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**Negotiating Difference and Constructing Belonging:
Urban, African American Professional-Managerial Workers**

By

Sabiya Robin Prince

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of
New York

2000

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Negotiating Difference and Constructing Belonging: The
Urban African American Professional-Managerial Workers

by

Sabiyha Robin Prince

Advisor: Leith P. Mullings

A dearth of anthropological research on African American professionals has left major gaps in our knowledge of contemporary black life in the United States. This segment of the African American population more than doubled during the 1970s. While research in this area holds tremendous potential, only a handful of ethnographic studies have examined the lives of upwardly mobile blacks. A focus on socioeconomic fragmentation can expand the view of African American life by engaging questions of intra-racial differentiation and the impact of dissimilarities on identity formation, processes of historical change and other important topics.

Looking at the communities of Central and West Harlem in New York City, this study explores the locus, form and significance of socioeconomic differentiation for African American professional-managerial workers (PMW). It starts by considering centuries of New York City history and the structural elements of class inequality to present readers

with the larger context of contemporary events. The primary objective of this study is to examine the everyday lives of black professionals in Harlem and determine what bearing income-generating activities have on ideology, consumption patterns, and lifestyle, among other factors. I also examine the relationships women and men maintain with other African Americans in their neighborhoods and networks of kin and friends.

This trajectory of ethnographic inquiry reveals the complex and contradictory ways African Americans have expressed and thought about racial belonging and how they have negotiated the many fissures and fragments of group membership. In theorizing about the interstices of race and class among black PMW in New York City, this study also interrogates the "middle class" concept and its utility for explicating processes of socioeconomic differentiation among African Americans.

The completion of this project would not have been possible without the help of many people. I owe my first debt to my mentor, Leith Mullings. For more than 12 years, Leith has functioned as an advisor, friend and employer to me. Her presence helped to make graduate school a supportive and welcoming environment and her keen insight into the social and cultural issues I have dealt with helped sharpen my thinking on these concerns.

I am grateful for the careful editing and analysis of my additional committee members, Jane Schneider and Ida Susser. Jane helped make this final product less parochial and Ida urged me to address the connection between past and present events and conditions. All three women encouraged me to include more ethnographic data when I thought I had exhausted my field notes.

Special mention should be made of the assistance of Professor Delmos Jones. Del served as a member of the committee which advanced me to candidacy. He did not live to see the completion of this project but I would like to acknowledge his critical contribution in the early stages of this research.

I could not have completed this project without the work of persons who were involved in the Harlem Birth Right research project. Both the Centers for Disease Control in

Atlanta, Georgia and the New York Urban League facilitated the completion of this project by respectively funding and organizing this qualitative research project which sought to understand the social, political, and economic context in which African American women give birth. Leith Mullings served as a primary investigator on this project, as did obstetrician and gynecologist, Dr. Janet Mitchell and epidemiologist Dr. Diane McLean. My friends and colleagues Denise Oliver and Deborah Thomas were great fun to work with. I cannot say enough about Alaka Wali, the senior ethnographer on this assignment, who provided all of us with tremendous practical and intellectual guidance. She also served as outside reader for my dissertation. All of the individuals involved in Harlem Birth Right contributed to this dissertation in some way.

Due to their help in both formal and informal settings, many other scholar/writer/friends need to be mentioned. Conversations with Allison Abner, Betsy Andrews, Anthony Marcus, Robert Reid-Pharr, Yvette Richards-Jordan, Brett Williams, and Kevin Yelvington, have been useful as I have grappled with such themes as identity, class, history, race and inequality.

I also want to thank Ellen DeRiso and Heather Clarke at the anthropology department of the graduate school. They

have been particularly patient with me as I have attempted to complete my studies long distance. The current staff was preceded by Terri Vulcano who retired years ago. Terri was the bedrock of this department without whom I would have been lost in the morass of paper and procedure. Thank you all for your patience and assistance.

The strongest thanks go to the people of Central and West Harlem who welcomed me into their homes and spent numerous hours being observed and tape recorded by me. Many of you shared my passion for this project and your generosity and contributions are what make this all possible.

Lastly, I want to thank my family for all of their support. My mother and brother, Rosa and Christopher Prince have encouraged me every step of the way. I love you both and thank you for being in my corner. Extended kin also made important contributions and that includes aunts, cousins and in-laws. All of them have been the greatest and helped in a variety of ways. My husband and daughter, Steven and Mariama Eversley, have been with me through the daily struggles of finishing this dissertation. They are my heart and I am thankful for their love and support.

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INTRODUCTION

Dubbed the "Negro Mecca" after the turn of the century, Harlem is a community always in flux. African Americans have come to predominate in Central and West Harlem where a series of upper-Manhattan neighborhoods span an area bounded by 110th Street on the south to 155th Street on the north. East to west, they are sandwiched between Latino "El Barrio" or East Harlem and the Hudson River. The evolution of Harlem into a community which now exemplifies things urban, black, American and changing was a process set into motion more than a century ago. Today, the communities of Central and West Harlem are home to Asians, Latinos, Euro-Americans, 363 Native Americans, and 113,887 African Americans out of a total population of 204,594 (Claritas 1997). Cultural diversity and demographic shifts are common parts of the social history of Harlem.

Socioeconomic heterogeneity is an important aspect of Harlem's diversity referred above. A common part of the history of blacks in U.S. cities involved the existence of communities where persons from a variety of income levels could be found. When not immediate neighbors, the poor and working class could be found living at opposite ends of the block or on adjacent tracts. While this was true of Harlem, this area also had a few notable exceptions to this socioeconomic diversity.

In West Harlem, The neighborhood of Sugar Hill sloped between Edgecombe and Amsterdam Avenues (Anderson 1991). This area, previously occupied by upper middle class Jews, Germans, and Irish, was nearly uniformly associated with the black elite. The Hill had such well-known residents as Ralph Ellison, Duke Ellington, and, in subsequent decades, Walter White and Thurgood Marshall (Anderson 1981). Now viewed as an extension of Hamilton Heights, this area is no longer the upper class enclave it was prior to the 1940s. It does have the highest percentage of resident homeowners in Harlem, however, and some of these are Euro-Americans. I met black and white property owners during an annual house tour in a neighborhood called Hamilton Heights during the summer of 1995. This tour included homes with market values exceeding one half of a million dollars.

Striver's Row is another Harlem neighborhood with costly real estate. As the name suggests, this area of Central Harlem speaks of upward mobility and accomplishment and is associated with the names Josephine Baker and Malcolm X, among other celebrities and public persons. A realtor showed me a spaciouly renovated row house on 139th Street which listed for \$250,000 in the fall of 1994. Along with Manhattanville, the River Houses and Lenox Terrace, these areas come closest to approximating "middle class enclaves" in Central and West Harlem.

With all its illustrious history, however, Striver's Row only consists of two neighborhood blocks. Dispersed among the homes of black professionals are single room occupancy buildings and apartment houses. Similarly, although Hamilton Heights covers a wider area, its housing stock includes abandoned buildings and units in various states of disrepair. Consistent with past patterns, neighbors differ vastly in terms of occupation, income, and the experience of opportunity and quality-of-life.

The specific case of Harlem and its contemporary, black professional residents may point to different causes for class-based, residential heterogeneity. The literature indicates that racial segregation has been the driving force behind ghettoization or the formation of predominately African American, urban communities. Similar processes have also taken place in suburbs from which whites flee when an influx of blacks occurs (Haynes 1996). This results in the creation of predominately black suburban communities which often exist in close proximity to the city limits (Farely 1970).

Today, although housing discrimination is a well documented factor in African American life, these blacks are finding more residential options available to them compared to past generations. What is motivating African Americans to move to Harlem given the other choices available to them?

This dissertation answers this and other questions through the use of anthropological research methods.

Anthropological strategies for gathering information are valuable because ethnographic data bring into focus the lives and faces behind statistics and theoretical formulations. Numbers are persuasive, but quantitative reports can also mislead, based on the style in which they are presented and/or the importance given their explanatory power. Similarly, although anthropological theories help social scientists understand and categorize field observations, data gathered through ethnographic inquiry can defy expectations built around theoretical constructs.

With some notable exceptions (Bell 1983; Gregory 1998; Pattillo-McCoy 1999), social science studies on urban, black life have focused on populations deemed marginalized by poverty, drug-selling, homelessness and/or persistent joblessness (Anderson 1990; Williams and Kornblum 1985 and 1994; Wilson 1996). Two key segments of the urban, African American population have been made invisible through this emphasis on isolation and dysfunction.

One consists of those residents who have jobs but remain low-income. As food service, health care, lower-level administrative employees and other workers, their wages have remained stagnant during the purported economic boom of the 1990s. These are Gwaltney's "core blacks" who

often miss being counted among those Americans who have "family values" and work hard. These African American women and men encounter many structural difficulties in their efforts to subsist and prosper. In New York City, many have left to return to their roots in the south (Chang 1994; Stack 1996). Others cease to be invisible when they receive media attention for being overwhelmed by economic vulnerability and the social constraints it generates.

Black professionals, or professional-managerial workers (PMW), are the other segment of urban, African Americans who receive little ethnographic attention today. More commonly referred to as the black middle class, this group is frequently erased in discussions and depictions of today's urban landscape. While absence may not be the most precise term, the movement of upwardly mobile blacks to suburban communities was a notable consequence of desegregation and the loosening of racial restrictions on the acquisition of residential property. These movements have been linked to a complex process of decline in urban areas which is purportedly caused by the decreased tax-base and the loss of proper role models in urban black communities fostered by black middle class abandonment, among other factors (Wilson 1978 and 1987). In this framework, cities have lost their political clout and low income African Americans suffer while black PMW pursue the trappings of "middle class life"

in suburbia.

Contrary to this view, however, there is research to show that black migration to the suburbs has remained relatively low, particularly in northern and mid-western states (Massey and Denton 1993). Based on a survey done in 1980, Kansas City, Indianapolis, Milwaukee and New York all had rates of black suburbanization under 10% (Massey and Denton 1988). Black PMW and the African American poor are just as segregated from whites as ever before. Pattillo-McCoy's recent ethnography indicates that 58% of African American households making \$75,000 reside in predominately black census tracts (1999). This determination is based on a population study carried out by the Rockefeller Institute of Government at the State University of New York at Albany which analyzed the metropolitan areas of Los Angeles, Houston, Detroit, Philadelphia, Chicago, Baltimore, Atlanta, Washington, D.C. and New York.

