-depth research gives him a clear picture of what might be done to alleviate the problems he encountered firsthand, he admits at the end of his conclusion that he has absolutely no faith that the United States will do any of it. He writes purely for a distant or improbable future when politicians and voters are willing to take his perspective seriously. The barrier, in other words, is attitudinal and not practical—the United States' cultural "common sense" makes it impossible to even initiate a conversation about how to improve the lives of the most marginalized Americans, because it associates people's outcomes with a sense of inherent moral worth. For Bourgois, the "liberal politicians" think the symptoms (drug use, broken families) are the problem, when the real problem is economic. And the "conservatives" do not even raise the pretense of wanting to help the poor, whom they instead consider America's enemies.

Crucially, Bourgois's insight into the attitudinal and cultural roots of the broken relationship between America's mainstream and poor also in large part explains how he has chosen to structure his book. Bourgois's analysis suggests that, in his contemporary political climate, it is more important to humanize the poor than provide a specific roadmap to alleviating their poverty (although he has no reservations about doing that, too). This, again, justifies his

decision to take his friends seriously as multifaceted people struggling in difficult circumstances and treat them as neither saints scorned by history, nor as sinners whose destiny is their fate. He chooses to neither whitewash their reality to win them false sympathy, nor to simply let the stories of their mistakes and failures circulate on their own.

Bourgois he knows that, in America, this is likely to reinforce the image of the "unworthy poor." Rather, he presents arguments of both structural injustice and personal agency, as well as balancing sympathy and criticism. In doing so, Bourgois models an attitude of genuine care wherein poor people are taken seriously as equals.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PREFACE TO THE 2003 SECOND EDITION

Between the book's initial publication in 1995 and 2003, Bourgois identifies four major shifts in the place he studied: economic growth, the increase in Mexican migration to New York and East Harlem, the widespread jailing of "the poor and the socially marginal" under the guise of "the war on drugs," and the turn toward marijuana and away from crack, which was decreasingly available on the street and noted less and less in "hospital emergency room and arrest statistics." Overall, heroin became more common, as well as "cheaper and purer," but involved another population—young whites, not the Latinx and African Americans at the heart of this book. Nevertheless, especially among older users, "both heroin and crack continued to be multibillion-dollar businesses that ravaged inner-city families with special virulence." However, many young people nevertheless started *selling* these drugs.

Bourgois's attention to the changes in El Barrio life shows that this book is ultimately a portrait of a specific time period and group of people, not a comprehensive study of the neighborhood nor an attempt to capture the essence of it. This is important for the contemporary reader, who encounters this book decades after its original publication. Indeed, El Barrio is now vastly different from what it was in the 1980s, but the lasting appeal of drugs in the neighborhood shows that a significant portion of its population continues to seek illegal, dangerous work in the drug trade as an alternative to the formal economy.

Many of the dealers Bourgois profiled in 1995 got low-paying jobs by 2002, and the few who were still dealing had largely switched to marijuana. But three were in jail, and many young people in neighborhoods like East Harlem remained "completely superfluous to the legal economy." This is unsurprising: the United States is the world's most unequal industrialized country, and continues to get worse. The influx of immigrants from rural Mexico and new construction in the neighborhood were also notable shifts, which contributed to the shrinking—but not elimination—of space dedicated to drug dealing.

Bourgois makes it clear that the contraction of the drug economy does not necessarily imply that life is getting better for El Barrio residents, who are more than just incidentally poor, but rather systematically excluded from the social mainstream. Contrary to popular narratives of continual social progress and change in the United States, Bourgois shows that the economic conditions of the American poor have worsened since the mid-20th century. This suggests that the narrative of progress serves only to hide the fact that the contemporary United States has a permanent underclass largely created and sustained by government policies.

However, public policy dealing with low-income people effectively replaced any semblance of social welfare with "an expensive, rigorous, criminal dragnet" that doubled the nation's incarceration rate in the 1990s and disproportionately targeted African American and Latinx people. Rudolph Giuliani's "get-tough-on-crime policy" not only expanded police brutality but also charged the state billions of dollars at the expense of funding health and education programs. While many have attributed the 1990s's reduction in crime rate to this policy, in fact cities without "tough-on-crime" strategies reduced their crime rates more than New York did. And draconian policies like the "one-strike-you're-out" approach to public housing—in which one person's crime leads to their entire family being kicked out of public housing forever—and the cyclical character of American poverty rig the game against the next generation that Bourgois has seen grow up during and after his research.

Although Bourgois's book is largely about the War on Drugs, his research took place before the emergence of what is now U.S. drug policy's defining factor: the widespread imprisonment of people for even minor drug offenses. The crack epidemic that Bourgois studied, which was heavily associated with poor, urban black and Latinx Americans, became the basis for this shift. As a result, for many such communities, the state has become a greater enemy than drugs themselves. Contemporary scholars tend to view incarceration, at the expense of education and community development, as intimately tied to the economic shifts that have continued to concentrate political and economic power in the hands of a few. These individuals tend to remove poor Americans from the underground economy only by turning them into sources of profit for the legal economy, such as unpaid prison labor.

INTRODUCTION

Bourgois begins that he "was forced into crack against my will." In 1985, when he first moved to East Harlem ("El Barrio") to study "the experience of poverty and ethnic segregation in the heart of one of the most expensive cities in the world," crack did not exist yet. But over the next year, "the multibillion-dollar crack cyclone" consumed the neighborhood and took over the lives of most of the people who lived there. The sidewalk in front of Bourgois's house became covered in used drug paraphernalia, and remained that way 10 years later, when he published this book. (The only change is the resurgence of heroin).

Bourgois truly did capture the crack epidemic at its inception, before the public outcry about it translated into the draconian policies Bourgois outlines in the 2003 Preface. From the beginning, his overriding interest is the profound wealth gap in America, and the gaps in culture, quality of life, power, and perspective that it engenders. El Barrio is a paradoxical place that is uniquely positioned to reveal the underbelly of American capitalism: it is the poorest neighborhood of the world's richest city. El Barrio is, then, subverts outsiders' conventional perception of New York, suggesting that the success of many Americans is far from innocent or victimless.

In his first subsection, "The Underground Economy," Bourgois explains that his book is really about "deeper dynamics of social marginalization and alienation," of which drugs are "merely a symptom." Given their official incomes, most East Harlem residents should not be able to survive in Manhattan—half live below the poverty line, and most survive through the "underground economy," which includes work ranging from babysitting and bartending to illegal construction jobs and, of course, selling drugs, the most lucrative of all. "Heroin, crack, powder cocaine, hypodermic needles, methadone, Valium, angel dust, marijuana, mescaline, bootleg alcohol, and tobacco" are all available within two blocks of Bourgois's apartment, on street corners, in crackhouses, and from medical clinics. And millions of dollars flow constantly through the neighborhood, "at least in the short run," it is more lucrative to join this industry than the legal one that pays minimum wage.

The Underground Economy is the first of Bourgois's two critical analytical concepts (along with Street Culture), both of which later become important ideas in the social sciences more broadly. The Underground Economy is a mirror image of the mainstream economy, just as El Barrio is a mirror image of mainstream New York and American society. The Underground Economy shows what happens to people who are excluded from American capitalism, whether by choice or by force (Bourgois ultimately argues that it is both). Bourgois shows that not everything in the Underground Economy is sinister, morally wrong, anti-capitalist, or even necessarily truly illegal. The defining feature of underground work is its informality*—it lies beyond the reaches of the state and does not have any contact with the bureaucracy that regulates most economic activities.*

Bourgois emphasizes that official data undercount inner-city residents (men by at least 20%) and finding any data about the underground economy is even harder, but it is telling that only 46% of the households in Bourgois's apartment's vicinity reported any official income, since the difference must be made up by some underground source (although not necessarily drugs).

The failure of official statistics is the central motivation for Bourgois's qualitative, ethnographic method; it is simply impossible to know what really happens in East Harlem without gaining the trust of the people who live there. This also shows the enduring alignment between academic research and official state power. The underground economy is invisible to statistical research because it refuses the formalized, measurable logic of the "legitimate" state.

In his second subheading, "Street Culture: Resistance and Self-Destruction," Bourgois argues that the cultural exclusion youth in El Barrio feel elsewhere in New York has led them to create what he names "inner-city street culture," a set of "beliefs, symbols, modes of interaction, values, and ideologies" that allows people to develop dignity while resisting dominant culture, which nevertheless inevitably cannibalizes street culture. And this street culture tends to cannibalize its participants, embroiling them in violence and drugs—even though the majority of the people who live in El Barrio "have nothing to do with drugs." Yet drugs are *visible* because they take over public space, and therefore "set the tone for public life." Because of their influence, Bourgois wants to understand these "addicts, thieves, and dealers" and befriended them during his time in El Barrio. Even if extreme, their stories reveal larger issues and social processes.

Bourgois's second major concept, Street Culture, shows another sense in which resistance to the mainstream in El Barrio exceeds the reach of quantifiable research, which cannot meaningfully capture "beliefs" or "symbols." Relative to the white, middle-class values that many use to conceptualize the broader American value system, El Barrio begins to look like an anti-America, which is why it is so reviled. Bourgois later shows, however, that El Barrio's values (entrepreneurship, autonomy, masculinity, and resilience) are actually a more extreme version of traditional American values, only practiced in a place that has been stigmatized by much of the country.

Under the introduction's third subheading, "Ethnographic Methods and Negative Stereotyping," Bourgois expresses his fear "that the life stories and events presented in this book will be misread as negative stereotypes" and explains that he has tried to balance a consideration of these stereotypes with the need to realistically depict "the suffering and destruction that exists on inner-city streets." This is necessary in order to reveal "the contradictions of the politics of representation of social marginalization in the United States" and "build an alternative, critical understanding of the U.S. inner city" based in "the interface between structural oppression and individual action," with a special attention to gender.

Now that he has justified his methodology for studying El Barrio, Bourgois addresses the neighborhood's dangers. He focuses on the relationship between the narrative he offers and the incendiary one that is dominant in mainstream depictions of El Barrio. Bourgois and the mainstream overlap in that both employ the same symbols and stories to depict the often-gruesome reality of life in El Barrio. While the mainstream creates a narrative to undermine El Barrio residents' moral worth, Bourgois believes that El Barrio residents, like any other human beings, have moral value and deserve dignified lives. Much of the public narrative places sole blame on either individual action or structural oppression as causes of inner-city "suffering and destruction," but Bourgois insists that both *are significant factors in El Barrio.*

Bourgois reiterates that ordinary, quantitative social science "cannot access with any degree of accuracy the people who survive in the underground economy" because these people are largely erased from official statistics and suspicious of those who try to study them. This is why cultural anthropology's tools are necessary: they are capable of "establishing long-term relationships based on trust" and "collect[ing] 'accurate data'" even if they "violate the canons of positivist research." Bourgois passed "hundreds of nights" with people who sell and use drugs, recording their stories and befriending their families.

Bourgois again justifies his anthropological methodology and explains his relationships with the people he profiles in this book. After living among them for five years, the people he meets in El Barrio are truly his friends, and he cannot claim to be a neutral observer (as a positivist researcher would). Bourgois concludes that true objectivity in the social sciences is impossible and questions whether objectivity would even be desirable in studies that deal with the observable suffering of marginalized individuals. As a result, rather than pretending his research can be apolitical, Bourgois embraces the political dimensions of his experiences in El Barrio and freely critiques U.S. government policy.


While "the self-conscious reflexivity called for by postmodernists" helps Bourgois account for the gap between his social position—as a privileged white researcher—and those of his marginalized subjects, he criticizes "the profoundly elitist tendencies of many postmodernist approaches," which confound "politics" with "poetics" and unnecessarily intellectualize "the urgent social crises" they study, turning "scholarly self-reflection […] into narcissistic celebrations of privilege" and rejecting the structural thinking necessary to confront real oppression.

"Reflexivity" is anthropologists' tendency to focus so much on analyzing the origins and consequences of their limited viewpoint that their work becomes centered on their perspective and fails to accurately address the "urgent social crises" they often set out to study. Bourgois's school of thought—which focuses on the origins, effects, and futures of political, economic, and environmental conditions—contrasts with this detached academic approach that analyzes real people and their problems like literary characters and situations.

Bourgois also critiques "anthropology's functionalist paradigm," which leads anthropologists to seek to show the "order and community" in the societies they study and ignore marginalized peoples and behaviors that disprove this assumption of order. Anthropologists also sometimes empathize with their subjects to the point of ignoring those people's negative circumstances, actions, and environments.

Bourgois's defense of his own anthropological methods does not prevent him from recognizing the dangers in such methods when they are misapplied. Functionalism is the other extreme that stands opposite reflexivity. While reflexivity ignores the anthropological subjects by focusing on the author, functionalism ignores the subjects' individuality and only focuses on systemic issues. While structuralists might overlook their subjects because they lack empathy, in situations like the one Bourgois researches, they might also do so because they empathize so much with people's struggles that they refuse to ever paint those people in a negative light.

Anthropologists also tend to focus on "exotic other[s]," which leads them to avoid the societies where they live and exoticize those societies when they *do* study them—both trends Bourgois seeks to avoid. He refuses to create "a pornography of violence that reinforces popular stereotypes," but also does not want to "sanitize the vulnerable" like many anthropologists. Finding a middle ground is difficult in the United States, where the public tends to see the suffering of the marginalized as proof of "[low] personal worth and racial determinism." Because Americans tend to ignore structural factors and blame people for their own poverty, many academics "have unreflexively latched on to positive representations of the oppressed," a tendency that has created backlash to Bourgois's book and silenced the stories he has sought to tell.

Bourgois avoids his own criticism of anthropological methods by studying his native New York City firsthand. In his quest to do justice to his friends in El Barrio, Bourgois recognizes that what is important is not protecting his own feelings about them and defending them at all cost—this would mean "[sanitizing]" their stories and likely arousing the suspicion of conservative critics. He also wants to prevent his readers from stereotyping his friends' suffering and failures as proof that they are wholly to blame for their own poverty.

Under the introduction's final subheading, "Critiquing the Culture of Poverty," Bourgois looks to Oscar Lewis's infamous 1960s ethnography *La Vida*, a study of one Puerto Rican family which "scared a generation of social scientists away from studying the inner city" by problematically focusing on personality and family values from a Freudian perspective, but forgetting the role of "history, culture, and political-economic structures." Despite Lewis's intent to help the people he studied, conservatives latched onto his argument about the "culture of poverty" to argue that the poor are "unworthy," and to blame for their own condition. Instead, Bourgois believes that anthropological accounts of inner-city poverty in the Untied States must acknowledge the role of "hostile race relations and structural economic dislocation."

Bourgois turns from the pitfalls of anthropological research methods to the dangers in anthropology's communication to the public. Lewis's study, like Bourgois's, looks at how culture and poverty intersect in El Barrio—but Lewis's book was misinterpreted as arguing that culture causes *poverty. The negative social stigma perpetuated by this interpretation explains why Bourgois has spent this introduction outlining his intentions, interest in his subjects' wellbeing, and opposition to U.S. policy. Twenty years after the crack epidemic, however, it is debatable whether In Search of Respect may have perpetuated some of the same stereotypes that were deployed to villainize and oppress the effected communities. Bourgois appears to have the pure intentions, but in turning to the case of Lewis's book, Bourgois himself shows that good intentions are not enough.*

But remembering structural problems was often difficult on the ground, when, for instance, the pain of watching "a pregnant friend fanatically smoking crack" was not dulled by "remember[ing] the history of her people's colonial oppression and humiliation." And thinking only in terms of structure "obscures the fact that humans are active agents in their own history." It is important to see both agency and structure, like how street culture "shape[s] the oppression that larger forces impose" on the people who live it. While Bourgois "cannot resolve the structure-versus-agency debate" or ensure readers will not try to turn his stories against the people who tell them, he feels obligated (personally, ethically, analytically, and theoretically) to reveal "the horrors [he] witnessed." This can hopefully allow the United States to confront the racism and systemic poverty that plague it, but there is always a chance that his narrative will turn into "a pornography of violence."

Bourgois again explains why he needed balance his examination of people's bad choices with the systemic factors that predetermined which choices are even available to them. He believes that the phenomena he observes can be explained on different levels. For instance, structural explanations show why El Barrio residents are born into poor families and discriminated against in the United States, while personal agency explains why they actively harm themselves and those around them by abusing drugs. While he sees these causes as a two-way street, he has no interest in setting moral blame, merely in outlining what must change in order for conditions to improve in El Barrio.

CHAPTER 1: VIOLATING APARTHEID IN THE UNITED STATES

Bourgois begins with a quote from a child who says he "sound[s] just like a television advertisement" and then explains that his project almost meets "a disastrous end" when he "inadvertently 'disrespect[s]' Ray," the owner of a number of local crackhouses, including one nicknamed "La Farmacia" in the now-burned out building where he grew up.

Bourgois opens by acknowledging the deep gulf between his subjects and himself, which make him seem like an alien or a television character to the people in El Barrio. As a representative of mainstream white culture, Bourgois has to work doubly hard to win trust in El Barrio.

Under the heading "Learning Street Smarts," Bourgois explains that Ray both lets him conduct his research in his crackhouses and physically protects him. Ray is friendly and generous that night, in contrast to "his usual churlishness," and Bourgois is increasingly proud of their "close and privileged relationship." Ray and Bourgois drink Heineken beers, a status symbol compared to everyone else's cheaper Budweiser. Bourgois shows a picture of himself in the newspaper, both to prove his "credibility as a 'real professor'" and show Ray's acquaintances that he is not the addict, pervert, or undercover officer they think he is. Everyone asks Ray to read the caption under Bourgois's photo—but Ray struggles and Bourgois realizes he is illiterate. Furious, Ray screams at the whole group and drives off. Primo, Bourgois's "closest friend on the streets" and one of Ray's associates, tells Bourgois he messed up.