These data show that the majority of African Americans, including black PMW, have remained in U.S. cities during the post-civil rights period. In doing so these studies highlight three major problems with the "absent" middle class paradigm [for urban, black professionals]. First it is an inaccurate depiction of urban class and race-based demographics which, secondly, puts undue emphasis on PMW as appropriate role models for African American youth.

The main theoretical thrust of this argument, moreover, contributes to the depiction of urban space and the urban black populations as undesirable and dangerous.

This ethnography explores the lives of urban African American PMW who reside in the communities of Central and West Harlem. The research seeks to understand how the past and present experiences of study participants relate to processes of constructing racial and spatial belonging in Harlem today. In answering this question, I consider the interconnections between racism, racial identity and the social construction of place and the development of a sense of class identity and belonging. In examining how PMW interpret and act out their socioeconomic status, relations between kin and community are areas which generate much data. This study has four additional concerns which broaden and enhance information gained from more general questions.

First, the analysis of the broader context provides more depth and detail to this ethnography. The complex and fluctuating dynamics of the contemporary period, marked by the ideological and material legacies of the civil rights movement, the influence of computer and communications technology, and sustained socioeconomic fragmentation among African Americans, have led to the formation of a unique configuration of events and conditions. These constitute the backdrop against which primary and secondary research

questions are analyzed. Such a focus includes an examination of both the income-generating activities of informants, whether these involve wage-work or forms of self-employment, and the economic climate which has an impact on occupational choices. The seemingly growing movement of African American PMW into Harlem is another key component to context.

The media have grappled with these issues; however census 2000 will provide the quantitative data to verify the extent to which such movements have actually intensified. Based on my observations and interactions in the field, thirty and forty year old professionals, in particular, are re-evaluating strategies of the past and moving to Harlem in a renewed quest for community. For some these changes signify "community development"; however if these movements lead to elevated housing costs which displace lower-income African American households, then this pattern must be seen as similar to gentrification.

A second strategy is to compare my findings on African American PMW with data on lower income households in the same communities. Before initiating in my dissertation research, I worked as an ethnographer on a previous Harlem-based field study. Harlem Birth Right (HBR) was a qualitative research project conducted by an interdisciplinary team of researchers to assess the

socioeconomic causes for poor pregnancy outcomes among African American women in Central Harlem. This project, funded by the Centers for Disease Control through a grant to the New York Urban League, generated a rich database on black women's support networks, economic status, access to resource and other key social indicators. I refer to this data at different points to emphasize both the similarities and differences in the experiences of low income blacks and their counterparts among PMW.

Processes of social change constitute the third component to this investigation. The comparative examination of past patterns fosters an appreciation of contemporary conditions by clarifying the extent to which these contemporary developments in Harlem are new. The historical literature reviewed in this dissertation indicates socioeconomic differentiation is not a new development in the African American experience. Given this, I ask how the processes of socioeconomic differentiation I document here have developed in ways specific to the late 20th century?

Finally, it is important to understand how this research on African American PMW in particular, relates to prevailing theoretical formulations on PMW in general. Middle stratum positioning is fostered by profit-earning strategies particular to the capitalist mode of production.

This study operates within a framework that views the middle stratum as primarily composed of college-educated workers who receive relatively high incomes, benefits, prestige, and other perks in exchange for their assistance in designing and operationalizing strategies for capital. Compared to low-income earners, PMW are in a better position to save money and accumulate wealth because their salaries exceed that which is needed to reproduce the cost of labor power (Wright 1991). This population has more discretionary income than persons in lower income brackets.

Accumulation would be severely hampered without the labor of individuals trained to oversee the appropriate care, management, and socialization of the ranks of productive labor and other workers. By maintaining order, delivering professional services, promoting consumerism, and fostering worker discipline, the middle stratum plays a unique role in facilitating the political economic status quo -- a function vital to the reproduction of capitalist society (Aronowitz 1979). Some conclude that the role of PMW in directing the generation of surplus value for the dominant class supports the characterization of this population as agents, deliberate or unwitting, of capital in its quest to exploit workers (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979). It is certainly apparent that in helping to construct and maintain the socioeconomic status quo, PMW may

face logistical and ideological barriers to engaging in anti-capitalist action.

The banks, publishing companies, architectural firms, government offices, real estate agencies, and transnational corporations for which many of the respondents in this study work are strategic to capital accumulation. Yet it is also true that college-educated blacks have historically made important contributions to movements for social justice in the U.S. Not only have college-educated activists and political leaders been instrumental in increasing the numbers of African American PMW, individuals like Angela Davis, Kwame Toure (Stokley Carmichael), Martin Luther King, and others have been at the forefront of efforts to broaden opportunities for all black people and negate or reverse the deleterious effects of capitalism. These kinds of contradictions merit the attention of historians and social scientists. The extent to which these considerations distinguish the experiences of African American PMW from the middle stratum of other groups in the U.S. remains an interesting question.

The design of this research is intended to culminate in a multi-layered study. In addition to examining some of the relevant theoretical and methodological issues in the study of African American PMW, this study includes ethnographic and ethno-historical data on kin relations, work

experiences, mobility strategies, and leisure activities. The diverse sources of data helped me to capture the complexity of experiences and events in Harlem.

Chapter one takes a long look at the black experience in New York City. It explores the history of African descended people in Manhattan as a whole and narrows in to examine the contemporary setting in my area of focus, Central and West Harlem. In this section I take the initial step of linking the present with the past as I present various types of data on Harlem.

Chapter two reviews the literature on socioeconomic stratification among African Americans over time. It begins with the period of enslavement and ends with the 1990s and covers a wide array of approaches and disciplines.

The third chapter is primarily composed of data from oral histories. It introduces project participants in greater detail and reconstructs the history of each family's arrival in the community. It also looks into the reasons these individuals remain in a community many view as undesirable.

Chapter four delves more deeply into the impact of remunerative work and economic differentiation on the daily lives of project participants. It is followed by chapter five which builds on the exploration of work by connecting this to recreational activities and other patterns of

consumption. By grappling with the "everyday" significance of socioeconomic stratification, both chapters contribute to the generation of class theory which reflects lived experience.

The sixth chapter looks at interactions across socioeconomic boundaries with an examination of relations between informants and their kin. How are relations with family members affected by the upward mobility of some and not others? Chapter seven looks at similar issues but focuses on the impact of a professional-managerial presence on non-kin social groups.

Chapter eight concludes the dissertation with a discussion of the significance and implications of my findings. The study is framed by a consideration of how generational variation affects the perspectives and experiences of project participants. Of all the ways in which the women and men in my study differ, age emerged as the most central differentiating factor.

This exploration has demonstrated that the expansion of personal and professional opportunities which often accompany upward mobility are central to how African American PMW experience their socioeconomic positioning. The fragmentation of this population, moreover, mitigates any view of this segment of the black populace in the U.S. as monolithic. Observations of kin relations indicate that

generational change and differential access to opportunity and information, among other resources, are salient markers for "high" socioeconomic status within urban, African American kin networks. What is particularly interesting is how project participants and their networks of kin, friends, and neighbors negotiate these marked boundaries.

Research Methods

I used a range of data-gathering strategies to understand the processes by which class and race combine to shape experience in an urban community. This section presents a discussion of these methods and includes a consideration of the barriers to collecting data that I encountered over time, as well as those factors which facilitated the research process. Both components, particularly as they pertain to the identities and actions of both researcher and the researched, speak to the role of race, socioeconomic status and gender in both shaping the direction of ethnographic inquiry and determining the nature of the data collected.

The participant-observation of respondents in households and work settings was a central strategy within my research design but I expected that life histories would also constitute an important part of this inquiry. While in the field I analyzed historical and personal documents

conducted focus groups and interviewed community-leaders and other Harlem residents. I had the opportunity to complete genealogical research on a number of the project participants and spoke with people who were either born or reared in Harlem, but who now reside elsewhere. This strategy allowed me to describe structural conditions in the area and population movements in and out of Harlem. In documenting the general flow and flavor of community life, it was also important that this work attend to the impact of historical change in the contemporary context.

After formalizing my research questions and determining useful data-gathering techniques, I began the task of selecting project participants. I used my network of friends and acquaintances to generate field respondents. After looking through my phone book I called people in Washington, D.C., California, Philadelphia and New York in search of Harlem residents. I scoured weak and strong connections for anyone and everyone who would constitute viable informants and obtained some of my long-term participants through this process. In time, my sample snowballed into a diverse group of college-educated and/or professionally-employed blacks that included a range of ages, occupations, and areas of origin, etc. In this process race contributed to the completion of my project because it is probable that I would not have had access to

this wide array of informants had I not been an African American who was inserted into a large and widely-dispersed network of other blacks.

My previous job as an ethnographer for Harlem Birth Right (HBR) was relevant to my doctoral study for a number of reasons. Involvement in HBR provided my first significant opportunity to engage in ethnographic field research. Moreover, I benefitted from the guidance of experienced ethnographers who were part of a supportive team of staff members. The primary investigators on the project were my advisor, Leith P. Mullings, Ph.D, gynecologist/obstetrician Janet Mitchell, M.D. and epidemiologist Dr. Diane McLean. Alaka Wali, Ph.D. was the senior ethnographer on a project which had four graduate student ethnographers, a project director, a research assistant and an administrative assistant. I was one of the student ethnographers.

Through my work with HBR I was offered access to a wide range of African American PMW. When my doctoral study began, I re-established contact with the men and women I met earlier and utilized their networks to obtain additional informants. As a result, months before I actively engaged in my doctoral research, I had already accumulated data which I would later include in my dissertation. I include considerations of the impact of HBR throughout this

discussion of methods. The ways in which these two projects both differ and are similar have important implications for the anthropological endeavor, particularly regarding the way race, class and gender function in the field.

Informants fell into three, overlapping categories. Group one consisted of community civic and business leaders with whom I was only able to speak once or twice at their place of work. Discussions with these individuals centered around the impact of class differentiation in Harlem and rarely touched on personal issues. Although a number of these individuals did not reside in Harlem, they were important and influential figures in the community. Moreover, these are people the public readily perceives of as members of the "black middle class." I considered persons in this category to be short term participants.

My second category of respondents were also short term participants. Unlike the first group, I interacted with these participants on an average of five times each during the course of a year. I spoke and interacted with these individuals, who represent seen different households, both at home and at their place of work. This public and private access enabled me to collect the life histories and partial genealogies of these participants while obtaining a varied, first-hand views. These interactions differed from those with public figures in terms of frequency and in the

diversity of the settings in which we met. The final category of project participants generated the largest amount of data.

The third category of informants consists of long term participants -- persons consistently engaged in my study for a year or more. These individuals from 19 households constituted my most reliable source for ethnographic data and interactions with them varied from repeated open-ended interviews to extended periods of participant-observation. On the following page is a list of long term participants along with their year or decade of birth, occupation and place of origin. I also indicate their marital status with the letters (m) married, (d) divorced) or (s) single/never married next to their names. All of these individuals live in Harlem. This sample reflects the diversity which characterizes African American PMW across the country. The real names of all participants have been changed to maintain their anonymity:

Table 1.1

<u>name</u> <u>marital status</u>	<u>year of</u> <u>birth</u>	<u>occupation</u>	<u>place of birth</u>
Johnetta Butler(d)	---	ret.administrator	Manhattan, NYC
Louisa Mae Campbell(m)	1926	ret. administrator	Harlem, NYC
Elijah Campbell(m)	1919	ret. political organizer	Harlem, NYC
Luwinda Charles(s)	1943	banking executive	Akron, Ohio

Patrice Covington (m)	1956	editor/college instructor	Syracuse, NY
Calvin Covington (m) dec	1954	teacher/artist	Brooklyn, NYC
Janice Douchette (m)	1940	public administrator	Greenville, NC
Sarah Goings (m)	1959	banking executive	-----
Barbara Green (d)	1955	project manager	Harlem, NYC
Eugenia Haskins (m)	1948	project administrator	Memphis, Tn.
Lashandra Haskins (s)	1969	student	Harlem, NYC
Eve Irons (m)	1963	dancer	L.Angeles, Ca.
Arthur Irons (m)	1965	musician	Philadelphia
Phillip Jackson (m)	---	attorney	Harlem, NYC
Robin Jackson (m)	---	attorney	Queens, NYC
Cynthia John (m)	1914	physician	Antigua, WI
Mercy McNair (m)	1950s	model/salon owner	N.Carolina
Dennis McNair (m)	---	antique sales	New Jersey
Natasha Newberry (s)	1959	unemployed	Raleigh, NC
Clarissa Parker (m)	1954	nurse	Alabama
Lawrence Parker (m)	1955	lawyer/fireman	Harlem, NYC
Jade Pinchot (d)	1949	entrepreneur	Queens, NYC
Craig Skyers (s)	1960s	architect	Gastonia, NC
Carolyn Strickland (d)	1940s	realtor	Queens, NYC
Kaetlin Tyson (s)	1960s	production assistant	Canada
Brenda Walker (m)	1947	nurse/entrepreneur	Oneonta, NY
David Walker (m)	---	nurse/entrepreneur	Jamaica WI

To obtain additional data, I held two focus groups at a neighborhood church near the conclusion of my field research. One session was organized around the theme of class identity and the second was expected to center around the black PMW and issues of gender. My hope was that the group dynamic would promote a lively debate among individuals who varied in terms of gender, sexuality, and generation. Neither focus group turned out the way I intended but the data were useful nonetheless.

The collection of life histories and genealogies were helpful in a number of ways. These put the lives of project participants in chronological perspective and allowed for an understanding of the role of change in their lives. This information fostered an awareness of key national and global events which occurred during respondent's life cycle and facilitated a grasp of generational economic mobility. These data also kept me aware of the linkages between the macro-level and interpersonal factors. I examined letters, daily planners, books, photographs, calendars and other personal documents.

Financial records were unfortunately absent from these primary sources. I concluded that most participants would be reluctant to discuss this topic with me. I also decided that anonymous questionnaires would not work because, in

order to make the information useful, I would need to connect data on household income and investments to particular households which would violate confidentiality. Wary of offending participant's sensibilities, I relied, instead, on indirect approaches for obtaining information about income, debt, and wealth in order to protect the privacy of project participants.

There are a number of factors which reflect the economic condition of a household or individual. I asked whether or not the informant was a homeowner and, if so, the number of properties they owned. I observed living conditions and informally assessed how much was invested in art and furnishings. I discussed with them past and current travel plans and made inquiries into the other kinds of recreational activities they enjoyed. Over time I was able to determine that eight households, most often those with double incomes, had six figure salaries. Four households had salaries under \$40,000 while the majority earned between \$40,000 and \$100,000 annually. The self-employed had fluctuating incomes. Performing artists Eve and Anthony Irons, for example, obtained their incomes in fits and spurts.

During some interactions, I would introduce topics for general discussion in the hope of eliciting a personalized response from the participant. In one instance, I discussed

the findings of Oliver and Shapiro's book *Black Wealth, White Wealth* with an informant. This book concluded that African Americans have experienced significant income growth over the last decades but that racial inequalities in wealth still differentiate the economic well being of black and white households. This type of a discussion would often prompt an informant to talk about their own debts and assets. In an attempt to mitigate the gathering of unreliable data, I would periodically ask the same question in different ways. In this way, I gave the informant numerous opportunities to either corroborate or dismiss the conclusions I drew based on indirect observations and/or their own words.

Between the fall of 1994 and June 1996, I interviewed, chauffeured, worked alongside and dined with women and men who represented the range of Harlem residents in terms of occupation, age, residence patterns, political orientation and place of origin. During my tenure with HBR, I accompanied informants to precinct and community improvement association meetings and attended parades and block fairs. I ate in Harlem restaurants and shopped within and beyond the well-known 125th Street corridor. I attended lectures at churches and elementary schools and took classes at City College in Harlem. I frequented museums and libraries and marched in an assortment of political rallies. These

activities familiarized me with community concerns, economic conditions and cultural constructs in Harlem. The early information I collected also constituted comparative field data I would later use in my dissertation study on the presence of PMW in the community.

As a member of the HBR ethnographic team, I spent a significant amount of time with employed and unemployed, moderate to low-income women and their families. Expectations for my dissertation research were largely formed through interactions with members of these working class households. I envisioned lengthy encounters with participants and anticipated the many opportunities I would have to observe patterns in social organization and kin relations by becoming a part of my informants' daily lives. Shortly after my doctoral research began, however, it became apparent that many of the middle stratum project participants would not allow me the access I desired. Their socioeconomic status became a barrier to the realization of my ethnographic vision.

The majority of informants involved in my dissertation study worked a 45 hour week, not including hours worked on weekends. Some individuals, like fashion writer Patricia Covington, 38, worked two jobs. In addition to her full time duties with a publishing company, she also taught at a

university and was working on a bachelor's degree. Similarly, corporate executive Luwinda Charles, 47, and architect Craig Skyers, 35, rarely left work before 7pm. Both also worked frequently on Saturdays. As a result, work schedules proved to be another problem with obtaining data from participant-observation.

The burden of running a household exacerbated the fulfillment of job-related responsibilities. In the majority of instances, PMW were protective of the short time they had to spend with children, friends and significant others. When not working as a project director for a city-run training center, for example, one mother of five had to accompany her 5 year old to swimming lessons and a few other extra-curricular activities in which she was involved. Often our schedules would conflict due to her many obligations with her children. Other informants worked at night and although this made them available during the day, time spent with me was also time they could be spending sleeping. Juggling work and household-related responsibilities was particularly difficult for the single parents in the study.

Comparisons between participants in my dissertation study and HBR participants have useful implications for anthropological praxis. The latter had more free time than informants I would later meet during doctoral research. Of

the low-income, long-term HBR participants, one was fired from her job and two quit their positions as workers in a fast food restaurant. Another had been unemployed for five years at the onset of her involvement in the project. She left the workforce following the birth of her second child who was attending kindergarten at that time.

While contending with under- and unemployment, HBR project participants shared additional conflicts and responsibilities, as did the middle stratum workers. These women still allowed me to come by their residences periodically, accompany them on pre-natal visits, or just sit in the park and chat. They managed to schedule me in between their job searches, child care duties, and household errands. Provided there were no interruptions in their phone service, they would return my calls in a reasonable amount of time. Months into the project, however, I began to see signs of their interest subsiding. As the novelty of my presence in their lives wore off, phone calls were not returned so hastily and the women were becoming less accessible to me.

In response to this dilemma, I made adjustments to my strategies. At the onset of the project, HBR's primary investigators, in conjunction with a community advisory board and the rest of the ethnographic team, determined that cash incentives should be provided to participants at both

the beginning and end of the project to partially compensate them for their time. While not monumental, the money was welcomed by these participants with fluctuating employment histories.

Building upon this, I began relying more heavily on incentives of my own in attempting to offset informant's waning participation. I increasingly offered rides to women, none of whom had cars, and shared well-maintained but used children's clothing and furniture, which was a common practice among my own network of friends. I babysat children and attended or helped organize parties for particular life events. My socioeconomic status facilitated my access to the resources these poor and working class women needed. My ability to partially fill this void helped me build relationships with participants and demonstrated how the personal can shape anthropological research processes.

With respondents for my dissertation research, however, I had little opportunity to exchange services or resources for information. Offers to act as a babysitter or house sitter were never utilized by informants. I planned to offer money to reciprocate participants for time and effort, but because the research portion of my project was not funded, I was unable to pay the incentive fees. Many participants later told me they would not have accepted such

a token anyway.

Middle stratum-participants' quest for leisure time was another class-related element of my research project. Unlike HBR participants, the PMW in my dissertation study visited their vacation properties, traveled to Europe and the Caribbean, power-walked, attended the theater and dined out often. Being entertained, exercising, enjoying the company friends, or just relaxing, provided important down time away from work and contributed greatly to participants' quality of life. In contrast to the vision of participant-observation I had before initiating field research, these factors limited the amount of time I could spend with informants. Moreover, anticipated invitations to visit summer homes in Sag Harbor, Long Island or attend family reunions never arrived.

Another factor distinguishing my dissertation study from work with HBR was the way in which I communicated with project participants. Computer technology played an important role in this as I often stayed in touch with informants through faxes and email. One woman would send me a letter confirming the appointments I made with her. There were also websites, such as one for The Harlem Chamber of Commerce, which I utilized for contacts and information. This stood in marked contrast to HBR experience and indicated again that the socioeconomic hierarchy was not

only the topic of my research, but also shaped its direction.