Ray's unpredictable behavior shows how the crack economy is at once completely informal and yet also bound by a set of well-understood rules about respect, authority, and masculinity. Ray's illiteracy shows how distinct these rules are from those of ordinary legal business, in which nobody could become wildly successful without knowing how to read and write. People's suspicion of Bourgois further shows the significant racial divide in the U.S., and how threatening it is when someone like Bourgois challenges this structure. The problem of explaining his research is also fundamentally about communicating across this divide.

The next subheading is "The Parameters of Violence, Power, and Generosity." The next time Ray sees Philippe Bourgois (whom he, like everyone else, calls Felipe), he portrays Bourgois's press release as a "potential breach of security" and makes a vague death threat, before driving off with his teenaged girlfriend. Primo, who grew up affiliated with Ray's gangs, takes Bourgois aside and tells him to stay away from the Game Room (the crackhouse Primo runs for Ray). Primo admits that he is afraid of Ray, who used to joke about raping him—and "once raped an old male transient" along with his old best friend (and Primo's cousin) Luis. In fact, Luis has just gotten arrested, and Ray is debating whether to kill him or pay his legal fees—each cost $3,000, but Luis has lost everyone's trust after developing a crack habit and once snitching on his own family member.

Ray's behavior is intentionally vague in order to re-exert his now wavering authority over Bourgois. Primo's tale unintentionally serves the same function, showing how Ray's reputation for unpredictable violence prevents others from crossing him. Ray's willingness to turn against his best friend demonstrates that all his shows of friendship and generosity are ultimately subservient to his business—while not empty gestures, they are no assurance of mutual loyalty. Mainstream business people typically have more well-defined boundaries between friends and coworkers, but for Ray, everyone is a potential revenue source or liability. There is no clear division between his personal life and his work.

Bourgois explains that stories and displays of brutal violence are an essential part of Ray's business: they prevent those he works with from cheating him out of cash. It is about "public relations" and retaining "human capital." In Primo's words, "you gotta be a little wild in the streets." Primo and Caesar, his best friend and the Game Room's lookout, help Bourgois flee the Game Room whenever Ray shows up, but Primo reports that Ray is having "foreboding dreams" that Bourgois is a spy, either for the government or for aliens from "Mars or something." (For many Nuyoricans, dreams are seen as capturing hidden truths.)

In order to contextualize Ray's behavior in terms the mainstream economy, Bourgois turns to the similarities between Ray's business and that of any other entrepreneur. Ray's intimidation clearly works—not only on Bourgois but also on Primo and Caesar—even though they fully understand the purpose behind his shows of force. Again, Bourgois's cultural difference from the people of El Barrio translates into a sense of unfamiliarity and danger for both sides.

Three months later, however, Ray shows up by surprise when Bourgois and Primo are busy trying to calm down a drunk Caesar—who often goes on binges, has a "propensity for gratuitous violence," and on this occasion is complaining about Ray, deliberately yelling into Bourgois's recorder that he wants to "kill that fat motherfucker." Ray shows up, but fortunately misses Caesar's diatribe and is a good mood. Within a few months, he and Bourgois have repaired their relationship to its old confidence. And this is no exception: Ray has many genuine, reciprocal friendships, including with some of the people who work for him, like a woman named Candy, who recalls him being a "nice kid," almost like a brother.

Caesar's unpredictable behavior is much like Ray's, except that it likely put himself in danger, if Ray finds out. Although he works for Ray and admires his success in the crack business, Caesar also resents his boss. Caesar's loyalty to Ray, therefore, is questionable. Ray's ability to suddenly forget his conflict with Bourgois suggests that, with time, he has realized that Bourgois is not a legitimate threat.

In his section "The Barriers of Cultural Capital," Bourgois explains that Ray is a contradictory figure: while able to run a complex drug distribution enterprise, he is "completely incapable of fathoming the intricate rules and regulations of legal society." In other words, "Ray lacked the 'cultural capital' necessary to succeed" in the mainstream. This becomes even more evident when, later, he enlists Bourgois's help because he cannot figure out how to get an ID and does not know what a passport is. He hopes to start a business to launder his money, and Bourgois does his best to avoid participating in this. Ray opens a laundromat, a corner store, and a social club, all of which fail because of bureaucratic limits.

Bourgois's analysis of Ray hinges on the important concept of cultural capital, which explains the set of abilities, codes, and practices that are considered legitimate and proper, and that therefore allow people to achieve higher class status in society. Yet the Underground Economy appears to have a conception of cultural capital opposite that in the mainstream economy, which is why hugely successful Ray looks foolish whenever he has to deal with government bureaucracy.

Under the heading "Confronting Race, Class, and the Police," Bourgois shows how he "had to confront the overwhelming reality of racial and class-based apartheid in America" immediately upon moving to El Barrio. His "outsider status" is obvious: dealers yell and scatter when he walks by, assuming he is an undercover agent. But many assume he is a drug addict, especially the police, who search him repeatedly because "there was no reason for a white boy to be in the neighborhood." Eventually he gets used to being searched every week or two by the police, and stopped almost as often by officers telling him he must have wandered into the wrong neighborhood.

Bourgois returns explicitly to the problem of his identity, which again attests to the separation of Street Culture and the mainstream culture. Just as El Barrio residents would be discriminated against in lower Manhattan, Bourgois is viewed as a likely threat, criminal, or delinquent in El Barrio. The racist logic of American society becomes obvious through the police's treatment of Bourgois, as he is given the same treatment in El Barrio that the neighborhood's residents might receive in predominately white areas.

In "Racism and the Culture of Terror," Bourgois explains that "a racist 'common sense'" also perpetuates urban apartheid: white and middle-class people think African American and Latinx areas are "too dangerous" (including most of Bourgois's friends). In reality, few East Harlem residents are ever mugged, and whites "are probably safer" because, as Caesar explains, "people think you're a *fed* [federal agent]" or "think, 'he's white and he's in the neighborhood, so he must be crazy,'" and avoid him either way. Despite wandering around East Harlem nearly every night for many years, Bourgois only gets mugged once, inside a store, and his wife is fine. In fact, his "friends living downtown in safer neighborhoods" have worse luck. However, the sense of danger is still palpable and "pervades daily life in El Barrio" because violence is "highly visible and traumatic." (Bourgois witnesses multiple shootings in his first year there.)

Bourgois implicates the rest of American society (especially people of his own white, upper-class, liberal in-group) in believing and perpetuating the racism toward inner-city residents that is largely responsible for their inability to succeed in mainstream society. Inner-city residents' names, skin color, accents, and emblems of street culture guarantee that they will start out with negative cultural capital in the mainstream. The fact that even well-meaning white people instinctively associate the entire neighborhood with the worst stories and stereotypes shows how the public often turns narratives about the poor into reasons to hate, fear, or reject such groups.

The result of this violence is a "culture of terror": most people stay off the streets and distrust the people surrounding them. And the public image of this "culture of terror" leads people to distance themselves from the marginalized people living in places like El Barrio. Like those around him, Bourgois feels he has "to deny or 'normalize' the culture of terror" by allowing himself to relax and seek community in the neighborhood. In fact, Bourgois grew up "just seven blocks downtown from El Barrio's southern border," and always bought into "the illusion of friendly public space" in El Barrio. But the neighborhood's "violent minority" constantly pushes back with the "culture of terror." So do the police—once, when Bourgois mentions "that the neighborhood felt safe," Caesar tells him a lengthy story about watching two men mug and beat a woman, and then police beat the muggers nearly to death.

Bourgois does not mean to deny the reality of violence in El Barrio, which would mean sanitizing the experiences of his friends and research subjects. El Barrio residents and outsiders alike misinterpret violent incidents among those involved in the drug trade as a continuous, pervasive threat of violence from all sides, directed at anyone, including innocent bystanders. Caesar's tale shows how this violence multiplies with police involvement, and raises the problem of how law enforcement (and the public) draw the line between innocents to be protected and criminals to be controlled.

In the section "Internalizing Institutional Violence," Bourgois reveals that his friends in El Barrio feared police brutality far less than what they would suffer in the holding cell in prison—Caesar, again, offers a long and colorful warning about being rape. In fact, the City has just sent new squads to round up and arrest people in huge numbers in El Barrio, and after hearing Caesar's story Bourgois runs upstairs to get his I.D., just in case the police come for him.

Again, the "culture of terror" encompasses not only public images of El Barrio or residents' fears of violence, but also serves as a motivation for the criminals in the neighborhood to stay out of trouble. Whereas people in mainstream culture might worry about jail time's effects on their future, in El Barrio, the dangers of incarceration are primarily associated with the possibility of bodily harm.

Under "Accessing the Game Room Crackhouse," Bourgois explains that his first goal upon arriving in El Barrio is convincing Primo he is not an undercover officer. Bourgois is brought to the Game Room by his neighbor Carmen, who is 39 and already a grandmother, and who recently grew addicted to crack, became homeless, and abandoned her grandchildren. Primo thinks Bourgois is undercover at first, but after a couple weeks, they become friends, since Bourgois has to pass the Game Room multiple times each day. Primo invites him inside and, astonishingly, is *happy* when he turns down an offer of cocaine—ironically, "street ethics [...] equates any kind of drug use with the work of the devil," even though it is everywhere. Primo and his friends are also interested to meet "a friendly white," since the only white people they know are angry authority figures at school, work, and the police station.

With Carmen's story, Bourgois introduces the horrible toll that crack takes on the lives of El Barrio residents. It is not the physiological effects of the drug itself, but rather the financial, personal, and emotional damage people will cause in order to procure the drug. Primo's delight that Bourgois will not use drugs exposes the inherent contradictions in street culture, which valorizes drugs as a means to wealth yet denigrates users for their weakness and lack of autonomy. Dealers who use drugs often end up caught between these two conceptions, as well as the different connotations tied to each drug. Bourgois's status as a "friendly white" further highlights the antagonism between street and mainstream culture.

As he starts hanging out more and more at the Game Room, Bourgois becomes "an exotic object of prestige," and people want to be around him because his whiteness is intimidating (which sometimes problematizes his research). Soon, he is an "honorary nigga.'" A few years later, drunk and high on speedball, Primo's lookout "Benzie" (Benito) admitted that he initially thought Bourgois was "a faggot" because of the way he talked. Primo calls this "intelligent talk," and notes that Bourgois sounds like he is from Spain when he speaks Spanish. While Bourgois immediately feels vaguely offended, he later realizes that it was better he was never self-conscious about "giving off 'dirty sexual pervert' vibes."

Bourgois's complex relationship with the Game Room's dealers and users shows that ethnography is always a two-way encounter between the researcher and subject. Each side is encountering a new culture and making sense of it on their own culture's terms before beginning to learn the language of the other culture. Bourgois's voice is another signifier of his cultural capital in the mainstream and lack of it in El Barrio (until it is bestowed on him by his friends), just as his formal European Spanish accent recalls the first wave of white colonizers in Puerto Rico.

In "African American/Puerto Rican Relations on the Street," Bourgois explains that his Nuyorican friends in El Barrio, even though whites would see many of them as black, are "explicitly hostile to African Americans." Ray's two African American dealers go by Spanish names and complain of racism in the Game Room. And Caesar goes on a diatribe about how he hates and wants to kill black people, "because it was a black man who killed my sister." Nevertheless, street culture nearly uniformly comes from African Americans, and Caesar is the first to admit that he wants to have "that black style."

The hostility between African Americans and Puerto Ricans, (which exists in spite of their common cultural, economic, and political interests) is a means for both groups to substantiate their own identities outside of the mainstream and create an enemy. And yet, it is ironic that Bourgois's Nuyorican friends discriminate against African Americans based on the same racist logic that white people use to discriminate against them.

Despite El Barrio's racial politics, "everyone in Ray's network" ultimately accepts and likes Bourgois, although those "on the periphery of Ray's scene" remain suspicious—and even yell at Bourgois "for never tape-recording them," since they want "'at least a chapter' in [his] book." And everyone is skeptical about Bourgois's desire "to give something back to the community" through his book, because they see "everyone in the world [as] hustling." Some years in, Caesar and Primo start "urging [Bourgois] to make speedier progress" on what they assume will be "a best seller." Caesar gets angry at Bourgois for "giving up on" them when he gets an injury from typing too much, and demands "a lifetime reference" in the book from Bourgois, whom he calls "our role model."

Even though speaking into a tape recorder would ordinarily represent going "on the record" and admitting one's misdeeds in a verifiable and prosecutable way, Bourgois's tape recorder represents the power and legitimacy of street knowledge rather than of the bureaucratic state. While it is an honor to be included in Bourgois's book, people are rather jaded about the possibility of working for the sake of others, rather than for economic self-interest, which is as central to Street Culture as the culture of American business. Bourgois's transformation into a "role model" shows that he could never be a neutral observer in this research project. Precisely because of his difference from those he studies, he ends up affecting their lives—hopefully, as he declares here, for the better.

CHAPTER 2: A STREET HISTORY OF EL BARRIO

After an epigraph from a Catholic priest decrying the danger of East Harlem in the 1930s, Bourgois explains the importance of historical context, and especially the "oppressive colonial history" of Puerto Rico, in his introduction to this chapter. Because of its importance amid shipping routes, the island was long contested by major powers uninterested in its inhabitants' lives or safety. Even as a slave society, Puerto Rico was "above all, a locus for military control," and its contemporary status as the same has led to a mass migration to the mainland United States over the last century. A "Free Associated Commonwealth," Puerto Rico remains a disenfranchised colony largely economically dependent on funds from the mainland.

As he argued in the introduction, Bourgois intends to shed light on the historical antecedents to the modern-day marginalization of Nuyorican people in El Barrio. He considers how they became Nuyoricans in the first place: to this day, the territory of Puerto Rico has been thoroughly dominated, ignored, and deprived of sovereignty by colonial powers. Notably, Puerto Rico remains *a colony: this history is not past, and Puerto Ricans remain one of the few currently colonized peoples in the world.*

In "From Puerto Rican **Jíbaro** to Hispanic Crack Dealer," Bourgois explains that the U.S. expropriated and consolidated farmers' lands after initially occupying Puerto Rico. After giving that land to large corporations, the government turned its previous owners into a class of wage-laborers who became associated with the term "jíbaros," which is both a derogatory term and a "symbol of Puerto Rican cultural integrity and self-respect," depending on the context. The term originally referred to Puerto Ricans who refused to work on Spanish plantations and "lived outside the jurisdiction of the urban-based state." This parallels "street culture's resistance to exploitation and marginalization by U.S. society," and in fact Primo sometimes calls his group "jíbaros."

The United States has historically exploited Puerto Rico's labor in order to build up the profits of mainland corporations. The jíbaro's move from an enslaved society to an oppressive form of labor under capitalism exemplifies this trend and parallels Nuyoricans' experiences as they discover the legal job market is more insufferable than selling crack is dangerous. While they use the term "jíbaro" to point to their rejection of the state, the term also suggests their only alternative to living under their own "street culture" is to be incorporated into the lowest rung of the existing mainstream culture.

While likely unaware of Puerto Rico's social history after its transfer to U.S. control, El Barrio residents are the direct descendants of the mass migration after World War Two, during which 1.5 million people (a third of the island) moved from Puerto Rico to New York in two decades. Most of them worked in garment factories, and then service jobs when the manufacturing sector collapsed in the 1970s and 1980s. And now their children are people largely working in the underground economy, like Primo, who when revising his family history declares, "fuck it! I'm just a **jíbaro**."

After two generations underwent drastic transformations in Puerto Rico, the following two generations had a similar experience in the United States. The economic opportunities for which the first generation migrated collapsed, and again, Puerto Ricans became a casualty of history.

Meanwhile, given U.S. tax exemptions in Puerto Rico after the Cuban Revolution in 1959, corporations have turned Puerto Rico into a tax shelter, extracting "the highest corporate profit rate of any country in the western hemisphere" but sending nearly all those profits back to the mainland. And Puerto Ricans experience "an overtly racist 'cultural assault'" too: forced to navigate a second language and treated as racial inferiors in the United States. The combination of these "overwhelming changes" in a few generations has contributed to Puerto Ricans' disproportionate levels of poverty and unemployment, drug use and health issues—they fare the worst on these measures among any ethnic group in New York.

Just as early Puerto Rican immigrants were treated as disposable laborers on the mainland (as was the next generation, since they could not fit into the transformed economy), the island's economy has also been made disposable. Although mainland Americans would not tolerate this kind of treatment, Puerto Ricans have no federal political rights. While Bourgois does not mean to say that Puerto Rico's dramatic historical changes are the only reason for contemporary Nuyoricans' poverty, he sees a clear connection between the United States' unfair treatment of Puerto Ricans (forcing them to adapt to circumstances and cultural frameworks they neither chose nor predicted) and El Barrio Nuyoricans' deliberate rejection of mainstream culture.

In "Confronting Individual Responsibility on the Street," Bourgois contrasts his academic take on Nuyorican hardship with the fact that history does not exonerate individuals on the ground for "impos[ing] suffering on their families, neighbors, and friends." In fact, the dealers Bourgois studied "firmly believe in individual responsibility," like most Americans, and blame themselves for their poverty. But there is also an "almost political" form of street culture that indicts the limits of mainstream America. Caesar defends this view in an argument with Primo, who declares that "if I have a problem it's because I brought it upon myself."

Again, Bourgois points to the limits of the structure versus agency debate. His structural arguments do not explain individual choices, only the unfavorable conditions that constrain and determine individuals' choices. And street culture seems caught in the same dilemma—although it often aligns with the American tendency to valorize agency and ignore structure, it also recognizes that this viewpoint is a way for Americans to conveniently forget the oppression they have imposed upon others both inside and outside their nation's borders. Caesar, however, goes the opposite direction, using this history to excuse his detrimental individual behavior.

In "East Harlem's Immigrant Maelstroms," Bourgois turns to "another historical legacy of social marginalization," that of the neighborhood itself. The Dutch forced Manhattan's native inhabitants out of the area by 1669 and covered it in tobacco plantations. It was briefly a "countryside retreat for wealthy New Yorkers" in the 1700s and 1800s, and then immigrant workers moved in in the 1880s-90s after public transportation opened connected it to the rest of the city. "One of the poorest and most culturally diverse neighborhoods in the history of the United States," East Harlem saw waves of German and Irish immigrants, then Jews moving North from the Lower East Side, Scandinavians, and African Americans. At the time, however, researchers considered this incredible diversity a hindrance to assimilation.