Previous scholars have noted that interactions between researcher and the researched are affected by structures of inequality in the larger society (D'Amico-Samuels 1991; Mullings 1997). My dissertation study put a different spin on this subject, however, for unlike the common anthropological model of the middle class researcher studying a rural, peasant, or low-income urban population, I studied a population with whom I shared socioeconomic status. As regularly employed owners of property, most participants were in a better economic situation than I.

Much of urban anthropology informs us about conditions for "marginalized" populations such as drug addicts, homeless persons, the persistently poor, or persons living with AIDS. While this work makes visible populations many want to ignore, such asymmetrical researcher-researched positioning can also be viewed as replicating the colonial model in anthropological research. I would question the objectives of engaging in these types of studies if research is not geared toward generating solutions to the social conditions observed. Research into elite and middle stratum populations, while fraught with barriers to access, represents a departure from the status quo in anthropological inquiry.

Like class and race, age and gender were also factors influencing outcomes. Project participants ten to twenty year my senior showed great enthusiasm for my position as a doctoral candidate. This attitude was reflected in the words of an elderly church assistant who beamed as she commented, "You are such an articulate and pleasant young lady. It really is a pleasure to meet you." While this is not always taken as a compliment to many blacks since the individual making this type of comment is often expressing surprise, the attitude of this church worker exuded parental-like pride in what she perceived was my professionalism and verbal skills. Throughout my mission to recruit and interview participants I encountered tremendous support and excitement over my project. Although I am not sure a white ethnographer would have elicited such a response, I know a white researcher would not have had access to entrepreneur Brenda Walker. As a child and then young woman growing up in a rural, predominately white northern town, Ms. Walker frequently confronted the harshness of racial hatred. Now living in an area of Harlem which maintains the highest property values, she has no social relations with whites and remains uncomfortable about having white adults in her home. Feeling somewhat ashamed of her attitude, she told me, "I'm getting better Sabiyha."

There were other benefits my race/gender standpoint

generated for my doctoral study. As a thirty-something African American woman reared in a black community, I carried the broadly-conceptualized knowledge of cultural mores and cues thereof. I found myself almost instinctively knowing how to flow in interactions, how to speak to elders respectfully, when to tread gently or simply back off on questions, and how to instill trust in my intentions. This was particularly important as many Harlemites report being strongly skeptical about the motives of inquiring academics and journalists.

Participants had good reason to have doubts. Many, particularly those on Striver's Row, were keenly aware of a sensational New York magazine article on Harlem which presented a unidimensional portrait of the black middle class inhabitants of this 2-block stretch of historic homes designed by architect Stanford White. Residents were depicted as detached practitioners of conspicuous consumption. In my search for project respondents, I represented my study as one which would, among other things, show that Harlem was a diverse and active community. While reassuring them in this manner I was also clear that I would not downplay any indicators of impropriety or class chauvinism.

As the majority of my long-term participants were women, gender figured into my research in equally varied

ways. During the course of my study I found it was easiest to "hang out" with same sex informants from my general age group. Many of us shared recreational interests and held similar political viewpoints. Where older informants were more comfortable with the interview format, these thirty and forty-something professional women invited me to cookouts, dinner parties, women's group meetings and book club sessions. These informal activities enabled me to collect data through participant observation. In the years since I have left the field, I still maintain contact with two of these women.

When considered in conjunction with the focus groups and semi-structured interviews I conducted, this population of young black women yielded the most multi-layered and detailed data. As many of them also had young children, the accompaniment of my young daughter on household visits both eased my child care responsibilities and served as an important commonality between us. Child care duties still remained a logistical problem which sometimes interfered with my ability to conduct my study. On many days I would have to end field research early to pick up my daughter from school just north of my apartment in the Bronx. On a number of days, particularly during the winter and fall, she was sick and didn't attend school at all. There were one or two instances where I was unable to hear or transcribe a

recorded interview because the voices of our children playing nearby drowned out an informant's discussion. As happens for many female anthropologists, particularly those engaging in research "at home," carrying out domestic duties often competes with time set aside for field research. I compensated for these difficulties by increasing the length of time I spent in the field.

These myriad issues raise questions about the effects of identity or standpoint in the field. They also have implications for who can and cannot do anthropology and why. Ethnography is a process fraught with challenges and obstacles. The constraints I faced were particular to my status as the mother of a young child, an African American woman, and long-term resident of New York City. My familiarity with Harlem life and "the black experience" and the receptive responses I received from participants smoothed out these difficulties.

CHAPTER ONE
Culture, Race, and Class in New York City and Harlem History

Harlem has metamorphasized continually during the past two hundred years. This chapter will discuss the many changes that have occurred in this area of northern Manhattan as they pertain to peoples of African descent. One thing that has remained consistent with regard to black life in the U.S. is the presence of racism. Because of slavery, racial inequality has been a persistent and forceful part of African American history since its inception.

Enslavement constitutes the bulk of the experience of African people in the United States. Slavery lasted close to 250 years, in comparison to the more than 130 years that have passed since passage of the Emancipation Proclamation and the more consequential 13th Amendment. It is because of the length and general significance of this era that the antebellum period is a good place to begin a discussion of class formation among African Americans. Slavery left no aspect of black life untouched and went on to spawn structural and ideological barriers to black achievement which people continue to fight against today.

Human agency is a central component to this legacy of oppression as resistance to racial inequality has been a

considerable force in the shaping of African American life and culture (Gilroy 1987, Kelley 1995). Historians have documented the ingenuity, dynamism, hope, and opportunism of women and men during enslavement. These studies show that blacks did not submit passively to its dehumanizing and rigorous assaults (Franklin 1946; Bennett 1962; Aptheker 1970; Davis 1981). African American culture continues to be forged through a dialectic of oppression and resistance, with racial subordination continuing to shape identity formation, material conditions, and notions of racial ability and national belonging in the contemporary period.

Hints of Social Stratification among the Enslaved

Historians point to evidence of status differentiation among enslaved women and men in the U.S. Whether generating wealth or providing services, enslaved blacks worked in agriculture, transportation, the skilled crafts, home maintenance, childcare and food production, among other areas. The specific nature of the work differed from region to region based on geographic and demographic characteristics which determined the elements of local economies. In 1850, for example, 2.8 million enslaved persons worked on farms and plantations in the southern U.S. Half of this number was involved in cotton production in Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama and Georgia and another one

million grew rice, tobacco and sugar in these and other southeastern states (Frazier 1947).

On larger plantations, black laborers were more strictly divided into agricultural and non-agricultural groupings while a greater fluidity between the two categories was common on smaller holdings (Franklin 1949). Female non-agricultural workers tended subsistence gardens, prepared meals, cleaned and mended clothing, cared for children and cleaned house, among other household duties (White 1983; Jones 1985). Black male equivalents worked as coachmen, artisans, formen, and personal valets (Berlin 1974). It was common for both sexes of non-agricultural slaves to work closely alongside white household members; in some instances they even earned the trust and recognition of their owners. Some gained advantages over agricultural workers such as access to used food and clothing, the avoidance of field labor, and, in exceptional cases, opportunities to receive an education. This should not blind us to the reality that these unfree, household workers labored long, hard hours, and also faced the wrath and sexual domination of owners (Davis 1981).

The responsibilities of enslaved male artisans, drivers and overseers could involve some freedom of movement and measure of authority on the plantation (Berry and Blassingame 1982). As slave owners were more likely to

manumit "favorites", these men and women were predominant among those freed (Berlin 1974). In instances during the post and antebellum periods, former masters would attest to the character and reliability of their well-liked former-slaves. If an enslaved person was fortunate enough to gain their freedom, this type of patronage offered strategic contacts and useful skills which put them in a position to earn a wage and gain and status through employment.

Although there is no evidence of a one-to-one correspondence, kinship and skin color have played a role in the division of slave labor and eventual processes of socioeconomic stratification among African Americans. Included among "favorite slaves" were the children of white male owners and enslaved African American women. Historians document black female household servants being emancipated at greater rates than the enslaved, agricultural workers (Gutman 1976). On large plantations, the latter rarely worked in close contact with white household members and had little opportunity to distinguish themselves from other blacks.

A survey taken in New York City in the year 1800 indicated a large proportion of skilled free blacks were categorized as "mulatto" (White 1991). In another sign of this connection between color and status, mixed-race blacks were prevalent among slave owning African American

households. Although the manumission of kin was often the purpose for this practice, all black masters were not benevolent. In Louisiana and South Carolina, in particular, wealthy, free "families of color" were numerous and successful in their endeavor to accumulate wealth by using slave labor in agricultural production (Johnson and Roark 1984). In cities like Memphis, Atlanta, and Durham, North Carolina, many from "mixed-race" families became entrepreneurs who had considerable economic success after the turn of the century (Frazier 1957). Not all African American entrepreneurs were affected by skin color variation in this way, however.

Hundreds of thousands of black laborers, slave and free, worked in urban settings, the suburbs around cities, and in the western territories (Franklin 1947). Southern cities like Charleston and New Orleans relied heavily on the craftsmanship of skilled African American slaves to complete work in iron smelting and other important arts. In Pennsylvania white artisans fought in vain to keep blacks out of the skilled trades (Foner 1974). Freed blacks in New England were an important part of marine industries. One black whaler invented a tool which would revolutionize this industry. In Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, and similar territories, black freedmen engaged in fur trapping and animal husbandry (Berry and Blassingame 1992; Katz 1986).

Black Manhattan From Colonial to Post-Colonial Slavery

In the mid-1700s, two-thirds of the black population of Manhattan Island lived enslaved in one out of every five Euro-American households. Men and women were owned by grocers, merchants, ship masters and prominent New York families such as those of Aaron Burr and John Jay. Artisans in New York City relied heavily on slave labor and this need gave New York the highest proportion of African American craft persons in the American colonies (White 1991).

Four out of 10 members of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen in New York owned slaves whom they instructed in plumbing, tanning, sail-making, and other skills, according to 18th century records (White 1991). Blacks were predominant among masons, tobacconists, carpenters, millers, caulkers, bakers and the makers of shoes, barrels, candles, rope, and cabinets (Foner 1974). The relatively slow pace of immigration from Europe between the late 1700s and 1815 was a factor in fostering these conditions. Slave-owning artisans also hired out blacks for a fee and used these men and women as domestic servants in their homes.

By 1810, 9.7% of New York City's population was African American, with close to 7500 of these being freed persons. A large portion of non-slaves were also skilled craft persons who either owned their own businesses or were hired

by whites. Others labored in warehouses and on cargo docks. Blacks dominated the oyster trade and worked as domestic servants (White 1991).

Free African American women also had high rates of workforce participation. A sexual division of labor largely restricted women to domestic occupations working as seamstresses, cooks, produce sellers and, most predominately, laundresses. Some were the heads of their households, either unwed or married to frequently absent maritime workers. A small number turned to petty crime to subsist (White 1991).

New York's Gradual Manumission Act of 1799 mandated the freeing of all children born after July 4th that year while an additional act, passed in 1817, decreed the remaining slaves should be freed on or by July 4th 1827 (White 1991). After emancipation, the majority of African Americans faced limited opportunities for economic advancement. Heightened job market competition, brought about by the influx of white labor from Europe during the 1820s, markedly decreased the number of blacks involved in skilled work (Scheiner 1965). In New York, as in Baltimore, Philadelphia and other U.S. cities, Irish immigrants were given preference for positions previously dominated by African American artisans (Foner 1974, Scheiner 1965). Skilled blacks were largely pushed backwards into unskilled and domestic work and this

development set the stage for the increased economic marginalization of Manhattan's black population. Blacks became a reserve labor pool -- hired and fired with the ebbs and flows of an employer's needs. The "surplus" of black workers would drive down labor costs and be utilized when strike-breakers were needed.

In the wake of deskilling, important occupational niches remained open to African American workers. Black barbers, grocers, hotel workers, and butlers continued to serve the needs of affluent whites (Osofsky 1963, Katzman 1973; Meier 1963). Many of the men holding these jobs constituted a high-status group. These positions were prestigious because, when compared to some of the backbreaking work other African Americans had available to them, these occupations were well paid and desirable. However, the patron-client relations which fostered the emergence of an African American elite began to falter in subsequent decades. Again, competition from white immigrants loosened African Americans' grip on these occupational niches and by the commencement of World War I, history saw the social position of these elites significantly altered.

Free Labor on the Move

During the early 19th century, the majority of African

Americans in New York City lived in the Five Points District on the outskirts of lower Manhattan. The majority of residents held low-paying jobs as house servants and laborers. Poverty rates were high and this area was reputed to be a "den of vice and squalor" (Osofsky 1963). Despite Euro-American characterizations, however, the area housed The African Society of Mutual Relief, a "Negro" theater and the religious and educational institutions which nurtured such important figures as actor Ira Aldridge, abolitionist Henry Highland Garnett and Pan Africanist mentor of W. E. B. DuBois, the Reverend Dr. Alexander Crummel (Osofsky 1963).

As New York City rapidly developed and expanded its boundaries northward, the black population also moved north. There were few property owners among them, hence African Americans were forced to relocate, subject to the vicissitudes of the real estate market. As properties changed hands and/or rental prices increased, residents moved on in search of more affordable lodging. By 1830, blacks predominated on Sullivan, Bleeker, Carmine and MacDougal, the streets of "Little Africa" in what later became "Little Italy" and is now Greenwich Village (Osofsky 1963). Their churches and fraternal orders followed the movements of blacks, while the division of labor which disadvantaged them largely remained unchanged.

By 1880, the majority of Manhattan Island's 20,000 African American residents lived in midtown communities given the folk designations "The Tenderloin" and "San Juan Hill." Pockets remained in former black enclaves downtown while others lived north of Harlem and in Brooklyn to which many African Americans migrated after the draft riots of 1863 (Gatewood 1990). A black elite of clergymen, caterers and other entrepreneurs had a visibly active civic and club life in New York City. Displaying their class chauvinism, some would bemoan the fact that whites often refused to distinguish between themselves and blacks of "less bearing and fortitude" (Meier 1963).

The demise of the reconstruction effort, a setback which had a considerable impact on the southern U.S., was immediately followed by what has been referred to as the period of "Irish hegemony" in New York City politics (Wilson and Green 1992). The near-monopoly African Americans had in catering, which prompted blacks to form the United Waiters' Mutual Beneficial Association in 1869, came to an end around the time increasing numbers of French, German and Irish immigrants began replacing African American chambermaids, waiters, footmen, valets and coachmen (Scheiner 1991). Black male workers came to predominate as longshoremen and in other unskilled occupations while the majority of black women continued to work as domestic servants in white

households.

Transformations in Harlem's Economic and Racial Landscape

Before the turn of the century, Euro-Americans constituted the majority population in Harlem. The descendants of Dutch, French and English colonial settlers proudly viewed their suburban village as a haven for the fashionable, cultured and wealthy. Migratory streams from southern and eastern Europe would challenge the demographic status quo and prompt native-born whites to publically express their concern over the burgeoning Italian and Jewish populations (Osofsky 1963).

Despite these threats to homogeneity, many among the white and privileged believed the completion of new transportation routes would enhance the quality of life in their Harlem (Osofsky 1963). The view was that the area's high status reputation and proximity to mass transportation and other services would continue to attract well-off white New Yorkers. A flurry of real estate speculation ensued with developers projecting a greater need for luxurious apartment dwellings. Real estate brokers and bankers would abandon many of their plans, however, as the demographic tide shifted and peoples of African descent increasingly chose to call Harlem home.

Not only were growing numbers of southern blacks

fleeing Jim Crow, but development schemes were forcing out African Americans living in midtown and upper east side communities in Manhattan (Trotter 1991). Immigrants from the Caribbean also contributed to growth in New York City's black population. Whites fought against what homeowner association leaders called "the black invasion" and "coming black hordes" (Osofsky 1963). Unable to hold back the tide, however, the majority of white elites fled to less diverse areas of New York City and outlying northern counties. Italian and Jewish immigrants would follow suit in the following decades.

Harlem's emergence as an African American community occurred in the wake of socioeconomic developments which were centuries in the making and which culminated in migration and urban, racial segregation. By the 1920s, the area was increasingly characterized as the definitive urban "slum." Like other areas of the growing metropolis, high rates of unemployment fostered the emergence of an informal economy which included criminal activities. White property owners portrayed eroding conditions as an intrinsic outgrowth of black migration, while black business and clergymen called on blacks to adopt the refined behaviors of the "ancient black New Yorker" (Osofsky 1963). This emphasis on culture and comportment belied the role of structural factors in facilitating the deterioration of

community infrastructure.

The movement of blacks into cities produced consumer markets and occupational niches which served the needs of growing black populations (Woodson 1934, Frazier 1957, Sites and Mullins 1985). Positions for skilled and professional employment in the wider society were largely reserved for whites during this time. In this context, an embryonic middle stratum developed which consisted of both the descendants of wealthy, "old" African American families and blacks for whom good luck and hard work facilitated upward economic mobility against tremendous odds. Unlike the black elites of the 18th and 19th centuries, the incomes of these entrepreneurs and professionals were generated through the provision of services to blacks rather than whites (Landry 1987). Some of these , moreover, were among the rare, black beneficiaries of higher education. As the following chapter discusses, the changes of the 20th century constitute key transformations in the history of African American social stratification. These urban professionals serving black populations in cities constituted a nascent black middle stratum. Commonly called the, "old black middle class," this population replaced the elites of previous decades and occupationally approximates contemporary African American PMW (Landry 1987).

White property owners accumulated great profits through

the economic relationship they maintained with the Harlem community. African American realtors also fared well and played a significant role in the racial transformation of this community at the turn of the century. In previous years, the blacks who provided goods and services to whites occupied the upper rungs of the socioeconomic ladder and were held in high social esteem. Over time, however, the larger African American population became crucial to the survival of elite black segments.

The African American attorneys, beauticians, housekeepers and ministers who constituted this burgeoning middle stratum largely lived in the same neighborhood blocks as the black majority. Ethnographers noted the manner in which some among the "well off" erected barriers between themselves and lower-income blacks with whom segregation mandated they live (Du Bois 1899, Drake and Cayton 1945). Language, skin color, and consumption patterns were among the variables which accentuated socioeconomic boundaries (Davis, Gardner and Gardner 1941; Frazier 1957). In Harlem, elite neighborhoods evolved such as the previously-mentioned Striver's Row (138th and 139th Streets between 7th and 8th Avenues), Sugar Hill¹ (from 145th to 153rd streets, sandwiched between Riverside Drive and St. Nicholas Avenue),

¹Today, Sugar Hill is commonly incorporated into the community of Hamilton Heights.

and The Golden Edge, (110th Street, facing Central Park (Brandt 1996). Portrayals of intra-racial strife (Kelley 1995; Gaines 1996) stand in stark relief to studies which depict the pre-integration period as one of great harmony and cooperation among blacks across socioeconomic boundaries.

Heavy migratory flows created an unprecedented demand for housing in Harlem communities. Between 1920 and 1930, 87,417 blacks arrived, bringing the total number of African Americans to 164,566, with 25% of these being foreign-born (Osofsky 1963). Opportunistic landlords charged exorbitant rents which, when coupled with a division of labor which relegated blacks to low-paid, low status occupations, fostered the erosion of community conditions. Osofsky (1963) cites an Urban League study in 1928 which indicated almost half of Harlem residents spent 40% of their income on rent. The consistently unequal access to such basic resources as affordable housing and reliable, well-paying employment formed a socioeconomic legacy which Harlemites continue to grapple with today.

These hardships could not detract from Harlem's historical importance as one of the first and largest urban African American communities in the U.S. Like parts of Boston and Philadelphia, this New York community was also

among the earliest of northern settings where blacks organized against racial oppression. In the 1920s, black discontent congealed into social movements which mobilized African Americans through trade unions, cultural groups, and legal defense organizations, among other venues. Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association was very active around this time. The visibility of blacks in the Communist Party during this period would later influence a number of young intellectuals, including Richard Wright, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Langston Hughes, and Paul Robeson (Naison 1983).