In Bourgois's research, the historical dispossession and oppression of the Puerto Rican people intersects with East Harlem's historical impoverishment and marginalization. Unlike in Puerto Rico, this was not the direct result of official policy, but policy and public attitudes still contributed to East Harlem's fate. It was a site for those considered undesirable "others" by native-born Americans, and was treated from the start as a marginal zone where those hoping to become Americans would wait and struggle to adapt.

In the section "The Italian Invasion of East Harlem," Bourgois explains how East Harlem became, according to the New York Mayor's office, "probably the largest Italian colony in the Western hemisphere" around the beginning of the 20th century. In East Harlem's dense cluster of ethnically-stratified shantytowns, Italians suffered horrific discrimination, which the few remaining Italian residents remember vividly. Mostly Sicilians, they were sometimes considered "of 'African racial stock'" and stereotyped in schools and by researchers, as well as of course in everyday life. As one writer put it, they "were becoming Americans by learning how to be ashamed of [their] parents."

The Italian experience in the early-20th century is a clear parallel to the Puerto Rican experience over the following hundred years. The Italian American narrative reflects the stories of many immigrant groups in the United States, who are initially rejected by both native-born Americans and other immigrant groups before eventually finding themselves accepted in American society. As an immigrant enclave, then, East Harlem also allowed Italians to form a community of acceptance within a city and nation that reviled them.

Under "The Puerto Rican 'Invasion' of El Barrio," Bourgois reveals that the Puerto Ricans moving into East Harlem just before World War Two "received as negative a reception as had the Italians," and often from Italian gangs themselves, which is a conflict many of Ray's friends and acquaintances remember. Until even the 1970s, Italian organized crime kept certain buildings and blocks white-only, and mob threats continued even after Bourgois began his research. In the 1930s, middle-class Jews started leaving the neighborhood and African Americans moving in. But the area's growing Puerto Rican population, many of whom were malnourished due to conditions on the island, were vilified in New York: academic medical experts called them full of "tropical diseases [and] venereal diseases," government reports spoke of their "inferiority in native ability," intelligence researchers complained about their IQs, and popular publications decried their lack of English and propensity to live on welfare.

Originally the victims of racism, the Italian residents of East Harlem quickly became its enforcers, much like Puerto Ricans increasingly turn against new Mexican immigrants during the period of Bourgois's research. These existing Italian residents, organized crime, and the official media all align against Puerto Rican newcomers, using extreme tactics and racist narratives that are hardly imaginable in today's landscape. Although only some of Bourgois's friends in El Barrio personally experienced this forceful, wide-ranging discrimination, all of them were raised by parents who did, and this further helps explain their sense of displacement and alienation in New York.

In "Poverty and Ecological Disrepair," Bourgois looks at the wealth of literature decrying East Harlem as Manhattan's poorest and dirtiest neighborhood, a body of work catalyzed by the neighborhood's location next to New York's wealthiest. In the 1920s-30s, a criminologist named Trasher studied the area and developed a theory "that crime and social pathology emerged in expanding concentric circles from out of core urban poverty areas." Oscar Lewis's "culture of poverty theory" in the 1960s was next, and it is still often dishonestly employed to blame poverty's victims for their condition. Creative works include a film by James Agee and Helen Levitt, the hit song "A Rose in Spanish Harlem," and most importantly "the Nuyorican literary genre" that has won global acclaim.

East Harlem's reputation almost seems to be a self-fulfilling prophecy, less about the actual character of the neighborhood than its proximity and visibility to the wealthy Upper East Side. It becomes a codeword for poverty in the United States, and its reputation is mutually reinforced by popular narratives, scholarly work, and government policies, which points to the danger Bourgois faces if his work is misinterpreted. At the same time, the neighborhood itself writes back, with Nuyorican literature taking on a subversive role much like street culture's resistance to the mainstream.

In "The Reconcentration of Poverty in Easternmost East Harlem," Bourgois notes that the part of East Harlem where he, Ray, and their network lived has long been considered "the poorest and most delinquent section." In the 1950s, the government spent millions of dollars destroying everything that existed in the neighborhood and replacing it with housing projects, which only concentrated poverty even more intensely in the area, a tendency that continues to the present. In fact, during the same period, one of the buildings on his block burned down—and while he lived there 24 years later, he watched the same fate befall another.

The physical infrastructure of East Harlem clearly reflects the neighborhood's destiny. Although the construction of housing projects might have been well-intentioned, Bourgois makes it clear that the government's huge investment in East Harlem only worsened the neighborhood's conditions. Rather than spending to alleviate poverty, the city seemed to be spending to keep it confined to certain areas already zoned as undesirable.

Under "From Speakeasy to Crackhouse," Bourgois explicitly turns back to the problem of substance abuse and crime in East Harlem, which was originally filled with tobacco plantations and then overrun with speakeasies in the 1920s, and then of course the crackhouses that Bourgois studied. In fact, the Game Room used to be a speakeasy, and the library next door documented its frustration with both halves of this history. The historical density of "speakeasies, brothels, crackhouses, and shooting galleries" has created a hostile environment—one the librarians' animosity toward the public exemplifies. (When Bourgois takes a young neighbor to get a library card, the library kicks him out, assuming he is trying to steal books or molest the boy.)

Bourgois turns to the third historical narrative that is critical to his research: that of drugs and drug abuse. The intersection of poverty, racialized communities, and drugs was not new when the crack epidemic exploded in the 1980s; rather, it is enduring and responsible for the neighborhood's cycle of mistrust and "culture of terror." Again, locals—here, those supposed to be serving the community in the library—immediately assume Bourgois has sinister intentions, which attests to the pervasive cynicism engendered by drugs and violence.

Under "The Omnipresence of Heroin and Cocaine," he notes that these drugs have been a fixation of the literature about East Harlem since the 1920s, and that pictures of La Farmacia and clients who buy Ray's drugs have even been shown in recent works of journalism on the subject. In a school across the street from a popular drug-using corner, teachers put black paper over the windows so their students would not watch people inject drugs.

Although his research is partially motivated by the limits of conventional quantitative statistics, Bourgois evidently does not choose to research East Harlem because its story has been neglected or under-narrated. Rather, he hopes to show what is left out by the conventional, sensationalistic, even pornographic depictions of the neighborhood—which includes the perspectives of its non-drug-using residents.

In "Mafia Legacies in the Underground Economy," Bourgois explains that "the historical continuity of visible substance abuse" in East Harlem "repeatedly socializ[es] new generations of ambitious, energetic youngsters into careers of street dealing and substance use." In the 1920s, the Italian Mafia first began selling drugs on a mass scale in the neighborhood, and the legacy of organized crime in El Barrio has "redefin[ed] 'common sense' in favor of crime and violence." The police are corrupt, guns and drugs are easy to come by, it is common to see shoot-outs and murders, and "the Genovese crime family [...] controlled the neighborhood" up to the end of the 1980s.

Although the drug trade is illegal, it becomes a prestigious and attractive career path for East Harlem youth, who are inculcated into its street culture from an early age and given no alternative cultural framework through which to think about their futures. Contrary to the public opinion that drug dealers are lazy, unmotivated, or unwilling to work, Bourgois shows that the most *motivated and entrepreneurial East Harlem youth are actually the ones who end up selling drugs—which is, after all, an individualistic, winner-take-all business.*

In fact, the Genovese family runs their scheme out of the same block where Bourgois lives. (The leader, "Fat Tony," is sentenced to 175 years in prison during Bourgois's residence.) After they murder his real estate agent, Bourgois decides to avoid the Genoveses, although they are always suspiciously using payphones and unloading mysterious bags in a fruit store they own. Nevertheless, the Genoveses are the laughingstock of the New York organized crime world. Their decline impacts the neighborhood's real estate market: they sell various buildings and it becomes easier to rent to black tenants.

Just as Bourgois unintentionally shows up in East Harlem on the eve of the crack epidemic, he accidentally ends up with a front-row seat to the decline of East Harlem's most important criminal dynasty. While most outsiders now connect East Harlem to criminality because of its Puerto Rican residents, Bourgois makes it clear that the Italian American Mafia was far more dangerous than the small-time crack dealers of the 1980s and 1990s.

In the chapter's last section, "The Free Market for Crack and Cocaine," Bourgois explains that the Mafia's decline coincides with the rise of cocaine and crack, which result largely from the U.S. government shifting its focus to targeting drug traffickers (and cocaine is easier to transport than marijuana). In turn, crack emerges—a smokable mix of cocaine and baking soda, which is stronger and quicker than cocaine, and cheaper initially but better-suited for drug binges. With the mob's heroin trade disappearing, this crack economy takes over, with "upstart Puerto Rican, African American, and Dominican entrepreneurs" leading the way. But the Mafia's impact continues to be felt, since it taught people that, in Caesar's words, "you got to be making your money dirty."

Just as with his subjects' self-destructive behavior, Bourgois sees both structure (the malicious consequences of well-intentioned but deeply ineffectual U.S. drug policy, and the enduring influence of the Mafia) and agency (the individual's decision to use and sell drugs) in East Harlem's transformation into a crack mecca. While the supposedly unique and especially dangerous chemical composition of crack is often attributed to the destruction of inner-city communities, Bourgois affirms that it is simply a faster-acting version of cocaine, and that its effects were due to a combination of this fact, its low price, and the business opportunities it created for inner-city residents who lacked alternatives.

CHAPTER 3: CRACKHOUSE MANAGEMENT: ADDICTION, DISCIPLINE, AND DIGNITY

Bourgois starts with a quote from Felix, who felt important and respected when running the Game Room, but then reveals that the crack trade is like "any other risky private sector retail enterprise," and would be "overwhelmingly routine and tedious" if it did not include a sense of danger.

In an attempt to dispel the common assumption that the crack trade is opposite the formal economy (unstable, hugely profitable, and theatrically dangerous), Bourgois begins by showing that it is simply another job, with dangers that do not affect the formula for success: consistent sales.

In the section "Living with Crack," Bourgois explains the Game Room's origins: Felix, Primo's cousin and Ray's old friend, originally founded it but ran it badly—he "did not insulate himself from the police" and spent most of his time sleeping with teenage addicts, to the chagrin of his wife Candy.

Felix's error seems to have been assuming that the crack trade would be as glamorous as it is often depicted to be, and he is therefore running an ineffective business. In contrast, Ray—while he still has sex with teenagers and uses violence to sustain his business—focuses on the bottom line rather than the status and glory his business wins him.

Primo buys his supply at the Game Room in those days, after leaving his job, wife, and child to move back in with his mother and start mugging people to fund his habit. He tells Bourgois about robbing and threatening to kill a drunk Mexican man in his aunt's apartment building. (Caesar, who is addicted at the time of Bourgois's research, interrupts to comment on how much he loves crack).

Primo's trajectory is typical—or, arguably, stereotypical—of those who became involved in the crack trade at the beginning of the epidemic. It shows how crack engenders violence, not because of the drug itself, but because of the economic desperation of its users.

One day, Candy discovers Felix sleeping with her sister, and the confrontation leads to him hurting his ankle, either from jumping off a staircase landing or from a knife Candy throws at him. He enlists Primo to help manage the crackhouse, and ironically working there is what gets Primo to quit crack. Some time later, Candy shoots Felix (also for sleeping with her sister) and he goes to prison as soon as he gets out of the hospital. Candy sells the Game Room to Ray, who has just *returned* from prison.

Primo's apparently contradictory path away from crack demonstrates that stable (though underground) work gave him something to focus on and strive for, which diverted him away from drugs. This supports Bourgois's argument that drugs are symptom, rather than a cause, of poverty and a lack of opportunity. Candy's troubled relationship with Felix points to El Barrio's fraught gender dynamic, on which Bourgois focuses in the final three chapters of the book.

In "Restructuring Management at the Game Room," Bourgois explains what happens after Ray takes over the crackhouse and imposes his stricter rules, but leaves Primo in charge. "A brilliant labor relations manager," Ray uses controlled violence and gestures of friendship to control his workers, most of whom are family (by blood, marriage, or "fictive kinship arrangement[s]" like being godparents to one another's children or having those children with the same women). The Game Room's profits soar after Ray takes control, both improves quality and cuts prices, and kicks out rival gangs who begin filtering into his block. He soon opens two more crackhouses.

Again, Ray's success is based on business savvy that is specifically inflected through the norms and conditions of street culture. Whereas Felix wholly embodies the stereotype of the reckless, freewheeling crack dealer, Ray selectively invokes this same stereotype to run his business. His "labor relations" strategy is to carefully mete out carelessness. While his use of violence separates him from a conventional entrepreneur, his careful management of his underpaid employees and ruthless campaigns against his competition are common, tactics in mainstream American business.

Within a year, Primo is in the upper echelons of Ray's business hierarchy: he gets "benefits" (protection if he gets arrested, gifts, and fancy dinners), but the people he hires as lookouts, like Caesar, get nothing but the pay he negotiates with them. Caesar's predecessor Benzie disrespected too many people, so Primo fired him, but Primo does not trust Caesar either. And Primo himself often berates customers, especially African Americans and women.

Again, like any other business, the crack trade has a clear hierarchy, with Ray as the executive, Primo as middle management, and Caesar as the expendable, low-level worker. Ray has to look out for his workers to maintain loyalty, but only because Primo could theoretically turn against Ray. Caesar, who does not deal directly with Ray, poses no threat to him.

Under "Curbing Addiction and Channeling Violence," Bourgois elaborates on Caesar's unpredictable behavior whenever he goes on a crack binge—he steals and attacks people, but he and Primo remain close, perhaps "because [Primo] sympathized with Caesar's crack addiction" (since Primo himself quit through stable work at the Game Room), or perhaps because he can pay Caesar (like the other addicts who work as lookouts) in crack instead of cash. Primo tries changing Caesar's pay schedule to limit his drug usage, but Caesar mostly remains an effective employee, in part because of his penchant for violence. Caesar brags about nearly killing a man with a baseball bat, an episode Bourgois remembers vividly, and he gets social security money because he is "a certified nut case."

Though Caesar's crack addiction would threaten his ability to perform Primo's job, it makes him an excellent lookout. Like Ray's carefully-managed reputation for violence, Caesar's outbursts protect the business. The only drawback is that Caesar's violence is random and authentically reflects his personality, while Ray's is premeditated and primarily for show. Much like a lawyer's reputation for ruthlessness might help them win clients and scare their competition, crack dealers' reputation for violence makes potential robbers think twice. Caesar's addiction and social security check also make him a less costly employee for Primo, and so he ironically hires the unstable Caesar because he is easier to take advantage of.

Unlike Caesar, during his time at the Game Room Benzie managed to quit crack, replacing it with powder cocaine and occasional heroin. And interestingly, Benzie had a legal job doing boat maintenance, which he quit to deal. Primo and Benzie reminisce about how much they used to make—at least $200 a night—and how they used to blow all of it on hotels and parties.

Benzie, Caesar's predecessor, challenges the assumption that those involved in the crack trade cannot get legal employment. Rather, he deliberately chose the underground economy because it was a better alternative than his disappointing job in the mainstream economy. Dealers' propensity to spend their earnings on drugs is another reason that poverty perpetuates itself in El Barrio.

In the section "Minimum Wage Crack Dealers," Bourgois turns explicitly to "the mystery of why most street-level crack dealers remain penniless." Like most people, they overspend when they earn a lot in a short period of time, and unlike most people, they have "limited options for spending [this] money constructively in the legal economy." While they brag about their high pay, it is not so simple. They are paid based on what they sell, which on average comes out to a wage of $7-8 an hour (double the minimum in the 1980s). Sometimes they make much more, and they tend to remember the best nights at the expense of the average ones. One day, Bourgois looks through Primo's wallet to figure out how much he is making and accidentally finds $15 worth of food stamps, which Primo says is from his mother "for emergencies."

Bourgois's analysis reveals an enduring contradiction in public perceptions about drug dealers: it is assumed that they deal drugs because they are impoverished, yet it is a supposedly lucrative trade. The dealers themselves seem to believe in this paradox. Bourgois shows the reality: firstly, even if the dealers had money, they could not break into the middle classes because of cultural barriers to finding better, legal work, and that. Secondly, although they occasionally receive large sums, these deals are few and far between when compared to the steady pay of conventional work. Curiously, this suggests that people like Benzie—who quit legal jobs to sell drugs—are not actually motivated by money, but by some combination of dignity, autonomy, and perceived status.

Besides dealing's low wages, Bourgois continues, it is also horrible work: it is dangerous and the Game Room lacks heating and air conditioning, a bathroom and a telephone. People sit around on "grimy milk crates and bent aluminum schools" under an exposed light bulb, withstanding the "smell of urine and vomit." Primo emphasizes that he hates it. Benzie regrets losing his old job doing maintenance at the yacht club after spending all night partying and all morning with a woman. Eventually, Benzie steals from Ray and ends up in jail, then starts working a minimum wage job when he gets out. He still does drugs on the weekends, during which he tells Primo how great it is to work legally and proclaims (while sniffing cocaine) that he "do[es] not do drugs." For the first time, he says, he has self-respect.

When it is treated as just another job, drug dealing loses nearly all its glamor. Benzie reveals that becoming a drug lookout was only half a choice—it was also because keep a mainstream job was incompatible with his lifestyle. He eventually manages to balance the two, proclaiming the values of each to the other side. It is clear, though, that if he wants to become successful in either mainstream or street culture, he has to give up the other.

Primo also sometimes admits to Bourgois that he would "rather be legal," making reliable money and looking forward to building wealth in the future. But people get into dealing for the opposite reason—Bourgois will cover this more in depth in the following chapter, but essentially, they see legal labor as degrading and inhumane. One lookout, Willie, recalls signing up for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals—because he loves animals—and then learning that his job is to collect the corpses of euthanized animals in carts for garbage collection.