A new energy was culminating as the result of these social movements and the work of previous activists and intellectuals. DuBois' work with the Niagra Movement and Ida B. Wells' anti-lynching work helped set the stage for further confrontations with structures of racial inequality. These battles fostered the social and political environment in which the Harlem Renaissance could occur and provided venues for black literary figures and artists. The NAACP's magazine *The Crisis* was a particularly important vehicle for writers of poetry and prose (Lewis 1981). In 1910 DuBois became the editor of this influential magazine that helped popularize the work of Jessie Fausett, James Weldon Johnson, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Claude McKay, and other a host of

other writers. The momentum was growing and in March of 1924, the Harlem Renaissance was "kicked off" with a gathering of black and white writers and intellectuals at New York's only elite club which did not have color or sex restrictions. At the Civic Club on March 21st, this "dress rehearsal" for what was to come began with a gathering of black and white writers which included Eugene O'Neil, Langston Hughes, H.L. Mencken, DuBois, Countee Cullen, and many others.

The Harlem Renaissance focused worldwide attention on the wealth of African American literary and artistic talent and solidified this community's centrality to modern American history and culture. It was during this time that philosopher Alain Locke pondered the emergence of a "New Negro" whom the dominant group would, one day, have to respect and contend with. Locke's egalitarian vision would not become a reality despite the accomplishments of many talented and exceptional African Americans during this period. Many decades later, however, the realms of the arts and politics would project a number of African American women and men into higher socioeconomic strata.

Black transnational migration was a development of the post-World War I period which also left a keen imprint on the economic and cultural life of this urban community.

Afro-Caribbean people have been a documented part of Harlem history as early as the 1800s, but after the turn of the century, their numbers increased. These immigrants had to contend with white racism and, in some instances, the nativism of U.S.-born blacks (Meier 1963).

Interactions between African Caribbean and African American peoples in Harlem can be characterized as both cooperative and conflictual, depending upon the period and the issues and personalities involved. "West Indian" immigrants developed distinct institutions and separate spheres of social interaction, but at the same time they intermarried with African Americans and were significantly involved in most black liberation movements. Whether through contentious or amicable relations, African Caribbean peoples have been a central and consistent element in economic, cultural and political developments in Harlem, and hence, African American life.

Many of the participants in my study trace their Harlem histories to the decades following the turn of the century. For some, their parents and/or grandparents were either born in Harlem during this time or in the process of migrating there from the southern U.S. or the Caribbean. In the early 1900s, the father of Mary Davis would regularly leave their upstate New York home to work in Harlem. In the following

years he relocated his family to 135th Street. Eighty year-old Elijah Campbell was born on in the Striver's Row house in which he and his wife continue to live today. The father of Dr. Ernestine John immigrated to Harlem from Antigua in 1918. These individuals are among the living links to Harlem's past.

Harlem During the War Years and After

The African American-led struggle for civil rights during the 1960s marked a momentous period in this population's history. Among the important changes brought about by this social movement was a dramatic increase in the percentage of African American professional-managerial workers. It was during the years which preceded the 1960s, however, that much of the groundwork for the movement was initiated. Putting this struggle in its proper historical context clarifies the process by which record numbers of blacks began moving into higher socioeconomic strata. Scholars point, in particular, to the role of global geopolitical conflict and how it impacted the demographic, ideological and economic landscape of the U.S.

The second World War was a catalyst for social change in a number of ways. Of particular consequence, European-American households were granted key access to upward

mobility pathways through provisions of the GI Bill (Sacks 1994). This government-sponsored program transformed higher education in the U.S. and made a college education accessible to more than just the children of Protestant elites (Willenz 1983). It also led to the "greatest wave of college-building in American history" (Nash et al 1986).

The access to resources male veterans received from the government allowed them to attend college and catapulted working class whites into the middle stratum. These processes also fostered advantages which would be passed down to subsequent generations. According to Sacks, the GI Bill constituted an affirmative-action program for white males because non-whites did not benefit from the measure in any significant way (1994). In the racially-charged environment of the U.S. armed forces, 39% of African American soldiers, in comparison with 21% of white, were given disproportionate dishonorable discharges (Wynn 1976). Black GIs, the majority of whom served in segregated forces under white officers, were subsequently denied these benefits and the vast access to educational, occupational and residential opportunities which they provided (Wynn 1976).

There were other ways in which the war altered the social and economic landscape of the U.S. In each of the

three decades following 1940, 1.5 million blacks left the south for northern cities (Jaynes and Williams 1989). Wartime labor shortages, particularly in durable goods manufacturing, were alleviated, in part, by the employment of black southern migrants in U.S. cities. In New York City, however, Irish and Italian-Americans dominated the apparel, electronics, printing and construction industries which formed the core of New York's manufacturing complex. African American workers were concentrated in laundering, hotels, hospital, and domestic household service (Waldinger 1996). White ethnic groups maintained tight control over the best paying manual jobs and utilized these to achieve upward mobility. World War II did not lead to the dramatic alterations in New York City's work force that were seen in other urban centers across the U.S.

After 1940, more than 3 million African Americans registered for the draft (Mullen 1973). In *Blacks in America's Wars*, Mullen indicates that by 1944, close to 1 million blacks served in the army, Coast Guard, Navy and Marine Corps (1973). War-time ideological currents in black communities played a role in facilitating economic opportunity for African Americans. Expectations for racial justice were heightened as a result of black participation in the war effort. There was a general belief that Euro-

American awareness of the sacrifices of African Americans made during this conflict would lead to a more just distribution of opportunity. As racism continued, unabated, even New Deal recovery programs discriminated against blacks in search of relief and opportunity (Brandt 1996). In the wake of this deferred hope, African Americans intensified the fight for racial justice. Educator Mary McCleod Bethune was among blacks catapulted to national prominence as advisors to Eleanor and President Franklin D. Roosevelt (Franklin 1947). The work of the NAACP and A. Phillip Randolph led to Roosevelt's passage of Executive Order 8802 which forbade discrimination in defense industries (Jaynes and Williams 1989). Seven years later Harry Truman signed Executive Order 9981 in 1948 which led to the desegregation of the armed services. This was followed by Eisenhower's signing of Executive Order 1059 in 1955 which established the President's Committee on Government Employment Policy.

In New York City, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell organized mass protests against employment discrimination in the city's retail chains. These and other economic, ideological and political developments had a cumulative effect on African American employment opportunities. They show, moreover, how the stage was being set in the 1940s and 50s for the more dramatic changes which would occur in

subsequent decades.

The New African American Professional-Managerial Stratum

The years between 1960 and 1970, saw the largest increase in the number of African American PMW in U.S. history (Landry 1987). As discussed, entry into this middle stratum was largely fostered by segregation in previous epochs. In more recent times, these processes underwent another change as blacks made forays into formally "white-only" domains through gains of the civil rights movement. African Americans experienced marked change and greater equality in the form of access to public accommodation, education and income-generating opportunities. Upward mobility was facilitated through state and federally-sponsored programs designed to manage and/or improve the condition of other African Americans (Franklin and Resnick 1973), as well as minority set asides in the awarding of government contracts (Collins 1983). As a result of these attempts to redress past racial discrepancies, the size of the African American middle stratum more than doubled during this period.

In New York City, numbers of African Americans became concentrated in the public sector as white ethnic control gave way to greater black representation (Wilson and Green

1992). Whereas the GI Bill enabled segments of European-Americans to abandon blue collar work for better remunerated and more prestigious professional and technical jobs, the gains of African Americans during this time inserted blacks into the lower end of the professional spectrum. In addition to entering nursing, primary school education and social work, blacks also predominated in "peripheral managerial posts such as affirmative action officers, community relations specialists and special projects managers" (Hill 1987). The public sector is still a huge employer of African American PMW in New York City. The availability of these jobs can vary with the winds of political change. Top-level administrators can be fired when a new administration takes the helm and other jobs can be eliminated through policy changes or budgetary constraints. The tenuousness of these positions can undermine the duration and certainty of black economic achievement through public sector employment (Collins 1983).

Between 1970 and 1989 the number of African Americans with an annual household income of \$50,000 or more increased by 182% (Edwards and Polite 1992). In spite of this progress, however, black PMW continue to experience racial inequality in the U.S. (Harrison and Gorham 1992; Cose 1993). Discrimination in banking and real estate, for

example, differentiates the black middle stratum from the white (Malveaux 1988, Minerbrook 1993). This interracial contrast reached its zenith during the post war years when the Veteran's and Federal Housing Administrations subsidized white upward mobility and flight to the suburbs through the provision of low-down payment, low-interest and long-term loans to white households (Sacks 1994). Redlining and restrictive covenants of sale had the opposite effect for African Americans and undermined their attempts to change residential settings or make improvements on properties. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 lessened aspects of housing discrimination but this type of institutionalized racism continues to be a problem for African Americans and other minorities today.

Racial differentials in wealth and income constitute another example of how African American PMW experience inequality. Data from the 1990 census indicate black households headed by individuals with four or more years of college had incomes which amounted to only 78% of comparably-educated European-Americans (Feagin and Sikes 1994). The gains African Americans had made through the civil rights movement are a relatively recent phenomena. Time considerations, combined with race-based income discrepancies and discriminatory real estate practices,

undermine the ability of African Americans to build equity and reduce the racial divergence in the accumulation of monetary assets (Brimmer 1987). This dearth of wealth further sets the black middle strata apart from the white and makes African American PMW particularly vulnerable to economic downturns or familial crises. It also reduces the ability of adult kin to offer money to those of subsequent generations to provide for their education or facilitate home-buying (Oliver and Shapiro 1995).

Discriminatory ideas and practices faced by African American consumers constitute additional indicators of racial inequality. Research shows that African Americans pay more for a number of goods and services (Ayres 1991). Products and services being sold and offered to black communities are often of inferior quality and, in addition to facing problems obtaining credit needed to buy certain goods and services, African Americans "endure suspicious scrutiny if they pay by credit card or check" (Austin 1995; pg. 231). African American PMW are not immune to these experiences. These racist practices are not only psychologically taxing, they also exploit African American consumers for the economic advantage of small businesses and corporations.

While African Americans continue to face racism,

attacks on affirmative action and other gains of the civil rights movement are a consistent part of the contemporary political discourse. Black college enrollment has decreased and conservative pundits openly question the merits of providing opportunities for higher learning to all citizens. These developments are important considerations for the future of class formation in the U.S.