Ironically, while most outsiders might expect drug dealing to be the job that promises wealth but is morally compromising, this is actually how Bourgois's subjects see the legal economy. Willie's horrifying experience working at the animal shelter shows that Bourgois's subjects really are forced into the worst imaginable jobs and questions the default logic that legal employment is always a good thing.

Under "Management-Labor Conflict at the Game Room," Bourgois notes that Primo's status as the crackhouse boss makes his own lack of legal opportunities less obvious to those working under and buying from him. However, when Ray begins investing heavily in his other business, the Social Club next to La Farmacia, he grows more demanding and begins cutting into Primo's authority: Ray hires his own lookouts and lowers Primo's per-piece salary. In response, Primo starts drinking and using drugs more often, and Ray starts working him part-time. (This is also a response to the further increased quality and decreased prices of the Game Room's competitors.)

Primo's success in the Underground Economy has no bearing on his chances in the mainstream one—there is no connection between the kind of status he achieves in El Barrio and his status in the eyes of the outside world. Primo's reaction to his loss of control again suggests that he uses drugs when he lacks opportunities—not that he lacks opportunities because he uses drugs.

The Game Room gets moved, then shut down, then reopened with an inferior product (since Ray's former supplier got imprisoned). Primo and Caesar speculate about what Ray must be thinking and complain about their low pay. But, when Bourgois probes the topic, they launch back into war stories about their highest-paying nights and proclaim they are looking forward to the beginning of the new month (when "*monneeey*" comes in). Ray and the new guy he hires to take over part of Primo's shift, Tony, grow more and more suspicious of Primo and Caesar, especially when crack starts disappearing. Everyone suspects Caesar, but the culprit is actually "Ray's jack-of-all-trades maintenance worker" Gato. Ray beats Gato up and forces him to start selling crack to pay back the supply he stole. To boot, Ray negotiates down Tony's salary, knowing that Tony and Primo hate each other too much to work together and demand better treatment.

Primo and Caesar's demotion has nothing to do with their performance, which demonstrates that, even despite Primo's relatively privileged position in Ray's hierarchy, there is nothing like job security at the Game Room. They are completely in the dark about management decisions and their future prospects, and while they try to assuage their fears by telling stories, it becomes clear that their working conditions and opportunities are deteriorating. Hiring Tony is another of Ray's brilliant management decisions, but the agony Tony creates for Primo shows that—in the underground and mainstream economies alike—good management often means worse conditions for workers. This helps explain both why Bourgois's subjects lack access to the opportunities their parents had, and why their options in the legal economy are so limited.

Under the heading "The Crackhouse Clique: Dealing with Security," Bourgois explains that, despite his difficulties, Primo still appears to run the show, and is popular among the large crowd that always hangs out around the crackhouse (especially the teenage girls). Bourgois later realizes that these omnipresent loiterers help inform Primo about the competition, "camouflage the comings and goings of the emaciated addicts," distract the police (especially the 72-year-old one-eyed alcoholic Abraham, who collects quarters from the game machines), and protect the crackhouse against potential mugging or attacks.

Primo's clique blurs the bounds of business and leisure, as they are both an economic asset for the crackhouse and his friends. They at once confer him status and offer him the same advantage as Ray's displays of violence: protection. The clique and Abraham make the Game Room unpalatable for police, who cannot discern who is and is not involved in illegal activity.

In fact, the Game Room does get robbed twice during Bourgois's research, and being around friends makes Primo's job feel less perilous and means there is always a witness if something goes wrong. In fact, Bourgois's "white face" was probably part of this deterrence strategy—potential robbers probably thought he was an undercover cop, so would stay away from the Game Room. And, of course, Primo's army of acquaintances also helps him weed out undercover cops.

Bourgois realizes that he is part of Primo's clique, and that his whiteness is a particularly valuable commodity in the drug market. Again, all of Primo's decisions are in some way economic, even though he might not explicitly think about them this way.

Despite making "tens of thousands" of sales and moving at least a million dollars during Bourgois's research, Primo only gets arrested twice, and this is a more frequent rate of arrest than those at Ray's other operations. The police, in short, are incompetent and distant from the community—in five years, they never learn to recognize Bourgois, who is invariably the only white man around and even starts going to police-led "community outreach meetings." In the Game Room, Primo and his associates sold in spots shielded from view and made sure too much crack was never visible at once. They also have to learn to judge when to hide their drugs to avoid a police raid, but not to do it so often that it gets in the way of sales.

Bourgois's analysis of the police in El Barrio should remind the reader that he is writing from a time before the War on Drugs became militarized and refocused on enforcement and incarceration. The book takes place during the early years of the crack epidemic, when the police are largely irrelevant, passive bystanders. This is partially the product of street culture, which teaches people not to associate or cooperate with police officers, whose work thereby becomes more difficult.

Primo tells Bourgois how he learned to spot and reject cops. His one criminal conviction came when he carelessly sold to a man without looking at him, and then got caught in the process of stashing the drugs. But his only punishment was probation. And he avoided jail after his second arrest when the police mixed him up with Caesar and undermined the prosecutor's case.

Primo's attribution of his arrest to carelessness shows that he believes a basic, consistent level of caution—one he can presumably maintain even when high on drugs—is plenty to avoid the legal consequences of his actions. In other words, the illegality of the drug trade does not dissuade Primo and his associates from participating in it.

CHAPTER 4: "GOIN LEGIT": DISRESPECT AND RESISTANCE AT WORK

Bourgois beings by noting that everyone he met during his research had worked multiple legal jobs, often from a young age, but that "virtually none" of them found *stable* such work by their early 20s. The main culprit was the decline of New York's manufacturing industry, a shift with well-documented negative effects on low-wage workers' opportunities. However, there are also "cultural dislocations" associated with this shift, and with the concentration of power and money in "the finance, real estate, and insurance (FIRE) sector." If working-class youth want to move upward, they often have to start as entry-level workers in these industries and endure a "wrenching cultural confrontation with the upper-middle-class white world," the values of which are opposite those of street culture.

After Chapter 3, which focused on the internal dynamics of the crack trade, Chapter 4 turns to the relationship between the underground and legal economies. Although, in theory, they operate according to different and incompatible logics, Bourgois shows that they are never truly mutually exclusive in people's lives. Rather, the underground economy offers the reliable, equal-opportunity jobs to which El Barrio youth turn when their forays into the mainstream economy inevitably fail.

Under "Resistance, Laziness, and Self-Destruction," Bourgois notes that the dealers he befriended tended to oscillate between selling crack and doing "the least desirable [jobs] in U.S. society," including "unlicensed asbestos remover, home attendant, street-corner flyer-distributor, deep-fat fry cook, and night-shift security guard on the violent ward at the municipal hospital for the criminally insane." When they get fired, they are proud to return to dealing, "as a triumph of free will and resistance" to exploitative jobs.

The actual job descriptions of Bourgois's subjects make their reluctance to transition into the mainstream economy much more understandable. Whereas the working conditions in the crack trade are far from ideal, they are likely better than being an "unlicensed asbestos remover" or risking confrontations with "the violent […] criminally insane." Most importantly, drug dealing offers young men (and sometimes women) a sense of autonomy, pride, and self-reliance within street culture, whereas low-level service work makes them look like failures within the mainstream culture.

More fundamentally, the people Bourgois meets are also afraid of being proven lazy or incapable—Primo, for instance, does not see the value in working a "bullshit job," like at a fast food restaurant, for low pay. He admits that he is too "*lazy*" for the work and has "just got used to the street scene." He got fired from his last job because he was still using crack at the Game Room all night, every night, and showing up exhausted. He alternates between blaming himself and blaming his horrible jobs.

Mainstream work is both the potential solution to people's sense of inferiority and the cause of this feeling, since they are only eligible for the worst jobs and often have trouble maintaining them. Primo's inability to decide whether he or his job is to blame demonstrates how he, too, gets caught up in the structure-versus-agency debate.

Caesar, on the other hand, declares that he is "happy with [his] life," spending every spare penny "get[ting] wrecked" and focusing on his "personal drug-addiction and self-destruction." He feels sick and disgusting every morning, but enjoys his time "breaking shit," "hassling customers," and "selling them garbage drugs" in the Game Room. His girlfriend's food stamps pay for his food, but he has no social security income at the moment because "they found out that I had worked legal" and he owes $1,500 in taxes.

Whereas Primo is ambivalent about both street culture (which accepts him, but which he wants to supersede) and mainstream culture (which he fears will never include him), Caesar completely rejects conventional notions of success and responsibility. Instead, he celebrates every opportunity to shun and distance himself from these expectations. This ultimately means embracing his irresponsibility and destructive behavior, but that decision makes sense, since he views legal work as including its own set of punishments (like taxes).

In "First Fired — Last Hired," Bourgois explains how dealers' pride allows them to forget they are "socially and economically superfluous to mainstream society." When he repeatedly gets turned down for a job during a bad downswing in the employment market, Primo blames the "son of a bitch guy at the job center" and starts growing depressed and increasing his drug intake. He hates that "it seems [to others] like I like to be lazy." He almost gets a job through Benzie, who is trying to get the intellectually disabled dishwasher in the kitchen where he works fired. The same week, he becomes responsible for paying his rent, starts getting fewer shifts at the Game Room, and starts resorting to asking his mother and sister for money. He gets evicted soon after and moves back in with his mother.

Bourgois shows how street culture serves as a sort of counterbalance to the humiliation El Barrio residents face in the mainstream world. It gives them a sense of self-esteem on which they can fall back when the conventional economy rejects them. Though Primo directly traces his job loss to structural and economic factors, this is one of the few times he squarely insists on an individual (agency-based) explanation. His desperation is underlined by the incredibly low ceiling for his aspirations (dishwashing).

In "Internalizing Unemployment," Bourgois explains that Primo next begins trying to forget that he has no chance of getting a job. He uses more and more drugs, and berates his girlfriend when she gets fired (in his words, he "ha[s] to abuse that bitch verbally"). He transitions from seeking work to becoming one of "what the economists euphemistically call 'discouraged workers.'" He neither wants nor can get a job for four to five dollars an hour, and he feels like "wasting a lot of money on train fare" for interviews is not even worth the trouble.

Primo takes out his economic frustrations on those around him and seems to believe that he deserves a job and lifestyle more dignified than the ones being offered to him. Bourgois seems to be implying that the very concept of "discouraged workers" is economists' way of translating a problem in the economy itself—its lack of good opportunities—into an indictment of workers who apparently lack the energy (or "courage") to take on the poor jobs for which they are eligible.

When he gets himself particularly intoxicated, Primo eagerly "admit[s] his deepest problems and anxieties." For instance, when doing cocaine and heroin at an elementary school playground that is "one of Manhattan's most active retail heroin markets," he admits he "gotta stop drinking" and looks forward to being sober. But he does not know how he could enter the legal market—he would be homeless if not for his mother, and could not get the job necessary to afford an apartment. He could go work, but is so "used to being a lazy person"—having a bed and food, taking advantage of his mother's reluctant hospitality. (He is the only person in his family who does not work.) His friend Willie is also deeply confused and spends the night "on an all-night crack binge."

While drug use is Primo's way of covering up his problems and anxieties, it also ultimately reveals them in ways more direct than Primo would acknowledge while sober. His fears are not only about his own abilities and economic future, but also about making his family proud by meeting the seemingly unrealistic expectations they set for him. The fact that heroin is constantly bought and sold on an elementary school playground reminds the reader of the drug trade's pervasive and damaging effects on the neighborhood, whose children grow up surrounded by it.

Bourgois befriends Primo's mother, who is tired and ashamed of his addictions, his irresponsibility, and his dependence on her. Primo and his mother then get scammed out of $2,400 sending him to "a so-called maintenance engineering training program," and another $2,400 when the school closes down suddenly before he can get his certificate. Meanwhile, he is on trial for selling crack to an undercover police officer and his lawyer berates him for refusing to get a job. Caesar is Primo's "only source of solidarity and understanding," and together they extol "the street-defined dignity of refusing to work honestly for low wages." They take pride in dealing—enough that when some recent Mexican immigrants berate Caesar for his irresponsibility, Caesar responds that Puerto Ricans are proud to "Fight the Power!" and "live off the system," seeking "easy money" and rejecting "stupid jobs."

Primo's mother offers Bourgois an entirely new perspective on the underground economy: at once that of a concerned parent and that of someone whose generational difference in some way prevents her from understanding her son's lack of opportunities in the labor market. But rather than convincing him to try legal work, the criticism of Primo's mother and lawyer merely reinforces to him that the mainstream economy is out of his reach. The old conflict between Italian and Puerto Rican immigrants now transitions into tension between Puerto Rican and Mexican people, whom Puerto Ricans define as excessively loyal to the mainstream economic system and ideology of success.

In "Crossover Dreams," Bourgois admits that Caesar is also "ridden with self-doubt over his exclusion from mainstream society," although his chances of overcoming this are even lower than Primo's. Once, Ray buys a bodega to launder his money and contracts Primo and Caesar to work there. They are thrilled at the prospect of "legit" work, which they reveal when rambling about their fantasies during a late-night psychedelic trip. Unfortunately, Ray is unable to figure out the paperwork and never opens the store. Bourgois sees the contrast between Ray's failure in the legal economy and his success in the underground economy of evidence of "the different 'cultural capitals' needed" in each context. Ray is a master of street culture but looks like "an incompetent, gruff, illiterate, urban **jíbaro**" when trying to run a legal business.

Ray's informal, underground business nearly becomes the jumping-off point for Primo and Caesar to "go legit." But again, the deficit in their abilities and the rift between mainstream and underground intervenes to block their success. Like the original jíbaros, Primo, Ray, and Caesar's rejection of the state leads the state to reject them as illegitimate and classless. While most people in mainstream culture may believe that completing a few government documents and inspections seems far easier than the nefarious drug trade, for Ray the former is completely foreign, while the latter is second nature.

Primo's attempt to offer "Mr. Fix-It Services" also fails—his clients did not want a Puerto Rican from the projects entering their houses to fix their appliances. He says "it's like they hear my voice, and they stop." He misses appointments and does not know what to charge people—both of which present a problem when Bourgois contracts him to fix his mother's stereo system.

Even when he tries to take on a line of work that preserves his autonomy and relies on his physical strength (social markers of masculinity in El Barrio's street culture), racism and a lack of cultural capital get in Primo's way, preventing him from getting the start he desperately needs.

In "Pursuing the Immigrant's Dream," Bourgois turns from the cultural gaps between the legal and illegal markets to the patterns of marginalization throughout his friends' lives. When they first start working "in their early teenage years," they desperately want consistent work—many leave school to work in factories that quickly close, and then "rotat[e] from one poorly paid job to the next" because of their lack of education and cultural capital. Primo did this in the garment industry, and Caesar in metallurgy—Caesar remembers watching his uncle fall into a vat of acid after working at the factory for 45 years. Willie is the only person Bourgois interviews who finished high school, and he remembers being jealous of Caesar's money and women.

Coming of age during the death knells of New York's manufacturing sector, Primo and Caesar not only had to deal with a lack of opportunities, but in fact had to watch the opportunities available to their parents disappear from their own futures due to structural factors outside their control. Caesar's experience with his uncle no doubt influenced his eventual attitude toward mainstream work, and also suggests that even the best mainstream work available to El Barrio residents is not necessarily dignified or rewarding in the long term.

In "Shattered Working-class Fantasies in the Service Sector," Bourgois explains how Primo, Caesar, and Willie's factory-worker dreams were "replaced by the nightmare of poorly paid, highly feminized, office-support service work." Factory work meshes better with hypermasculine street culture, unlike "the humble, obedient modes of subservient social interaction" that define ununionized office work. Office bosses deride street culture, and people like Primo and Caesar have difficulty adapting to "the 'common sense' of white-collar work." They lack the social skills for watercooler talk and respectful interactions with women, and ultimately "they look like idiotic buffoons to the men and women for whom they work." While they use street culture to try and overcome their marginalization, this culture entrenches it instead.

Here, Bourgois shows how street culture turns from a mere alternative an antagonist of the dominant culture. Because street culture is widely associated with violence, drugs, and a lack of education, its associated social markers signal unfitness for normal work to the gatekeepers of the mainstream economy. While most people see mainstream culture as the default, for El Barrio residents it is an entirely new language to learn, in which others expect them to be fluent from day one on the job.

Under "Getting 'Dissed' in the Office," Bourgois recounts Primo's difficulties working in a mail room at a magazine, like Gloria, the boss who calls him "illiterate" (he has to look up this word in the dictionary, which hurts him far more than the original insult) and the supervisors that constantly monitor him. He tries to help out by answering calls that nobody is around to take, but then gets banned from the phone because of his Puerto Rican accent. (Furious, he starts exaggerating the accent.)

The division between street and mainstream cultures leads Primo's behavior to have two opposite meanings: from his street culture-oriented perspective, he is taking on extra responsibility and showing his dedication to the company. But, according to the company's point of view, he is getting in the way of other people's work and harming the company's image by suffusing it with street culture.

In the section "The Gender Diss," Bourgois explains that Primo and Caesar were particularly offended by having to answer to female bosses like Gloria, because of "the machismo of street culture." They understand the corporate hierarchy—when he works in the mailroom, Primo holds the executives' checks up to a light before handing them over. New York's immense wealth, like that of the usually white female executives who order around men of color making minimum wage, "exacerbates the sense of sexist-racist insult."

While Primo's sense of emasculation at the hands of a female boss suggests that street culture makes it difficult for women to achieve the same status as men, his recognition of New York's profound inequality shows the illogic of the mainstream economy that treats him as inferior simply because of the way he carries himself.

Bourgois begins "Work Site Wars" by explaining how the corporate bonus system turns low-wage workers against each other, which makes them more disposable. Primo is often the first worker fired when a company decides to downsize. On one of these occasions, although he while he first blames his female boss, he later realizes that the company was "looking for reasons to let people go." His pleas do not save his job. He simply does not understand his bosses, like when Gloria tries to convince him to go to school. He lacks a "frame of reference to interpret and understand" his work. When asked to do inventory, for instance, he decides to "throw some of this shit away. Just to make it look neater [...] 'cause I knew she was never gonna use any of that stuff again." He sees Gloria's orders as personal attacks.