Contemporary Life in Central and West Harlem

Harlem's contemporary landscape continues to reflect processes of socioeconomic differentiation, migration, cultural innovation, and racial oppression. Quantitative data show the demographic shifts that have occurred in the communities of Central and West Harlem over the past 20 years. The 1980 census indicates that 15,391 persons chose executive/managerial/professional/administrative as their occupational category (Department of City Planning 1990). In 1990, these numbers increased to 20,855 and 20,879 in 1997. There has also been an increase in income levels in Central and West Harlem. In 1990, 4,055 households reported annual incomes greater than \$75,000 while more recent data indicate 6,551 households at this income-earning level (Claritas 1997).

Statistical data also reveal some of the differences

between Central and West Harlem. Both sections of the community begin at 110th Street and meet along the border of Manhattan Avenue. Morningside Avenue separates them at 113th Street and the division proceeds to the right at St. Nicholas Avenue and 125th Street. Morningside then weaves its way into Bradhurst and then Edgecombe Avenues a few blocks north. West Harlem ends at 155th Street while Central Harlem continues north and ends where Harlem River Drive meets East Harlem. Proceed farther north and you will enter the Bronx.

The population of West Harlem is larger but Central Harlem has the most blacks, 77,254, compared to 36,633 recorded for West Harlem. West Harlem also has the greater number of college graduates, employed persons, and professionals, as well as the higher income levels. In 1997, that number was 14,925 for West Harlem and 5,954 for Central Harlem. These numbers show a 5% increase from 1980 figures.

In moving about through the community, one does get a sense that something new is taking place. Many of the changes I observed are, in large part, related to a variety of government programs and subsidies that PMW are taking advantage of. Non-profit "community-development" organizations such as The Abyssinian Development Corporation

and others have received increased funding to build and renovate residential properties in Harlem (Garb 1999). There is also the Homeworks program which is turning over vacant, city-owned buildings. As discussed earlier, The Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone has been the impetus for many of these changes.

Nkechi Rashid and Brian King recently purchased a brownstone in the Hamilton Heights section of Harlem, not far from City College. Hamilton Heights, along with the neighborhoods of Manhattanville and Mount Morris Park, has seen much of the residential property enhancements in Harlem. Rashid and King, a television director and dentist respectively, hope to move into their first home by the end of the summer of 2000. Currently an empty shell, the 4-bedroom house sold for approximately \$350,000 -- a price which includes to cost of renovations. Like other professional-managerial residents in the area, the couple intends to rent out the basement level as an apartment dwelling.

In 1999, after the bulk of my fieldwork was complete, I accompanied Rashid, King and their 3-year old daughter on a visit to their future residence. Their prospective home is sandwiched in the middle of a block, between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenues. True to the media reports, there was a

sense of excitement in the air. The weather was balmy for December as we drove and walked through the streets of Central and West Harlem. It was the holiday season and it was possible that this, along with the unseasonably warm weather, contributed to the heightened sense of activity in the street. Viewing the community through the eyes of these soon-to-be residents caused much of their anticipation and excitement to rub off on me.

We stopped in front of countless numbers of buildings in various states of renovation. Some were surrounded by fencing with signs placed on the doors or windows that indicated the contractor and/or developer of the project. King and I stepped inside the home that was currently being renovated which was located on the same street of their house. We spoke briefly with the contractor who was supervising the final states of a kitchen installation and met the white family that was preparing to move in. King also showed me a home a few doors down from theirs where a Latino police officer had recently purchased and renovated a brownstone through Homeworks, the same program the couple used. The officer occupied the bottom two floors of the row house and rented out two levels above his.

Properties subsidized by public funds are targeted in program literature for families deemed low to moderate

income. Even with the provision of low interest loans or waived deposits and/or closing costs, costs ranging from \$190,000 to \$450,000 are out of the range for lower middle income households. Project participants who have moved into Harlem as homeowners and who are benefitting from such programs earn high salaries. This is certainly the case for one couple which has a combined income numbering in the six figures. As previously stated, more data is needed to understand the statistical implications of these movements.

Further qualitative research is also needed to chart the impact of these changes on residents who do not earn high salaries. Processes of gentrification have been largely seen as pertaining to an influx of whites into urban communities predominated by minority populations. The apparent increase in the number of black professionals indicates a marked difference from previous patterns.

These new developments diversify a community which remains vibrant, rewarding, and troubled. The percentage of foreign born residents in Central Harlem has climbed from 4.5% in 1970, to 9.9% in 1990 (Bureau of the Census 1991). Public spaces are enlivened by shop owners and street vendors who specialize in the cultural commodities of their respective homelands and tangibly exhibit these statistical shifts.

The influx of west Africans is a recent addition to Harlem's diasporic mix. Senegalese hair braiding shops line 125th Street from Lenox to Amsterdam Avenues. In warm seasons these women aggressively seek out new customers in and around subway stations. Between runs, cab drivers from Mali and Cote Ivoire converse with kin and friends on main boulevards and side streets. West Africans also have a visible presence among public sector employees working in hospitals and other government agencies. In language and in dress, African entrepreneurs, pedestrians, and store patrons add a distinct flavor to the tenor and adornment of Harlem street life. These demographic changes have the contradictory effect of presenting poignant opportunities for cultural exchange and leading to ugly confrontations between immigrants and co-workers, clients or patrons.

Harlem has consistently been a more stable residential community than New York City as a whole. Over 65% of its residents had lived in the same house five years before the 1990 census was taken and many of my project participants are the faces behind these numbers. Homeowner Johnetta Butler has lived in the same brownstone since the late 1960s and the Bakers have owned their Hamilton Heights row house since 1942. Some project participants have adult children living with them while a select few have spent years

renovating their Harlem properties prior to taking up residence. For example, film maker Stewart Newman renovated his duplex apartment for 7 years before moving in 1996. Mount Morris Park and Hamilton Heights have the largest percentage of resident homeowners in Harlem. By contrast, the bulk of housing stock in central and west Harlem is held by property owners who do not reside in the community (Department of City Planning 1990).

While the presence of long-term residents is one form of continuity, the population of Harlem has been declining since 1970. A 33% decrease in numbers between 1980 and 1990 parallels a 32% decrease in available housing units between 1970 and 1990 (McLean, Mitchell and Mullings 1994). New York City lost 200,000 African Americans to southward migration during the 1980s (Chang 1994). Given this pattern it is interesting that only two of my participants expressed any consideration of leaving Harlem.

As more than 35% of employed African Americans in New York City work for city-run agencies, adults in Harlem are more likely to work in public administration in comparison with employed New Yorkers of other racial and ethnic groups (City of New York, Department of City Planning 1990). According to the 1990 census, over 50% of employed adult Harlemites were in service or clerical occupations with

close to 20% of this group consisting of PMW (McLean, Mullings and Mitchell 1994).

Government employment has been a primary ethnic mobility strategy since the mid 1800s in New York City when WASPs and Irish, later challenged by immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, competed for their share of these strategic jobs (Waldinger 1996). With racial discrimination less of a barrier in comparison to private sector employment, blacks have utilized work in city agencies as a means to achieve economic mobility (Fainstein and Fainstein 1996). Many of my older project participants became PMW through this process. The high number of blacks in public administration may indicate the role of racism in preventing African Americans from replicating Euro-American patterns of upward mobility.

Harlem residents work in a wide range of occupations, yet unemployment remains a serious problem in this community. Forty percent of adults older than 16 are without jobs and this has a direct impact on the distribution of household incomes (Department of City Planning 1990). Close to 50% of central Harlem households have incomes under \$10,000 -- a percentage twice that of both Manhattan and New York City as a whole (McLean, Mullings and Mitchell 1994).

The community has a substantial population of young adults and children and a large number of families with children under 18 were headed by women (Bureau of the Census 1991). These women must contend with a sexual division of labor which both unequally remunerates them in wage work and assigns them primary responsibility for child rearing and household work. In this socioeconomic context, it may be surprising to note that 71% of area of residents are not on public assistance (McLean, Mullings and Mitchell 1994).

Harlem is often portrayed in the television and print media as a community which is isolated and on the fringe. The work of ethnographers and social historians contradicts this narrow conceptualization by documenting the vitality with which people and ideas move in and out of this community. Its civic and religious institutions attract people from all areas of the city and the surrounding suburbs. Many are former residents who keep these institutional affiliations to maintain a connection to their pasts and other African Americans. This practice is particularly important for blacks who live in predominately white suburbs.

Harlemites of varied socioeconomic strata stay in close contact with their kin and friends living outside the community. Participants in my project visited Queens, New

Jersey, and Westchester County to attend church and shop in affordable and clean stores. The Harlem I studied is not the dark and foreboding community projected in film and television or discussed in newsprint. It is not a place where people live isolated from the mainstream or the "outside world". It is a community in which people work, struggle against numerous odds, experience victimization and setbacks, pursue goals, and sometimes prosper. It remains plagued by the vagaries of urban disinvestment but it is also a place which offers a testament to the survival of a people and this is something about which residents are proud.

CHAPTER TWO**Locating Class and Race in Anthropology and History: A Theoretical Overview**

It is important to review various understandings of class before grappling with the question of how race and class intersect. Social scientists, historians and laypersons can all agree that when we talk about class, we are discussing processes, issues and conditions rooted in the economic. For over a century, however, disagreement has ensued about the specific ways in which class differentiation shapes the human experience. For example, some scholars may view classes as tangible or objective positions in socioeconomic hierarchies while others deem the manner in which people form class identities and affiliations to be of more consequence. There is also contention about the number of classes that exist and the specific characteristics persons occupying each category should manifest.

What is indisputable is the debt contemporary scholars of class owe Karl Marx and Max Weber for their work in this area. Neither answered all the questions about the development and role of class inequality in human life; what their formulations accomplished was the building of important theoretical foundation upon which to study such processes. These men also set up the parameters of a debate

that continues today. Moreover, numerous scholars have used the work of Marx and Weber to advance understanding of those aspects of class formation which were initially overlooked.

Karl Marx used concepts such as *the means of production* and *the social relations of production* in formulating his view that unfairness and inequality are endemic to capitalism (Levine 1998). For him, class conflict fueled human history because the persons who own the land and capital will continually clamor for the profits generated by workers who fight for working conditions which are beneficial to themselves and their kin.