Just like Ray turns Primo and Tony against each other to prevent them from demanding better wages, hours, and working conditions, executives reward one another with bonuses for figuring out how to demand as much from their low-level workers as possible. The increasingly extravagant wealth of the American upper classes, then, can be seen as a direct result of the increasing misery of the poor. Just like Primo and his friends rebel against their disenfranchisement through street culture, Primo rebels against his menial job by taking on power and responsibilities that are beyond his role.

In "Weapons of the Weak," Primo complains about the mailings he is forced to prepare at the magazine, often at night and always under highly specific instructions from Gloria. He hates that she checks his work, offers to buy him food, and forces him to deliver work at her house. He over-reports his hours to get back at her. Although they both have good intentions, they both see something as wrong with the other. Primo still thinks about work in terms of a union forcing the boss to pay them better, not a worker sucking up to their boss for a promotion. When his hours get restricted, the money is no longer enough and he decides to leave. And Primo has nowhere to turn within the company. So he starts stealing, whether by taking the mail money or getting petty cash twice for the same errands.

Gloria's actions are a mirror image of Primo's—just as his well-intentioned attempts to help end up sabotaging the company, her attempts to guide him as he acclimates to the white-collar office environment ultimately backfire. Because her outreach is based on vulnerability and selflessness, he cannot make sense of it in terms of street culture, except as insult. Primo's experience highlights how employee-employer relations change and differ between blue-collar and white-collar environments. The former recognize the inevitably antagonistic financial relationship between employer and employee, but the latter (in which employees have no power to challenge their employers) require employees to forget the conflict and conform.

Under "'Fly Clothes' and Symbolic Power," Bourgois explains how dress codes become a medium for the battle between street and corporate culture. For instance, Caesar has to wear a shirt and tie to his job at the mail-room, but is sent to do so much construction work that he ruins the clothes and has to buy new ones. But he cannot wear clothing appropriate for what he is actually doing, only for his job description, lest his boss say he "look[s] like a hoodlum." Despite his "fly clothes on the street," he does not know what clothes to buy for work. Similarly, Primo left a job training program focused on fixing his "attitude" because he does not have the right clothes to wear. Ultimately, both are afraid of looking ridiculous because they do not know what professional attire means.

Although it seems like a minor and easily teachable dimension, clothing becomes a point of conflict between street and work culture because it is an area in which El Barrio residents have to choose one or the other, and cannot hide their discomfort with the mainstream world's expectations. The contrast between Caesar's official job and actual duties again shows that, even when ostensibly offered a chance in the formal economy, he is still treated as through street culture defines his abilities.

In "Unionized Travesties: Racism and Racketeering," Bourgois shows how construction work is the most accessible and acceptably macho entry-level work for people like Primo and Caesar, who are nevertheless often excluded from the industry by white unions with ties to organized crime. One group trying to help African American and Latinx people find work hired Caesar to protest a white construction company, which then hired him for the sake of diversity—but he could not stand being surrounded by racist whites and excluded from the union, not to mention away from crack during the day, so stopped showing up. The two most dangerous construction jobs, "building demolition and high-rise window replacement," are open to African Americans and Puerto Ricans, but the former is a means to gentrification and the latter a strategy landlords use to bypass rent control and evict poor tenants. In short, these jobs facilitate the displacement of their workers, and often treat them horribly.

Construction work is fitting for those involved in street culture because it still relies firmly on the blue-collar paradigm: the worker's duty is to build, not to continually appease their bosses or display a particular kind of professional decorum. But the industry's pervasive racism—much like Italian racism a generation before in El Barrio—prevents people of color from joining it. This is not subtle workplace discrimination—rather, it is a complete segregation of the industry. The fact that El Barrio's men are roped into work that undermines their own class interests—helping evict themselves from their own neighborhoods— demonstrates a curious parallel between street culture and the legal economy: in both cases, by trying to build better and more dignified lives for themselves, they end up hurting themselves in the long run.

In "The New-Immigrant Alternative," Bourgois explains that union work remains the gold standard, but that it can prove elusive: Primo gets a janitorial job but his employer steals some of his pay and fires him, like everyone else, two weeks before he would qualify to join the union. Rather than blaming their bosses, they blame recent Mexican, African, and Dominican immigrants who they believe are willing to work for much less. El Barrio Puerto Ricans deride and attack Mexicans in the 1990s just as Italians did Puerto Ricans a few decades earlier, and earlier residents did Italians before that. In fact, the constant influx of new workers allows companies to continue lowering wages and the government to continue reducing public support, to the detriment of everyone (including the new immigrants who face older immigrants' racism).

A well-functioning union preserves the dignity of low-wage, blue-collar work and prevents workers' rights from eroding. This is why Primo's employer recognizes the appeal of unions and uses the promise of them precisely to take advantage of his workers. Yet Primo, and others around him, are unwilling to blame structural conditions for their failures. They are used to businesspeople doing everything within their power to get ahead and continue to view these changes in the labor market as the products of many individual, agentive decisions.

In "The Bicultural Alternative: Upward Mobility or Beyond," Bourgois combines the insights of his previous sections in this chapter. Because FIRE sector service jobs offer inner-city youth their best chance of upward mobility, they have to balance two competing cultures and often feel like they are forced to betray one or another. An El Barrio resident named Leroy says that those who work in office buildings "wanna be white" and quit his job to sell crack after a white woman ran away from him on sight—when he was making an effort to be chivalrous. In fact, *he* is stunned by and afraid of the white woman, and he tries to understand how whites who have never been around black people might "automatically" be afraid of them.

Bourgois finally examines the two halves of El Barrio residents' economic troubles—their sense of belonging to street culture and their recognition that they must give up that culture and conform to predominately white management if they want to succeed. Bourgois does so in order to show that their difficulties are less about a lack of abilities or motivation (though they tend to doubt both of these in themselves), but rather due to a cultural conflict that requires them to sacrifice a part of themselves and pretend to be something they are not in order to have a chance at success. Leroy's confrontation with the white woman shows the impossibly deep divide he must bridge in order to succeed in the mainstream world.

In contrast, one of Caesar's cousins has an insurance job and lives in the suburbs, even though he used to be a heroin addict. He understands this move in terms of his religious conversion, and tries not to make his friends feel that he has "betrayed" them when he goes back to visit El Barrio. He is used to his white neighbors fearing him and shouting racist insults at him.

While Caesar's cousin has achieved a version of what Primo and Caesar dream about—stable work that takes him beyond financial worries—he clearly incurs a cost in terms of losing his cultural identity and becoming alienated from both his original community in El Barrio and his new, chosen community in the white suburbs.

CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL DAYS: LEARNING TO BE A BETTER CRIMINAL

In the chapter introduction, Bourgois quotes Caesar talking about the "wild war" between Puerto Ricans and African Americans at his school and explains that the next several chapters concern his subjects' early and family lives. This chapter is about public school and gangs, the most important institutions of adolescence.

Bourgois bridges the two halves of his book—the preceding chapters about the drug trade as an economic activity and public symbol of El Barrio life, and the final three chapters about private relationships and family life in the neighborhood. He does so by showing the interface between the two: how El Barrio youth's socialization into violence and institutions' failures to incorporate them into mainstream society lead them to reject conventional social norms and perpetuate violence in their personal lives.

Bourgois starts with Primo and Caesar's earliest memories about school in "Kindergarten Delinquencies: Confronting Cultural Capital." As a child, Primo hates school and never does homework—not only does his mother, who does not speak English and is functionally illiterate, have no idea how to deal with the school system, but moreover this system takes over her authority and makes Primo feel he has to choose between loyalty to school and to his mother. Researchers have well established that "teachers unconsciously process subliminal class and cultural messages to hierarchize their students," and Primo's absolute refusal to participate easily lands him at the bottom of this hierarchy. He ignores his mother's protests and forges her signature. She sends him to Puerto Rico, where her old community rejects him. When he is caught stealing $500 from his grandmother's purse, he gets sent back to New York.

Just as in his conflict between street and middle-class office cultures, Primo experiences the school system as an imposing, alien force that rigidly enforces uniformity. Middle-class parents with. mainstream cultural capital often are able to ensure that the interests of their children and the school system align. But this never happens with children like Primo, for whom school and family are entirely separate spheres. Torn between his mother and school system—who do not understand one another, and both assume their authority is absolute—it makes sense that Primo rejects both and acts out.

As Bourgois explains in "Violence: Family and Institutional," Caesar fared even worse than Primo. While Primo's mother came from "a rural plantation village," Caesar's mom was from a city, endured "more violent personal disruptions," and ended up using heroin during her pregnancy and serving more than two decades in prison for murdering a doctor. He grew up with his grandmother and moved frequently among cities and schools, where he invariably got into bad fights. At a reform school, he and his cousin Eddie watched counselors abuse students and were both suicidal because of their mothers' rejection. Eddie reveals that their grandmother publicly beat Caesar, and Caesar admits that she once threw a knife at him. In fact, Caesar and Eddie's grandmother has a reputation for brutality in the neighborhood, "even [among] the toughest of the dealers," although she is always polite to Bourgois.

Bourgois's attention to his subjects' family histories—like his summaries of Puerto Rico and El Barrio's histories—allow him to show the intergenerational patterns that made it particularly easy or logical (although never completely inevitable) for people to choose a self-destructive path. In this case, Caesar and Eddie learn from their families to address problems through violence. Rather than pay attention to their situations or attempt to teach them otherwise, the school system increasingly treats them as lost causes and menaces to society.

Given his upbringing, Bourgois thinks Caesar's propensity to violence makes sense. Caesar once hit a teacher with a chair, breaking his arm. He tried to rape another teacher and robbed a third repeatedly. He and Primo only went to school to meet girls and "fuck Special Ed niggas up." They beat one student over and over, basically staging his murder—incidentally, this student had the same disorder as Bourgois's young son, and this forces Bourgois into a moral crisis about his research, as do Caesar's stories about raping girls at school.

Caesar and Primo's early, severely violent behavior likely pushes the limits of most readers' empathy. While Bourgois demands that his readers understand the broader structural reasons as to why *Caesar and Primo were disposed to act this way, he does not by any means want to suggest that they lack agency and are not fully to blame for their own actions. This illuminates Bourgois's argument in the introduction that he has a moral responsibility to write about the violence he witnessed, as much as he has a parallel responsibility to use his depiction of this violence to advocate for the betterment of the communities in which it takes place.*

In "Learning Street Skills in Middle School," Bourgois continues to follow Primo and Caesar's diverging paths: while the former ended up in low-level classes, the latter went to "an experimental Special Education facility at a hospital for the criminally insane." He has gotten social security money ever since, and since almost everyone in his family does, too, he is relatively better off financially than most off the others. When he returns to a normal school, Caesar avoids class to sell pot, play dice, chase girls, and even once "shit off the roof." He has many more violent stories about murdering animals (burning them alive, drowning them in the river, and throwing them off buildings).

Bourgois seeks to demystify and provide a comprehensive look at Caesar's reckless violence, rather than defining him as inherently evil because of it. In fact, public policy seems to fall victim to this way of thinking, using Caesar's "official" insanity as a basis for arguing that he is beyond reproach and unable to ever truly contribute to the economy. The fact that this concretely benefits him demonstrates that such policies result in the opposite of their intention by encouraging antisocial behavior. This reality demonstrates that many people like Caesar who are excluded from the mainstream have not chosen their fate, but are merely ill.

Instead of school, the most influential institution in Caesar and Primo's youth is "The Peer Group," the subject of Bourgois's next section. Older kids, including Ray and Luis, teach eleven-year-old Primo how to steal cars and radios from rich neighborhoods, especially the Upper East Side that borders El Barrio. According to Bourgois, this is Primo's way of taking revenge on a socioeconomic system that denies him access to the things he wants while other children, for no apparent reason, get huge allowances. Less sociable and more interested in violence for its own sake, Caesar participates less in theft and instead "celebrate[s] the public, rowdy dimensions of street culture," for instance by showing off his clothes.

Bourgois reminds the reader that Ray, Primo, and Caesar are not just temporary friends out of convenience and mutual economic interest. Rather, their economic network is inseparable from the social one in which they have been embedded for more than a decade. From a very young age, Primo is acutely aware of New York's deep inequality and the relative deprivation into which he was born. In this sense, he sees robbery as a way of leveling the playing field. This viewpoint shows that he has gradually moved away from the perspective of structural oppression in favor of an individualistic, agency-based explanation of success and failure.

Under the heading "Adolescent Mischief and Inner-City Rage," Bourgois explains how crime *simply is* teenage play for Primo, the kind of "mischief" that would not be a problem in many social contexts (even Primo's mom admits to stealing mangos and sugar cane from the plantations where she grew up in her teens). One of the differences is that, for Primo and Caesar, there are opportunities to escalate: soon after beginning to rob cars, Primo starts burglarizing apartments and businesses. On one occasion, Primo and a guy named Papito both badly cut their hands and end up at the hospital. They invented a story to tell their parents, and then had operations. Primo's hand has never been fully functional since.

Many adolescents are given license by their parents, schools, and communities to go through a rebellious phase. For El Barrio youth, however, any misstep during this phase means being suddenly thrust into adulthood and labeled a dangerous criminal. While Primo's crimes got worse and worse, contrary to common belief, this trajectory did not continue doing so into adulthood. Selling crack is far less dangerous and arguably less damaging than what he did in his teens. Primo's motivations for crime gradually shift from centering on identity, pride, revenge, and dignity during his youth to simply making a stable income in adulthood.

Again, Caesar's experience is quite different: he takes pride in violently mugging people, including and old lady he later says he wanted to kill. He likes to play off the stereotype of the "crazy motherfucking Puerto Rican."

Whereas Primo gets into crime for the money, status, and sense of autonomy, Caesar—as he fully recognizes—is closer to the stereotype of a criminal who acts out of pure rage and sadism.

In the section "Adolescent Gang Rape," Bourgois explains that this was a common and profoundly troubling phenomenon in El Barrio: Ray and Luis coordinated gang rapes of teenage girls, and Primo and Caesar gladly participated in them. Bourgois is horrified and questions how, during his research, he "had grown to like most of these veteran rapists." He emphasizes that this discussion is difficult personally and dangerous politically (because it could lead readers to further alienate and demonize Puerto Ricans and the poor), but that he feels obligated to address the topic and cite his interviews with both perpetrators and survivors.

The problem of gang rape transitions the book to a specific discussion of the horrible gender violence that often characterizes life in El Barrio. It also raises a significant ethical challenge for Bourgois, who encounters behavior that is irrefutably harmful and unsanctionable, but has to balance his moral outrage with his awareness of the potential impacts that speaking out would have on his broader project and the trust he has built with his subjects.

Primo is around gang rape even before puberty, and starts participating it as soon as he begins it. He and his friends force women to submit by threatening violence, and he talks about which women were more and less "suitable" to be raped. Caesar insists that women like being raped and "come back for more." Luis apparently likes showing off in front of the other men, which confirms the "homoerotic dimension" of their actions for Bourgois, who eventually gets Primo to admit that he regrets what he did, although never to fully recognize the pain he caused.

Primo and Caesar's casual attitude about sexual violence demonstrates their deeply misogynistic perspective on sex. They view it as a transaction—like the crack trade—in which everyone is self-interested and any tactic is fair game. Bourgois indicates that he does insert his own conscience into his conversations about rape with Primo and Caesar, but admits that the results are lukewarm. While he had no illusions about turning his crack dealer friends into feminists, he also recognizes that he might be able to help them adopt another perspective on their behavior.

CHAPTER 6: REDRAWING THE GENDER LINE ON THE STREET

After quoting Candy's proud declaration that she realized her husband (Felix) was mistreating her and decided to shoot him, Bourgois explains that gang rapes in El Barrio, the subject of the end of the previous chapter, are not an aberration but rather "a biting reminder of the pervasiveness of sexual violence in El Barrio."

Candy's violent response to her husband's abuse is a small-scale representation of women's revenge against El Barrio's broader patriarchal structure. While shooting Felix might otherwise look like a horrific act of abuse itself, within the oppressive context of El Barrio, it could be seen as noble.

Under "Witnessing Patriarchy in Crisis," Bourgois writes that women are actually slowly gaining rights and power in El Barrio, despite the horrific violence they continue to face. Patriarchal norms still dominate street culture, and men often "lash out against the women and children they can no longer control." As old **jíbaro** identities clash with modern gender roles and financial troubles, creating a "crisis of patriarchy."

The economy's transition from manufacturing to the service industry means that women can now be just as successful as men at the lower levels of the corporate hierarchy (where El Barrio residents tend to work). Accordingly, men's claim to power on the basis of their economic role begins to fall apart.

Bourgois struggles with a methodological problem surrounding gender violence: as a male researcher, how can he get close enough to women to hear and record their stories? His friendship with Candy was uniquely close in this respect, although she is different from many women because she is "capable of commanding respect on the street." Bourgois first meets her when she storms into the Game Room, six months pregnant and furiously cursing out all of Ray's associates. Candy is "always angry" because Felix wasted money that was supposed to be for his lawyer on drugs, and this promised to leave his family penniless when he went to jail (which would be very soon).

While Candy's story allows Bourgois to go in-depth with one particular, compelling narrative that seems to exemplify gender roles and abuse in El Barrio, it also shows the limits of Bourgois's research, specifically due to his being a white man from outside the neighborhood. Like Primo's mother's musings on her son, Candy's reactions to Felix's actions show the destructive side of the irresponsibility that Primo and Caesar valorize.

In the section "Domestic Violence in Postindustnal Turmoil," Bourgois writes that after two years, he finally gets close enough to interview Candy, on the street and close enough to Caesar to not arouse suspicion. Candy talks about her love for her "pure and innocent" child, and how it makes her respect her own mother. But her father abused her badly, which led to her leaving home and getting pregnant at age 13. (Eloping to escape abusive men, whether fathers or husbands, is accepted practice in the El Barrio community, as long as women always stay under a man's control.) In fact, Felix and his gang raped Candy, and then he tried to marry her, but the court rejected this decision and tried to take their baby to foster care—something Candy refused to allow.

Parenthood in El Barrio is emotionally charged in contradictory ways: it at once destroys and gives meaning to life. The pervasiveness of abuse means that many people's poor relationships with their parents are somehow at the root of their problems. And yet, women like Candy see becoming parents as a way to recover the meaning they have lost in their lives. The notion that women may use their unhealthy romantic relationships with men as an escape from their equally abusive home life suggests that a patriarchal concept of men's ownership over women lies at the heart of gender politics in El Barrio.

During Bourgois's research, Candy is 34 and has been in and out of psychiatric hospitals throughout her life, giving her an understanding of how she was abused but also the ability to manipulate the bureaucracy. She "was used to […] getting beat up" by her father, so did not think there was anything wrong when Felix started doing the same. Bourgois emphasizes that "Felix's extreme brutality against Candy" is not only about individual psychology, but also about the "structural maladjustment" caused by rural Puerto Ricans' migration to New York. He beat her nightly for almost a decade and caused her to miscarry five pregnancies, all many months along. This kind of behavior might have been normal on a Puerto Rican hacienda, like the patriarchal beliefs that Candy herself holds—for instance, she is thrilled above all else to have a son.

Candy's lifelong trajectory suggests that she learned to understand herself through the eyes of the men who abused her, and therefore came to see such abuse as normal and acceptable. Felix treats Candy with a cruelty so horrific that Bourgois's structural explanation cannot (and does not aim to) lighten the sense of profound injustice. But although both Felix and Candy take for granted Felix's apparent right to control her with violence, their own beliefs—not their economic circumstances—are what legitimate this violence.

In "Female Liberation Versus Traditional Sexual Jealousy," Bourgois explains that the community supported Candy when, a month after his interview with her, she shot Felix. She thinks of this as revenge for his infidelity, which allows her to both continue believing in the "male-dominated nuclear household" and relieve her dependence on him. The worst part is that Felix is cheating on her with her *sister*, which wounds her deeply. From when she first met him, Felix "trained" Candy to have no life except him—she was not even allowed to look outside. When she finds him with her sister in a hotel, Candy tries to kill them both. In an aside, she says she believes she has survived her own suicide attempts because "God wants me alive, 'cause I'm a good-hearted woman."

Bourgois notes that, despite his decades of abuse, Felix's infidelity is ultimately Candy's justification for shooting him. Bourgois sees this as evidence that, while readers might see Candy's actions as a crusade against abuse, she herself does not. Instead, she is angry at Felix for denying her the "male-dominated nuclear household" for which she yearns and feels would resolve her sense of isolation. At the same time, accustomed to terrible treatment from everyone around her, Candy becomes self-reliant, and it is clear that she does not need a man to give her life value.

One day, Candy sees lipstick on Felix's face, pulls out her gun, and shoots him in the stomach. She calls him an ambulance, but they both lie to the police and say they were robbed. Although the cops suspected she was responsible, they let her go. Her family explains her behavior by reference to the idea of an "ataque de nervios" (nerve attack), "culturally scripted violent outbursts by [often abused] women."

The idea of an "ataque de nervios," like practice of women leaving their families to elope with boyfriends or husbands, is a specifically Puerto Rican cultural concept that helps make sense of why women—considered as emotional and irrational—would lash out against a romantic partner. Although the "ataque de nervios" is acceptable behavior, this is more because it is treated as an outburst beyond a woman's control, rather than because a man's abuse or mistreatment justifies a reaction.

In "Recovery: Sex, Drugs, and More Romantic Love," Candy explains how her life begins to unravel while Felix is in jail. Her fifth child is born, she runs out of money, and she grows depressed. To compensate, she starts selling crack and falls in love with Primo. Even *he* describes their first night together an unusual with sensitivity and care. Candy works all night, commanding attention on the street corner outside La Farmacia, before sending her children to school in the morning. Ray never worries about Candy's safety: after she shoots Felix, nobody will mess with her. She is a wildly successful dealer, but starts a cocaine habit.

In part because Felix controlled Candy for nearly her entire life, "training" her to sacrifice her life beyond him, she feels lost when he is gone but also has an opportunity to finally live on her own terms. Suddenly, having created a reputation for violence by shooting Felix, Candy gains significant cultural capital in El Barrio, which she uses to begin her own underground drug business, thereby outdoing the men at their own hypermasculine profession.

In the section "Inverting Patriarchy," Bourgois explains how Candy uses her newfound independence to help other women, like by trying to convince Luis's wife Wanda to retaliate for his violence—he beats her up whenever she looks out the window. But she still "accept[s] and participate[s] in the patriarchal logic that blames women for male promiscuity and violence," for instance saying that Luis and Felix learned to treat women badly "because the women in that family like to play their husbands dirty." And Bourgois notes that, in one sense, Candy remains under Felix's control by "following in his footsteps: selling drugs, neglecting her children, and flaunting her sexual conquests."

Bourgois analyzes Candy's relationship to patriarchy as ambivalent—despite her own strength and history of being abused, she still seems to think that women must follow men's lead and are obligated to behave in a way that does not anger men. Instead of achieving freedom on terms unbound by gender expectations and constraints, she "invert[s] patriarchy." Knowing and accepting that manhood confers power over others, she acts as masculine as possible. But she never seeks out another basis for power, whether because of her personal reservations or a lack of faith that the people around her might accept something other than the masculine power they are used to.

Primo is delighted to "freeload" off of Candy's income, but secretly worries that Candy is "out-machoing all the men in her life." Primo is unable to put up with this threat to his gender role, so he and Candy get into a bad physical fight in front of her kids that nearly ends with him getting shot, too. This is the end of their relationship, and Bourgois notes that *Candy* takes on the stereotypically male role in this conflict. She screams at him in public whenever she sees him with his new girlfriend, and during these confrontations he always worries that she will reach for her gun.

Primo's pride in "freeload[ing]" points back to the contradictory nature of El Barrio masculinity—at least for the generation Bourgois studies. These men take pride in both controlling their families (which they believe is their right) and refusing to work (even though work was the original economic basis for their control over their faculties). By acting as breadwinner in addition to assuming the dominant role in the relationship and controlling her partner with violence, Candy truly does fulfill the ideal of masculine authority better then El Barrio's men.

In "Contradictory Contexts for Women's Struggles," Bourgois visits Candy's parents' fishing village in Puerto Rico, where "gender relations have undergone a profound transformation" just like in New York City, although "the hostile migration experience and the polarized violence of the underground community" make things even harder in New York. Her capacity to succeed and win autonomy are limited by these issues as well as the script of patriarchy, which she follows because it is synonymous with power. This kind of autonomy is about "middle-class standards of individual freedom," *not* about group identity or acceptance in white society. Primo's mother, for instance, is marginalized and isolated in multiple ways in New York (gender, off-the-books work, residence in a housing project, language barrier, and racism), but gains some autonomy she would have lost in Puerto Rico. She deeply misses the sense of community she had there.

Bourgois's distinction between these two kinds of freedom—personal autonomy versus group interests—points to the way American life becomes defined by the perspective and interests of the dominant, white, middle-class culture. For the dominant culture, which already has group acceptance, improving one's individual economic situation (or that of one's nuclear family) is the main indicator of status and the implied goal in working people's lives. But for people like El Barrio residents, achieving class status on a small scale often disconnects people from the communities in which they live. The notion of individuality eventually undermines itself—while inner-city minorities can exercise economic and personal autonomy to some extent, this autonomy is always circumscribed by prejudice. As a result, those in power never view them solely as individuals, but rather as representatives of maligned groups.

Under the heading "Confronting the State: Forging Single Motherhood on Welfare," Bourgois turns to "the role of the state and public policy" in the gender dynamics experienced by his research subjects. While there is some infrastructure theoretically aimed at helping the marginalized, there is actually hostility in both directions between the government and the poor. Contrary to popular narratives of passive, unworthy poor people dependent on the government, the people Bourgois meets are "aggressively struggling with the system." Candy constantly fights with the Welfare Department, which re-validates all its clients every six months and constantly demands documentation Candy does not have (or forgets to bring).

While Welfare is supposed to be a means of helping the poor sustain themselves, motivated by sympathy and a sense that all people deserve dignity and opportunities, in reality the system runs on the opposite values. Welfare is undermined by the suspicion that the poor are trying to cheat and a demand for constant documentation and bureaucratic labor. Ironically, many people who oppose welfare do so because they think of it as too *sympathetic—which suggests that they may have an idealized perception of the system.*

After a court case, Candy wins nine months of Welfare that the Department has denied her. But this includes her time dealing crack. When she decides to quit and get back on Welfare for her children's safety, her case worker gets mixed up and Candy ends up attacking her in a fury. Eventually, she starts threatening to kill the case worker.

The fact that Candy can abruptly lose Welfare for nine months shows that it is not the consistent or substantial income many of its detractors think it is. Bureaucracy also clearly prevents Welfare from fulfilling its intent—whereas many Americans think of the poor as incompetent, here they appear to be highly motivated agents trying to get promised help from an incompetent and reluctant bureaucracy.

In "The Internalization of Institutional Constraints," Bourgois explains what happens to Candy when Felix starts getting weekend release from jail: although she has a restraining order against him, he invariably shows up drunk to see the children, and she suddenly feels controlled by him once again. She looks for a job to supplement the $53 she gets weekly from welfare and the few dollars her mother makes picking cans out of the trash. She simply cannot support herself and four children on this money, so she goes back to dealing with a new crew, and promptly gets arrested on her first day, just while greeting Ray's new baby. In fact, she was only supposed to be a lookout, and Caesar (who has the same job) considers her a "stupid ho'" for deciding to sell.

Felix's pattern of abusive and controlling behavior starts again, and unsurprisingly, he takes no interest in supporting his family. As a result, Candy takes on not only the extra burdens of making an income and putting up with him, but also the legal repercussions for doing so. Caesar's criticism reveals that women are forced into a double-bind—if they do not work, they cannot survive, but if they do work, they violate the gender expectations placed on them. It also reveals that the men who enforce this double-bind simply have no idea that they are doing so.

Throughout her legal process, Candy is frightened about her kids. Her oldest is 15, but she tells the police that she has a 20-year-old, so that they do not take her children away—instead, they go to her sister-in-law. Her new employer does not bail her out, and she thinks about snitching on them. Even though she is not working for him, Ray ends up bailing her out. At home, her whole extended family celebrates her return, but she feels that something is not right.

Ultimately, Candy's attempts to provide for her family end up undermining her relationship with them. Although she does not work for Ray anymore, his decision to bail her out shows that he does truly have relationships and concern for others beyond the realm of his business. Still, Candy is clearly troubled if she has to resort to him for help.

In "Mothers in Jail," Bourgois remembers Candy's stories about jail. Women are flooding into jails and prisons, in part because they are gaining access to street culture. Candy talks about the unsanitary conditions and bad food, lesbian prisoners who wanted to have sex with her and considering suicide. Primo interrupts and is visibly annoyed with her—the next month, this gets even worse when she gets the charges against her dropped because of her rocky mental health history. But she also clashes with the court when she shows up to court "in a skintight, blood-red jumpsuit" that the elderly judge finds disrespectful—although Candy chalks the woman's disapproval up to jealousy. She vows to stay out of the legal system forever, although Primo is skeptical of her. She angrily pushes him into the elevator, but then tells him he is her "only true love."

The rise of the female prison population suggests that their freedom is a double-edged sword in El Barrio. While they are increasingly free to participate in the market—including the underground economy—without men, they are now subject to constraints on their freedom on the part of the state, instead. Candy's comments recall Primo and Caesar's worries about prison rape and suggest that criminals fear one another. But, like Caesar, Candy's history of psychiatric issues gets her declared officially inept. Finally, her difficulty navigating the court system's norms and dress code shows that cultural capital is not only an economic problem, but also mediates people's ability to be taken seriously when they encounter the legal system that has immense influence over their futures.

CHAPTER 7: FAMILIES AND CHILDREN IN PAIN

Bourgois begins this chapter with Candy's complaint about girls who "only think of their sexual pleasures" and not about their children. He then cites prominent psychological research that shows children can be scarred forever after experiencing or witnessing violence at a young age. But such research would immediately define Bourgois's research participants as "antisocial sociopaths," and miss the complicated forces that lead to detrimental childhood experiences—one of which is the expectation in street culture that women make an income, in addition to caring for their children. Unfortunately, in the public eye this process is simply redefined as personal failure—a lack of "family values."

As when delving into Primo and Caesar's histories of crime, Bourgois opens his discussion of children in El Barrio by noting the danger of essentialism. One way of understanding this concept is that everyone has a limit to how much violence and how many misdeeds they can accept from someone, while still empathizing with that person. After this point, people tend to declare those intolerable others somehow essentially or irreparably evil. One example of this is labeling children "antisocial sociopaths" rather than confronting the complexity of the matter and the many years of formation these children have left.

Under the heading "Street Culture's Children," Bourgois notes that fears about the moral degradation of the youth have been omnipresent in East Harlem since the early 20th century. Bourgois, too, sees many young people "fall apart as they passed from childhood to adolescence." Children are a valued pillar of community in El Barrio—everyone smiles at, cuddles, and blesses each other's kids, something very uncommon among white Americans. Of course, Bourgois has a young son, Emiliano, whom he eventually tries as hard as possible to keep inside and away from the violence and drugs on the streets.

Bourgois suggests that the community's fears are well-founded: watching children "fall apart" morally, socially, and legally scars him as a father. Everyone's good intentions when meeting one another's children seem to contrast with the actual effects of the community on children it trains into criminals.

Bourgois takes neighborhood kids downtown every few weeks, usually to museums, and notices that everyone seems to treat them with suspicion. They blame themselves for their parents' addictions and romantic troubles, and often find themselves hanging out in crackhouses and on the street from a young age.

People's assumption that Bourgois is somehow taking advantage of the children he tries to break out of El Barrio's bubble again shows how the "culture of terror" and a pervasive sense that poor people lack moral worth get in the way of his attempts to help.

Candy's son Junior, who talks early on about trying to join the police, soon becomes "a bona fide drug courier" and then a lookout for the Game Room. When Bourgois confronts him about this flip, Junior insists that he does not do or have any interest in drugs.

Junior clearly does not make a conscious decision to get involved in the world of drugs, but rather ends up there almost by default, simply because it is the path of least resistance to an income. It is, after all, the only industry that advertises in his neighborhood.

In the section "Punishing Girls in the Street," Bourgois notes that Junior's sister Jackie goes through "the rites of passage of street culture" much faster. When her father Felix returns from jail and uproots the family, she runs away with her boyfriend, who abducts her for three days and enlists some friends to gang-rape her. While searching for Jackie, Caesar breaks down, because his own sister was murdered years before. Jackie soon returns and Candy forces everyone to admit that the men raped her, "despite street culture's double-standard denial of this form of violence."

Even more disturbing than her brother's fate, Jackie is quickly inaugurated into El Barrio's patriarchy. This is made all the more complicated by her own father Felix gang-raping her mother, Candy, when they were teenagers. Caesar's distress about his sister shows that he does truly care about his family behind the veneer of violence he puts on, but perhaps not to the extent that he can control his actions.

However, Primo and Caesar blame Jackie for getting raped, thinking about her through the lens of the women they used to rape themselves. Primo calls rape "getting influenced into screwing" and insists that Jackie "knew what she was doing." He thinks she should "just settle down" with her boyfriend-turned-rapist. They blame Candy's morals—and Candy also blames the victim by going after the family of the other girl the men raped alongside Jackie.

Even though they have children of their own, Primo and Caesar have little sympathy for Jackie because they are so used to seeing rape from the perpetrator's perspective that they cannot imagine her experience and terror. Even Candy responds to sexual violence by turning against its victims and defending men—perhaps, for her, this is an easier and more direct way to defend her daughter.

Under the heading "In Search of Meaning: Having Babies in El Barrio," Bourgois notes that people were not reluctant to have kids given their socioeconomic troubles—in fact "virtually all [his] friends and acquaintances" had a child in his five years of residency in El Barrio. Primo's girlfriend Maria, who is forced to move in with her severely alcoholic mother and watch Primo go through a felony trial, is "overjoyed to be pregnant," because the thought of a child represents "a romantic escape" from her life. And it can also help her get a subsidized apartment from the City Housing Authority, although she ends up giving birth to her son in a homeless shelter.

Although readers might expect that El Barrio residents are reluctant to have children—as they understand the pain of growing up in the neighborhood—in fact, they think of children as a means to return to innocence and protection from their problems. Like in street culture, the attempt to escape one's troubles by having children often ends up multiplying and prolonging people's suffering.

At the same time, Carmen—Maria's sister and Caesar's girlfriend—also gets pregnant and is relieved. Caesar has sent Carmen's older daughter away to live with Carmen's sister and "frequently beat[s] her two-year-old son," whom he also wants to send away. Caesar's grandmother invites Carmen to move in with the family, and like Maria, she is delighted to be pregnant because the mother-child relationship is one of the few potentially stable ones in the social context of El Barrio. (This is, for instance, why Candy stopped using drugs and tried to set her life straight: for her children's sake.)

Given his reputation for violence, it is unsurprising—if disturbing—that Caesar also terrorizes his family, and that his grandmother steps in to care for Carmen and her children when Caesar does not. Just like stable work (selling drugs) for Primo, parenthood offers Carmen a means of refocusing her energies on something productive and consistent. In this sense, having children allows people to create their own opportunities.

Under the heading "The Demonization of Mothers and Crack," Bourgois notes that single-mother households are actually "predicated on submission to patriarchy"—namely, "a father's right to abandon his children." It does not empower women, but rather just exploits them further. They cannot choose to put themselves before their children, but they cannot provide for their children without becoming independent. For instance, Primo and Caesar denigrate Candy when she starts selling crack, saying that she is a failure of a mother, even though they have no expectations at all for Felix.

Although single mothers do exercise autonomy and power in their households, they only do so out of necessity, which is why Bourgois argues that they are actually being controlled by (absent) men in doing so. Essentially, women are forced to pick up the pieces of men's neglect. Again, this double-bind means that women are denigrated for no matter what they do (whether providing for their children or focusing entirely on motherhood), creating an impossible double standard, while men are accepted no matter how little they contribute to their families.

Although every drug epidemic in American history has been accompanied by moralistic denunciations of a community, usually racial, associated with the drug in question, during the crack epidemic inner-city *women* are specifically considered tied to the drug. Because many are mothers and many end up earning money through prostitution, public perception begins to speculate that crack causes hypersexuality and destroys the "maternal, loving instinct." In fact, during this time period it is essentially impossible to take a child outside and not come into contact with drugs.

El Barrio's pervasive misogyny spreads into the mainstream when crack becomes specifically associated with women. Even though men in El Barrio are far more irresponsible and the women are not at fault for exposing their children to crack, for the public (as for El Barrio men like Primo and Caesar), women are the obvious target if only because they are the easiest one.

Bourgois is still heartbroken at what he sees and tries his best to get pregnant women to avoid crack (and Primo and Ray not to sell it to them). Benzie recalls a customer once giving birth in the Game Room—an ambulance comes, there is chaos, and two days later the woman is back smoking crack there, with her baby in the hospital. Bourgois is particularly distraught at this time because his infant son has just been diagnosed with cerebral palsy, and "crack babies" supposedly have similar symptoms. He manages to convince most of the dealers he meets not to sell to pregnant women "at least in front of [him]," but Ray insists he "don't care" and even Candy strangely argues that "the [baby's] body doesn't belong to [the mother]."

Although he cannot interfere with the vast majority the self-destructive behavior he encounters on a day-to-day basis in El Barrio, Bourgois confronts a serious ethical conflict when it comes to pregnant women and young mothers using crack. He chooses to interfere in the field he is researching when he realizes that he can concretely make a difference and help his friends think about the consequences of the drugs they are selling. Notably, much of the science about "crack babies" has been debunked since the 1990s, but scientific consensus is still that crack has mild but measurable negative effects on babies and developing children.

Bourgois begins investigating the issue with an African American female colleague, who can much more easily get through to the minority women most at risk. Many of these women were uncertain about becoming mothers, and others even argued that crack was *good* for their babies. They "criticized the hypocrisy of the street culture" but never "the society that refused to fund treatment centers and support services." The shortage of programs is so severe that Bourgois and his colleague cannot get a single person into treatment.

Again, Bourgois's identity as a white upper-class researcher gets in the way of his ability to connect with his subjects. When he and his co-investigator manage to do so, they realize that crack-using mothers are more aware of their community's hypocrisy than the government's failure to provide for them—indeed, this helps explain why they have turned to crack in the first place.

Later, Bourgois realizes that these women are "desperately seeking meaning in their lives and refusing to sacrifice themselves to the impossible task of raising healthy children in the inner city." An important study on Brazil showed that women sometimes allowed their children to die when they knew they could not take care of them. This is a similar situation, except that kids in El Barrio tend to suffer and die in their teenage years. Harlem is more dangerous than the World War II battlefield. By "poisoning their fetuses," crack-addicted pregnant women "accelerate the destruction of already doomed progeny" and "escape the long-term agony" associated with raising children in El Barrio, without resources and tightly bound to "a patriarchal definition of 'family'" that has not caught up with women's changing roles.

Although crack is certainly a counterproductive way to "seek meaning," Bourgois's explanation again shows that crack is the symptom and not the problem. Because the mothers in El Barrio can see few prospects for their family's future, rather than continue fighting a rigged game (as American common sense might expect them to do), they consciously reject the terms on which they are expected to live and refuse to give themselves and their children false hope for the future. Women's response to the crack epidemic, in addition to the drug itself, is shown to be a cause of El Barrio's destitution.

CHAPTER 8: VULNERABLE FATHERS

In this chapter Bourgois turns from motherhood to fatherhood. He begins by quoting Primo, who deeply regrets not being an active part of his son's life. Bourgois notes that "the moralistic debates" around inner-city families tend to focus on fathers' absence as the problem, when in reality fathers' *presence* and abuse tend to be more dangerous. And fathers' abandonment of their families is usually about a lack of economic opportunity, not some nebulous moral deficiency. Whereas previous generations in Puerto Rico counted on "the omnipotent pater familias," a respected man who ran the family in every way, Nuyoricans more commonly receive respect and protection from anyone. Like their ancestors, however, Nuyoricans continue to define their own alternative social world, developing pride despite their marginalization. But social change throws these oppositional categories and understandings into crisis.

Here, Bourgois examines the figures whose absence and inaction haunts El Barrio families: the fathers who ignore their obligations, yet try to claim that they (unlike all the other men around them) are not the stereotypical absent father. These contradictions reveal the underlying problem: men are caught between competing and incompatible concepts of fatherhood (the old school "pater familias," the protective man of street culture, and the neglectful fathers they do not want to be). It is easy to moralize fathers' economic indifference, and Bourgois sees this as a logical, if regrettable, perspective given fathers' complete lack of economic options.

In the section "Celebrating Paternal Powerlessness," Bourgois notes that all the men he profiles in the book have children, and none provide for them. They are more likely to be violent and hostile to their families. Caesar, for instance, openly celebrates himself for neglecting his family and focusing on sleeping with as many women as possible. Primo takes pride in living off his girlfriends' income and setting them against each other, and Luis trades sex for crack. One young man, Pedro, celebrates women who prostitute themselves. Caesar's cousin Eddie is the only person to recognize that his attempts to sleep with many women are "an escape from reality" (meaning his child and poverty). He also notes that the dangers of El Barrio life skew the gender balance sharply toward women.

The attitudes of fathers in El Barrio reflect a consistent pattern of individualistic thinking. Perhaps because these men cannot provide for their children and therefore cannot afford to think about their families as collective units, they focus solely on what they can do to sustain themselves and how much they can take advantage of those around them. The real motivation behind men's casual approach to sexuality, which only Eddie realizes, has a lot in common with women's motivations for using crack and getting optimistic about having children. Everyone in the neighborhood is trying to "escape from reality," perhaps because their reality is too difficult to confront or improve.

Under "Masculinity in Historical Crisis," Bourgois notes that the older generation of dealers he befriended—namely, Ray, Luis, and Candy—follow the old **jíbaro** emphasis on having a large family (which was very helpful on rural Puerto Rican farms, but is much less so in New York). Still, Ray and Luis try to have "as many children as possible" with various women and blame those women for their own refusal to support the children. Luis has 12 children with four women, and thinks he has no reason to see them. Ray, conversely, uses his various children as an excuse to switch from his low-paid security guard job to dealing crack—but never actually provides for them even when he is earning well and buys various cars. Primo blames the women's character for Ray's refusal to support his children, who number at least eight or nine.

Ray's generation appears to remain caught in an archaic way of measuring a man's worth. Perhaps because it was the norm in rural Puerto Rico for children to be subservient to their parents and have sufficient food to survive, Ray and Luis look at their children like passive extensions of themselves rather than individuals who need support from their fathers. The fact that Ray justifies dealing drugs because his children ostensibly need his help, and then never provides this help when he is earning, comfortably shows that he—perhaps singularly, given his unique financial success—fully understands what he is expected to do for his children yet deliberately refuses to do so.

In the younger generation of street dealers, Bourgois notes, reproduction is less important than "sexual belt-notching" as a measure of masculinity. Primo and Caesar are "in their early twenties," about 15 years younger than Ray and Luis, and think their grandparents were crazy to have so many kids. During that time back in Puerto Rico, Primo's mother notes, the strong sense of community, trust, and respect in elders, based in turn around respect for the family patriarch, made people's poverty endurable. Now, in New York, men do not command that respect—and Primo think this makes them go crazy.

Primo seems to understand that El Barrio men's crisis of masculinity has to do with their parents' migration from Puerto Rico and adaptation to a new environment that transformed the role of fathers in the community. While Primo fully understands the differences between Puerto Rico and New York, he does not seem to have developed a picture of what fatherhood and masculinity should look like in the latter.

Just before his father dies in Puerto Rico, Primo's sister goes to visit and remarks on the utter "squalor" of his village, which seems even worse than the town where Bourgois visited Primo's grandmother. Primo has no respect for his father, who is a "*borrachón sucio* [dirty ol' drunkard]" and mistreated his mother. When Primo is a child, his father asks him if his mother is sleeping with other men and then has a breakdown when Primo says yes—Bourgois notes that this is a kind of masculine ataque de nervios (a category usually reserved for women). Feeling disempowered and displaying his "despair and helplessness in front of his children," it seems that Primo's father "beat[s] up the nearest vulnerable female" to make up for his sense of emasculation.

Primo's father's breakdown is emblematic of the crisis of Puerto Rican masculinity in New York, where women's autonomy takes away men's former complete control over their wives. (Bourgois's description of this breakdown as an ataque de nervios *also muddles the traditional gender roles and concepts that govern in Puerto Rico.) Ironically, Primo turns against his father for doing many of the same things he does to his children—he seems to perfectly understand the emasculation that drove his father to violence.*


Little Pete, another friend and dealer in Ray's network, complains about his father's drug use and absence. Of course, he and Primo are both drug-using absent fathers.

Primo and Little Pete's condition is, in some sense, particularly helpless. They find themselves repeating their fathers' errors and do not know how to break the cycle.

Bourgois's next section is "The Material Basis for the Polarization of Intimate Violence." He notes that domestic violence is one of the most important and horrible consequences of his research subjects' "contemporary crisis of patriarchy," and that it is not enough to just blame "patterns of family violence" without considering what it would take to break the cycle. All the men Primo ever saw with his mother attacked her violently at one point or another, and he usually hid away while his sisters intervened. At one point, however, he does remember standing between his mother and her screaming, knife-wielding boyfriend. Nevertheless, "Primo reproduce[s] this same cycle of brutality when he beat[s] up Candy in front of her children."

Again, the past predicts the present, in large part because El Barrio men feel hopeless to change the future and justified because of the abuse they suffered themselves. When Bourgois talks about different ways of addressing domestic violence, he is subtly referencing the way anthropological work like Oscar Lewis's is misread. To attribute cyclical issues like violence and poverty to "culture" or "patterns" in a family is to describe *the problem, but not* explain *it or gesture toward a possible resolution. Saying a family has a "pattern of violence" that it must fix amounts to blaming the family and ignoring the far more important question of what creates such patterns of violence in the first place.*

Sometimes, when they are legally employed, the men in El Barrio do live out the nuclear families they idolize. In his youth, Primo works, has an apartment with his girlfriend Sandra and their son Papito, and even gives up drugs to stay "lovable with [his] kids." But when his hours change to an overnight shift, he loses time with his family and motivation to keep working, and starts doing drugs. He falls asleep at work and gets fired. After he and Sandra drift apart, Primo is devastated to leave Papito and move back in with his own mother. He decides that "when you're poor, things just don't work" in a relationship or with children. But his three sisters "didn't fuck up"—they have steady jobs, solid relationships, or both. In fact, Primo credits his mother for raising them all well.

The norm of absent fathers and broken families is far from absolute, and Bourgois makes it clear that the men who break these families often idolize the two-parent household as much as (or more than) women. Primo falls off this track because of something that at first appears to be a minor bump—a change in his work schedule—but that ultimately spirals out to undermine every aspect of his life. And yet, his sisters' fate shows that the nuclear family is a perfectly achievable outcome—although this does not mean it is necessarily as healthy or functional as people imagine it to be.

Under "Yearning for Fatherhood," Bourgois describes how conflicted Primo and Little Pete grow when he asks how their own childhood relationships with their fathers impact their feelings about their sons. Primo finds it sad that he could not give his son the nuclear family he wanted to provide, and Little Pete admits that he has "nothing to offer [his son] in the future." Primo tries to visit his son but knows it causes trouble with his ex-wife's new husband, and admits that he "called too late" the weekend before. High on cocaine and heroin, he gradually loses his coherency and train of thought.

Primo and Little Pete are perfectly aware that they are depriving their children of the nuclear families they wanted to create. They do this not willfully or maliciously, but simply out of resignation, because they feel they have no other option. Their limited attempts to enter their children's lives end up simply reinforcing their inadequacy as fathers.

Little Pete remembers that, when he was with his family, he had no interest in or "time to think about drugs." When Primo makes plans to see his son, Papito is thrilled, but then he does not follow through—he knows he cannot even afford to get Papito a birthday present. He admits that he could have done so had he not spent the money on drugs. Although he promises Bourgois that he will visit Papito and buy this present, he never does. Bourgois sees these contradictions play out everywhere, including in his neighbors: a boy is delighted to see his father, who is out of prison on work release, but is in prison in the first place for burglarizing his son and ex-wife's apartment.

Just like stable work, the responsibilities associated with a stable family seem to have dissuaded Little Pete from drug use, which again suggests that drugs are a symptom of social instability and not a cause. Primo recognizes that he makes contradictory decisions—although he consciously recognizes that it is better to care for his son, he instead chooses to spend his money on his own enjoyment (or, arguably, distraction). Bourgois sees this behavior as proof that absent fathers are torn between acting selfishly versus selflessly.

Primo's father soon dies, and Bourgois and Caesar hang out with him as he grieves. He regrets that his dad never met his grandchildren, and that he never had enough of a relationship with the man to feel devastated at his death. Caesar says he feels the same way, although he does have a close relationship with his stepfather. Primo is disappointed that his sister refuses to take photos of their father in his coffin.

The informal memorial for Primo's father in New York is suffused more with regret and ambivalence than sadness or grief. Primo struggles with what the absence of a father means for him. The passage also implicitly questions whether his children might eventually have the same muted reaction to his own death.

Finally, under "Accommodating Patriarchy," Bourgois shows how the women he meets "eventually broke their abusive relationships and expelled their men from their households," before finding a new man who often treats them no better. This creates a cycle of "serial household formation [...] that partially exonerates fathers" from their duties to their children. Even Candy defends such absent fathers, who should not be forced to pay "a woman [their ex] money to support another nigga' [their ex's new boyfriend]." If "you want the package" (slang for vagina), Candy says, "you pay for the whole package deal" (meaning supporting her whole family). Similarly, Luis tells his exes to have their new boyfriends "look out for my kids. Because they ain't going to get your pussy for free." Of course, this sense of responsibility contrasts with the men's pride in living off their girlfriends.

Just as men regret the way their fathers treated them yet replicate the same cyclical behavior, women recognize men's abuses and reject them, resenting them for their behavior but never truly holding them accountable for their children. Ultimately, however, street culture has developed its own ideology of parenthood, by which biological fatherhood means little and children are left with few expectations of having a stable father figure. Many men, therefore, do not "pay for the whole package deal"—Primo, for instance, moves from girlfriend to girlfriend but seldom supports them. The notion of fatherly responsibility becomes their excuse not to care for their biological children with their exes, but does not come into the picture in relation to the children of their present girlfriends.


Ultimately, Candy reframes the problem of absent fathers through "a female-essentialist celebration of mother love," arguing that mothers and children are bound by feeling and the pain of childbirth, while men "just give us sperm and that's it." She would never "just, leave the responsibility to the father." And she would also never make one of her children hate their father. Instead, kids should eventually "learn on their own" to understand their fathers' disinvolvement. But Candy ends up in a "Catch-22 triumph of old-fashioned patriarchal logic" when Caesar calls her a bad mother because she has no husband and is therefore depriving her children of the ideal two-parent household.

Although women do not choose to take on the multiple responsibilities with which they are saddled, Candy's attitude demonstrates that they can nevertheless embrace single motherhood as an alternative to the struggles of El Barrio life. It also allows the women to shape their children's futures without the interference of a second parent. Fundamentally, however, these are simply ways of coping with a far-from-ideal situation. Candy's refusal to badmouth her children's fathers, however, implies that she leaves remains hopeful that they might accept responsibility in the future.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

After noting Caesar's commentary on the book—"Ooh, Felipe! You make us sound like such sensitive crack dealers"—Bourgois admits that "there is no panacea for" the problems he outlines in the book. Given the long, complex, and institutionally embedded histories of racism and classism in the United States, it is unrealistic to expect that single or straightforward policies might resolve the problem. And the United States also "simply lacks the political will to address poverty," which is astonishing given the nation's wealth. Although he knows they are excuses to ignore "long-term structural problems," Bourgois decides to address possible policy solutions.

Here, Bourgois ties together his analyses of the economic and social problems that plague El Barrio by examining the structural relationship between all of these issues. He not only acknowledges the structural causes of these problems, but the changes that would be necessary to remedy them. He sees prejudice toward the poor as a far greater challenge than the mere difficulty of passing and implementing policies, and his focus on the relationship between societal structure and personal agency in hopes of changing the conversation about the intersection of poverty, morality, and personal responsibility.


Under "Confronting Racial and Class Inequality — Instead of Drugs," Bourgois notes that drugs can be addressed directly because they are the surface level problem that emerges from "deeper, structural dilemmas." Drugs are "the medium for desperate people to internalize their frustration, resistance, and powerlessness." And addressing drug abuse will not change "the class- and ethnic-based apartheids that riddle the U.S. landscape." The crack epidemic, like most drug epidemics, has little to do with the substance itself and everything to do with the cultural assumptions around the drug and economic pressures that drive people toward it, as working people lose any semblance of influence over the economy and the poor and unemployable multiply under globalization. As of the 1990s, poverty is growing rapidly, especially child poverty, which remains about 50% for Puerto Ricans in New York.

Bourgois's conclusion here might be the opposite of what a reader might expect from a study on the crack epidemic. This reaction shows how severely the public narrative about crack has been twisted to justify further disempowering the same communities the drug has ravaged. If drugs are only a symptomatic problem, addressing one drug simply makes way for another, and for other equivalent ways of releasing the tension that comes from growing up in a disenfranchised neighborhood. Indeed, Bourgois seems to be predicting that these problems will only worsen with coming economic and demographic changes.

Accordingly, Bourgois thinks solutions to the drug epidemic must be primarily economic: because selling drugs is "the biggest equal opportunity employer" for poor inner-city youth, both "the economic dynamism of the drug economy must be reduced" and "the fragility and hostility of the entry-level legal labor market needs to be transformed." An ounce of cocaine costs $8 to $10 to make, and sells for at least $2000, and so "decriminalization would make drugs less accessible to youths on inner-city streets" by making the illegal trade less attractive. Beyond saving the government billions in drug enforcement and incarceration costs, this would make the drug economy less visible.

For Bourgois, the solution to the epidemic of drug use, illegal labor, and violence in American inner cities is remarkably straightforward: the legal labor market simply has to become a better economic option than the illegal drug trade. While conventional policy is driven by moral imperatives—for instance, since drugs can harm people, drugs are illegal—Bourgois's proposals are driven by a combination of utility and evidence. By making the drug market more like any other market, profits would decrease, and inner-city youth would have less incentive to pursue careers in the underground economy.

The second necessary transformation is the creation of "economic opportunities for the marginal working class," including dignified and attractive entry-level jobs. The policies that punish poor people for reporting legal income (taking them off public assistance, prohibiting them from getting education, and making them pay taxes) must also be revamped.

Since shifts in the labor market—the domination of service work and the decline of unions—are so central to El Barrio residents' loss of employment opportunities, it will be impossible to bring economic stability to the neighborhood without using policy to again shift the market in a way that gives low-income people reasonable work opportunities and rewards them for choosing the legal market.

For Bourgois, the abject conditions of East Harlem represent the confluence of "state policy and free market forces," and these conditions lead even liberal elites to increasingly "dissociate themselves from the ethnically distinct, urban-based working poor and unemployed." In contrast to these actual causes, government and public sphere actors often blame people's "bad attitude" for their poverty, individualizing a problem that is really structural. In short, "the United States needs to level its playing field."

Whereas policies are supposed to supplement the market and correct its wrongs, certain United States policies can act to support particular market actors and therefore only make conditions worse for those who lack economic power. Bourgois notes that expanding inequality also cuts off inter-class identification, making even the liberal elites who believe in addressing poverty unable to fully understand its causes, effects, and solutions.

In the conclusion's other section, "Hip Hop **Jíbaro**: Toward a Politics of Mutual Respect," Bourgois emphasizes that the crack dealers he studied sought "dignity and fulfillment" through their work, and not only money. There is a complex street culture around respectability, status, and gender that policies must take into account, particularly by "prioritz[ing] the needs of women and children instead of marginalizing them." If women get opportunities to provide for themselves instead of "seek[ing] men with unreported illegal income," as the current system promotes, as well as "safe, affordable child care," they can give their children the economic stability necessary for them to pursue legal work.

Bourgois summarizes how his study of crack dealers challenges the common wisdom that people only sell drugs for easy money. For Bourgois's subjects, crack is not a get-rich-quick scheme, but often a reasonably respected in communities that largely reject traditional measures of status because they are excluded from accessing them. Improving women's lives promises to drive a wedge between the familial and economic woes of inner cities, and in turn offer better opportunities to the next generation.

Bourgois acknowledges that all of his solutions are long-term, politically difficult, and contrary to "the U.S. common sense" about poverty, which is essentially to ignore any structural dimension to the worsening problem. Bourgois's "most immediate goal [...] is to humanize the enemies of the United States without sanitizing or glamorizing them." He hopes to illuminate how oppression works and who drug dealers really are: "not 'exotic others'" but "highly motivated, ambitious inner-city youths" seeking the "American Dream" through entrepreneurship, "the classical Yankee model for upward mobility," which those in this book largely interpret through the model of the **jíbaro**. They are a reflection of so-called "'mainstream America'" and only fail to answer that mainstream because they "internalize their rage and desperation."

Although he is pessimistic about the United States' likelihood of serving its urban underclass, Bourgois does at least have the power to insist on giving his subjects the dignity they are denied in the mainstream. This means taking their struggles seriously, but also refusing to let those struggles excuse their violence and poor decision-making. Bourgois reminds the reader one more time that, despite the many negative media and popular culture representations of the American urban poor—who are treated as a foreign element or scourge on the population—his friends in El Barrio are eminently American, perhaps to a fault. The people of El Barrio do not lack in motivation or entrepreneurial ability, merely accessible resources for bettering themselves.

EPILOGUE

Bourgois's epilogue, written a few years after his research and just before the book's publication, begins with a quote from Caesar pleading for Bourgois's help figuring out "what the fuck I'm doing in life." Bourgois reveals that Primo's life has changed substantially: he is sober and has not dealt drugs for three years. He is working as a building porter during the summer, but has to go to the hospital for asthma related to his work and manages to convince the doctors not to write down the diagnosis (which might influence his ability to get a permanent job). A debt collection agency is after him, and his most recent girlfriend Maria has kicked him out for sleeping with someone else, although they still have a relationship and Primo remains close to his son.

Bourgois remains close to his research subjects, not only in his capacity as an anthropologist but also as a friend, role model, and source of advice. Primo's sobriety and refusal to let the truth damage his job prospects both suggest that he has seriously committed to achieving middle-class stability. But, even despite his best efforts, the battle remains uphill. He faces a number of new obstacles from the moment he embraces the legal economy.

Primo's mother is very sick, with AIDS and dementia that may be related to an old abusive boyfriend's beatings, and the City Housing Authority is bugging her to find out how much tax money they can get from Primo. He is also getting close to another son and giving Maria child support money when he is working—but everything he gives her gets subtracted from her government aid, so ultimately makes no difference.

The fate of Primo's mother (which has nothing to do with her own actions) is nothing short of tragic. The state penalizes Primo and his family when he finally begins to perform his duty as a father. This, again, shows how the mainstream culture that demands inner-city residents to morally reform themselves actually does nothing to encourage this reform, but rather deliberately makes it more difficult.

Caesar has stopped selling drugs but still spends most of his money on them, and reportedly beats his girlfriend Carmen's children, who are in the process of moving out of the house. Carmen soon throws him out of the house and forces him to go to rehab.

While Primo has fully embraced his aspiration of building a middle-class future, Caesar continues to reject mainstream culture and any modicum of responsibility. This contrast shows that, while people have no control over the structural circumstances into which they are born, they still have agency to mold their futures. Structural conditions do not, by any means, determine their fate.

Candy has also transitioned away from drugs and into the legal economy—but her first job was in a fraudulent doctor's office that treated imaginary diseases to make money from Medicaid. She is still married to and living with Felix, who ostensibly no longer beats her, and has adopted two of Luis and his wife Wanda's children. Felix works occasional construction jobs, but the family still receives welfare (his pay is cash and Candy works under a false social security number). Their son Junior is only 20 but already has two children, dropped out of high school, and has spent more than a year in prison (alongside Luis, his uncle) for dealing crack. He still sometimes sells drugs and lives at home. Their daughter Tabitha works and lives independently in the projects in Brooklyn, and another daughter is 17 and still in high school.

Like Primo, Candy seems to have turned her life around and charted a path toward stable work in the mainstream economy. Her first work experience, though, is a reminder that the underground economy does not have a monopoly on moral wrongdoing. Candy's epiphany and transformation unfortunately do nothing to protect her son from repeating her mistakes.

Benzie kept his food preparation job for five years, got in a car accident, won a settlement, and spent it starting a weed operation. Willie has married and moved out of the city to work in the military again. Tony manages other dealers in the neighborhood. And Ray is almost never around anymore—he has moved into the Bronx and acts "like he's a retired drug kingpin." Little Pete got shot and then thrown in prison for selling crack, where he is serving time with another former salesman of Ray's, Nestor, who shot a Mexican immigrant (tensions between El Barrio's Puerto Rican residents and new Mexican immigrants remain high).

Like when he quit his maintenance job to sell drugs, Benzie again subverts the assumption that people choose the underground economy only when the mainstream economy fails them. While Benzie uses legal money to invest in the underground economy, Ray does the opposite, effectively retiring from the underground economy as the only person in this book to actually rise up socioeconomically through the drug trade.

Luis is out of prison on probation and seems to be staying away from crack while he looks for a place in a treatment program. However, his wife Wanda is divorcing him and living with another man—he wants "to beat both of them up once he completes his probation and parole." Their children are all in foster care.

Luis hovers in the grey area between legal and illegal, perhaps recognizing the evil of his drug addiction without rejecting violence as a way of resolving his problems.

Bourgois's old neighbors still live in the same place: the mother is a bartender, her boyfriend sells crack, and one of her sons is now helping him, while the other sells for another crew. One shot a cabdriver but managed to get off on probation, and lives with his girlfriend and son. Eddie, Caesar's cousin, is still a bus driver. And Abraham, the alcoholic elderly man Primo "adopted" as a grandfather, died—this precipitated a housing catastrophe in the family, which ended up with Candy's sister in a psychiatric hospital and two of her daughters pregnant by her boyfriend. Primo's three sisters are all financially stable and doing relatively well.

The stories of the various characters who only played minor roles in Bourgois's book remind the reader that Bourgois's relationships and experiences in El Barrio ran far deeper than he had room to express in the final draft. The stories also demonstrate that the neighborhood's various residents remain interconnected—their troubles and triumphs have ripple effects and unintended consequences for one other.

Finally, Bourgois's old block "has not changed appreciably," although the Game Room shut down in 1992. Two storefronts and two teenage crews are still selling crack. A "well-run and completely legal bodega" has also opened, and an old abandoned building turned into public housing, but another building has become nearly "uninhabitable." The area around La Farmacia has also seen little change. When he sees one of the pregnant crack addicts from his research days again pregnant and on crack, Bourgois realizes that he has "lost the defense mechanisms that allow people on the street to 'normalize' personal suffering and violence."

The small-scale changes in El Barrio do little to change the neighborhood's environment as a whole—if things truly are getting better, it is difficult to tell from the few minor differences on Bourgois's old block. The environment continues to advertise the criminality and dereliction that define the neighborhood's streets, even if they do not accurately represent the experiences of most of its residents.

EPILOGUE 2003

In his new epilogue, almost a decade after the book's publication, Bourgois offers an update on his still-active friendship with Primo (and the news Primo offers about Bourgois's other old acquaintances). Although he has still not returned to selling drugs, he got kicked out of public housing for heroin possession, and his mother has died. He has become a Muslim and "occasionally sniff[s] heroin." He works renovating bathrooms for a lazy boss, and hopes to start working independently soon. He gets a 13-bathroom contract, but has to reject it because he cannot find people to subcontract with, and this means he must also disappoint his 15-year-old son who is hoping to move to New York and work with him. He is dating Candy's niece, who has a stable job as a bank teller.

Although Bourgois wrote this second epilogue eight years after In Search of Respect*'s original publication and his formal fieldwork ended long ago, he still sustains the relationships that made the book possible. Specifically, Bourgois remains close to Primo, whose varied trajectory demonstrates the outside forces that inner-city residents struggle to overcome. Despite his best attempts to turn his life around, Primo's success is ultimately out of his control.*

Primo's son, his ex Maria, Caesar, and Carmen are all living in Connecticut. Caesar has gone through rehab but continues using crack and Primo is trying to convince Maria to throw him out.

Although Primo and Caesar remain a sort of "fictive kin" because Primo's ex and Caesar's girlfriend are sisters, they have also clearly grown apart, and Primo finally begins to prioritize giving his son a stable upbringing.

Candy got a job taking care of elderly patients at home, but injured herself severely and can no longer leave the house. She is hooked on pain pills, "severely depressed and angry at the world." Felix has stopped beating her and continues to work off-the-books construction jobs. Their son Junior is in prison, and they briefly took foster children, but Luis's sons (the first they took in) allegedly sexually abused the others.

Like Primo, Candy suffers a terrible setback precisely when she is beginning to achieve both economic and personal stability. While Felix's improved behavior suggests Candy has finally forced him to respect her, Candy's depression is an understandable response to a turn of events that, it seems, could not have come at a worse time.

Luis has quit drugs, "to everyone's surprise," and is living with his girlfriend and two new children, although his five old ones remain in foster care. He works with Primo and tinkers with computers on the side. Tony has a job but lost his girlfriend, Little Pete is in prison alongside his brother, and Bourgois's old neighbors Angel and Manny are still "up to no good." Primo's sisters now live in the suburbs and have steady jobs, as does Benzie. And Ray is nowhere to be seen. He supposedly lives off the rent from buildings he bought with his drug money.

The whole cast of characters from Bourgois's book drift in different directions, with some finding the stability they sought and others falling resolutely into a career of crime. This is, of course, a reminder that El Barrio residents' fates are never set out in advance, no matter how severely restricted they may be. And yet, none of them follow a perfectly triumphant trajectory. Their dreams remain modest: to live a middle-class life, or to find respect and a steady income without having to leave New York.

Bourgois notes "the everyday violence against children that is routinized" in places like El Barrio, and that he has to acknowledge it anew every time he visits. He includes fieldwork notes from 2000, about a woman dealing with her learning-disabled, violent grandson whose father remains in prison for life on a murder conviction. The woman, Felix's sister Esperanza, sees another family in her building openly abuse their daughter. In fact, their five-year-old son had a brain tumor, and their older son blames them for it because they repeatedly hit the child on the head (and apparently still do). Esperanza also had to call the Bureau of Child Welfare on the neighbors (whose daughter was screaming for help during a beating) and had to evict her daughter, lest the Housing Authority kick *everyone* out of the apartment.

Despite all the years he spent in El Barrio, Bourgois never gets over the culture shock, especially when it means watching the neighborhood's children grow up in parallel to his own. Esperanza's suffering illustrates the ripple effects of that a violent neighborhood can have on entire families and communities—not just the perpetrators and victims. It also shows that the bulk of these ripple effects tend to land squarely on women. Esperanza's ethical dilemma parallels the numerous conundrums Bourgois faced during his research—she has to weigh loyalty to her community and suspicion of the police against her genuine care for a child.

A "marijuana-selling, wannabe boxer" shows up to chat with Esperanza's reclusive daughter, and Bourgois learns that this man is Luis's son, whom he had last met six years before, when "his father Luis has just been jailed and his mother [Wanda] is exchanging sex for crack under the elevated railroad tracks on Park Avenue." Luis's son has three children. On his way home, Bourgois sees a woman nearly beat her three-year-old in the elevator and a number of "underweight children" traveling with their "emaciated mothers who are obviously on crack missions."

Bourgois's position is made all the more difficult by watching innocent children turn into perpetrators of violence and participants in the drug trade. It is unclear whether this son of Luis's was one of the ones involved in abusing other foster children—but, given his parents' fates and what Bourgois has already shown about intergenerational cycles of violence, it would not be a shock.

Bourgois explains that his last fieldnotes from 2002 emphasize "the institutional violence of the new panopticon that enforces 'quality-of-life crimes' on El Barrio's streets." In fact, a cop fines Bourgois himself for drinking on the street, but yells such a string of obscenities that it becomes clear he thinks Bourgois is seeking drugs or sex in the neighborhood.

While the police used to casually harass Bourgois and his friends, now their petty antics (such as drinking on the street) have become prosecutable crimes. This reflects both the United States' increasingly draconian attitude toward inner-city crime in the and how longstanding prejudices against inner-city residents translate into the criminalization of their very existence. Bourgois knows that he would never have been fined, had the police not suspected he were up to something more sinister. He implies that these new laws are simply ways of giving the police wide discretion to arrest anyone they consider plausibly criminal, delinquent, or unworthy, based on very little evidence.

When he has to fly back from California to New York to pay his $10 fine, Bourgois notes that the courts are in chaos, with "most of our time [spent] waiting in hallways while the guards try to figure out which courtroom is not too crowded to take us." A police officer tells him to deny the charges, which are not worth the state's effort to substantiate, and Bourgois watches a series of marijuana cases get dismissed because "it's too expensive to have marijuana tested." After a few hours, Bourgois almost pays the fine of a man who cannot afford his own but decides not to "because [the man] might think I will demand a sexual favor in repayment." He goes uptown to visit Esperanza.

The absolute chaos of the municipal court system—as well as the vengeful pettiness of asking Bourgois to fly across the country for a $10 fine—again suggests that there is a wide gulf between the purported aims of the criminal justice system and its actual effects on the people it polices. Prosecutors, more interested in justice than winning, use marijuana cases as bluffs in hopes that people will either not show up or admit to a crime that cannot be proven.

Just after 9/11, Primo tells Bourgois that he has grown deathly afraid of terrorism, and stopped going to his drug treatment program as a result. His girlfriend is working—she turned down maternity leave in exchange for a promotion she was never given. He continues doing heroin but has not failed a drug test.

Despite his familiarity with danger and violence, Primo is still overwhelmed by the nebulous danger of terrorism. Perhaps ironically, many Americans' fears of inner cities during the crack epidemic operated on the same principle: fear of highly visible but relatively unlikely violence committed by a figure stereotyped as purely evil. Of course, this figure was the racialized crack dealer or user—Primo himself.

Some time later, Primo calls saying that Esperanza has sent her imprisoned son Bourgois's book, and the prison guards have confiscated it and tried to use it to extract a confession out of the man. He assures Esperanza, and the reader, that not only is her son barely mentioned in the book itself, but that there are legal previsions against his book becoming evidence in court. Later, Bourgois learns that Esperanza's son sued the jail and got himself moved to a closer, easier-to-visit location. Primo's girlfriend finally got her promotion and Esperanza's mental health is in great shape. Her and Felix's mother has died, but they are coping well, and the city government has sent the little girl next door away to foster care.

Much like crack dealers, the prison guards have no qualms about using every possible tactic—without regard for ethics or legality—in order to get their way with Esperanza's son. This offers one final reminder that inner city residents are treated as criminals and presumed guilty because of who they are, rather than what they have done. These tactics have only worsened since the 1990s, when Bourgois originally wrote the book. The crack epidemic was only the beginning of what effectively became a systemic war on American inner cities.

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