To the contrary, conflict is not viewed as the central characteristic of capitalism in the work of Max Weber (Crompton 1993). Instead of emphasizing the social relations of production and the ownership of land and capital, Weber saw market relations as the primary determining factor in social outcomes (Levine 1998). In this framework, the acquisition of education and skills lead to occupational attainment which facilitates prestige, income, and benefits. These are the key processes which bind individuals into shared positions in the economic hierarchy (Giddens and Held 1973). This approach challenges what many Weberians see as an economically reductionist or deterministic Marxism.

Scholars working within a Marxist framework have unveiled the many faces of capitalist oppression. Geographer David Harvey analyzes how capitalist imperatives shape urban planning strategies and spatial distribution (1985). Other scholars have looked at the use of ideology to enhance the ability of capital to reap profit from consumer desire and labor-force discipline. Corporations continue to employ a number of different tactics to both increase demand for their goods and services and shape workers' dispositions toward facilitating profit-making. Rouse notes that costly campaigns in television advertising have helped foster demand while the corporate monopolies in media ownership further solidify the connection between control over the means of production and mass communication systems (1995). These approaches suggest that class has as much to do with processes of domination and exploitation as it does with allegiance, identity and culture. Moreover, they enable us to navigate the theoretical terrain of the cultural, ideological and material class-nexus.

In the post World War II period, race, gender, sexuality, and national origin-issues have further transformed the study of class. Scholars now look at interlocking processes and include broader, more diverse populations within their realm of consideration. In

research on the U.S., these analyses attest to how standpoint and/or differentiated access to resources can set apart the experiences of minorities and women, for example, from white males with whom they may share class position (Hill-Collins 1990; King 1988). These studies generate specified theories which address how and why these variables intersect and affect experience and social structure.

The race/class/gender reformulation has also altered the direction in which we cast our gaze in search of "the economic." Early studies narrowly focused on the workplace, presenting wage labor and union activity as the most reliable class indicators (Scott 1994). This orientation produced studies that centered on white males and excluded the involvement of women and minorities in U.S. industrial employment. As a corrective, revisionists also looked at households and neighborhoods to explore how class interests have fueled political activity in such settings. The activism of community workers, many of whom are women, has been studied with this concern in mind (Gilkes 1988; Susser 1988).

The reconceptualization of the arenas in which scholars can observe class processes has also changed our view of the role of women's paid and unpaid labor in facilitating capitalist accumulation over time (Abramovitz 1988). The

engagement of women (and children) as a source of cheap labor is one way in which early industrialists realized tremendous profits (Safa 1986). Feminist scholarship reveals that profit making and the reduction of labor costs have been contingent upon women's work in child rearing, food preparation, household maintenance and other reproductive tasks assigned to them through the sexual division of labor (Glenn 1994). In the U.S., where women's household work once produced clothes, food, soap, and other important use values, now it is workers that are reproduced in the domestic domain. Whether biological or socio-cultural, all these forms of labor buttress the capitalist system of production.

The building of a theoretical consensus on the "middle class" has been a particularly difficult endeavor in class analysis. Social observers disagree on whether income, education, occupation, prestige, or patterns in consumption should conceptually anchor this intermediate position. Some analyses do not even recognize the existence of a middle stratum comprising a distinct position in the economic hierarchy (Kautsky 1971). Rather than dispose of the concept entirely, however, other perspectives encourage theorists to "capture the essential ambiguity" of this class position (Wacquant 1991). Bourdieu, for example, maintains

the middle class is an ill-defined concept precisely because the "fuzziness of the relationship between practices and positions" is greatest in this middle stratum (1987).

The theoretical framework of this study takes the opposition between the dominant or ruling class and working classes as the theoretical and experiential canvas upon which relations are formed and displayed. Both class groupings contain dynamically-constituted populations that are linked by a middle stratum of PMW. I counted among these PMW - a grouping more commonly referred to as the "middle class" - entrepreneurs and merchants who resist easy categorization as they either periodically shifted in and out of wage work or were employed in a salaried position while donating only part of their time to self-employment.

The dominant class is defined by their ownership and control of capital, land and raw materials, as well as any other instruments and products of labor. Euro-American households predominate in this grouping which includes men and women involved in banking, manufacturing, insurance, information and technological sales industries. This class enjoys the inordinate privileges of wealth and power which include surplus income, ownership of valued property, sway over the political structure, access to prestigious schools and universities, influential networks and excessive amounts

of leisure time (Higley 1995). As their factories and companies are often transnational, their force and authority extends well beyond U.S. borders. The consolidation of ruling class power relies heavily on schools, religious institutions, the corporate media and the machinery of the state which validate capitalist productive strategies (Rouse 1995). Their combined efforts not only oversee the control and distribution of strategic resources, but also develop and disseminate ideologies which work to both socialize compliant and distracted consumers and legitimate capitalist domination.

The influence of the dominant class extends into the lower levels of socioeconomic strata. The desire to both achieve what this ruling class has and maintain order, which is the goal of many "lower groupings," helps reinforce the status quo. It is also important to acknowledge that the ruling class may include individuals who may hold views contrary to those most directly engaged in processes of accumulation. There has been rebelliousness within, particularly among the young, but even this segment enjoys the privileges of their class.

A division of labor splinters workers into groupings further differentiated by the unequal distribution of skills and opportunity among them. Theorists continue to debate

whether or not this fragmentary process produces distinct class positions or asymmetrical positions within classes (Wright 1991). This study views the working class as encompassing most PMW, primary and secondary sector workers, and the reserve army of labor (Ehrenreich and Ehreireich 1979). These groupings share a need to exchange labor for wages -- a pivotal distinction between these populations and a ruling class minority who may control resources and engage and profit from the labor of workers from varied income brackets without necessarily working themselves.

Primary sector working class jobs are better paid and more secure than those of secondary sector workers who contend with low salaries, tenuous employment and work conditions which may be unsafe (Gordon, Edward and Reich 1982). For the most part, neither group has accumulated the amount of wealth necessary to withstand catastrophic illness, downsizing, or any occurrence which can cut off the flow of income. Recognizing that those in the dominant class may donate long hours to income-generation and the management of finances, members of the working classes are ultimately distinguished from those whose investments and amassed assets afford financial security without the material need to generate an income.

The accelerated emergence of PMW has been attributed to

events of the last half of the 19th century which has led to increasing amounts of wealth being concentrated in the hands of "monopolistic corporations and individual capitalists" (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979: pg. 14). The dominant class needed a middle stratum to supervise production, run reproductive institutions, maintain bureaucratic authority, make capital-enhancing scientific advances and create cultural frameworks which uphold the capitalist status quo and facilitate accumulation. This fostered the unequal distribution of prestige and opportunity among wage-earners with the jobs of professionals being comparatively more flexible, safe, secure, and well-paid than those of other workers.

The middle stratum obtains these jobs through the acquisition of a college education and/or professional degrees. Using networks established during training and through kin, many also gain access to strategic contacts and lucrative information. While the mandate of professional managerial workers has been described by some as the reproduction of capitalist relations (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979), individuals from this population segment have also demonstrated their potential for transforming society by contributing to and/or leading anti-capitalist political actions and movements. Historically, this has been

the case in the African American experience where a number of radical black activists and intellectuals have middle class backgrounds.

The boundaries between working class groupings are fluid as economic flux can produce upward and downward shifts in mobility. Movement into the ruling class is curtailed, by and large, as its members utilize private schools, prestigious colleges and universities, and exclusive fraternities and eating clubs to limit cross-class associations and encourage elite endogamy (Higley 1995). Absorption from below may occur through marriage but is reserved solely for those in the upper reaches of the middle stratum (Higley 1995).

The class hierarchy is interdependent with race and gender-based systems of inequality. Gender and race further fragment an economic hierarchy which is increasingly composed of individuals who occupy unstable, cross-cutting and sometimes contradictory positions. My study makes inquiries into such processes because black, PMW are a population which simultaneously belongs to a high status socioeconomic stratum and a devalued racial population. In view of such complexities, I ask, for example, what are the processes by which class is experienced materially, subjectively and historically. It is probable that culture

and class experience occur and are created at such a junction.

Race (and Class?) in African American Studies

Race is a predominate trope in the study of African American life and culture. The persistent reliance on this category to conceptualize, organize, and present data on African American communities reflects the primacy of white supremacy in affecting key aspects of the "black experience." African American political strategies, household composition, language and musical styles are only a few aspects of black life which have, in some way, been shaped by racial inequality. In the context of this persistent struggle, ideas of an "authentic black experience" have resonated in various forms within a population with a critical need for "race loyalty" (Dyson 1993). Conformity and allegiance are historical components of black survival but these practices have also limited the acknowledgment of black "others" whose experiences are rooted in the contours of intra-racial variance. This process fosters silences, particularly around matters of sexual difference and gender inequality within. Essentialist paradigms of African American identity and action have been effectively critiqued by scholars who alert

us to the analytical pitfalls of racial-uniformity (Gilroy 1987; Dent 1992; Morrison 1992). African American women's studies, in particular, lay out the lines along which black experiences fragment and diverge (Davis 1981; King 1988; Hill-Collins 1990; Mullings 1986 and 1997).

Theoretical emphasis on class formation also has the potential to generate rich and useful data on intra-racial difference. The use of class as a unit of analyses in black studies focuses attention on often overlooked regional and chronological variants in African American populations and allows for a more definitive inclusion of blacks into the framework of U.S. and global labor studies. Historians looking at African American migration have done this kind of work (Trotter 1991).

Critics attribute the dearth of ethnographically-grounded accounts of black class differentiation to a number of factors. The far-reaching force of racism in black life, as one example, is a condition that can undercut our ability to conceptualize and typologize African Americans as workers. This is compounded by the persistent barriers to industrial employment and unionization historically faced by African Americans (Painter 1986). Socioeconomic polarization may be a relatively recent social phenomenon, in terms of the percentage of black workers who can be

characterized as professional-managerial; however, since at least the 1980s, the growth in this segment of the African American populace has been significant enough to merit anthropological interest. The study of how black women and men have achieved upward mobility, moreover, can also shed light on the complex interplay between structure and agency that is the human experience.

There are other factors which narrowly orient discussions and interpretations of African American life and culture. In the U.S., both racial and class identity formation have occurred within an historical context where the machinery of the capitalist class has worked to undermine interracial, class-based activism (Zinn 1980). The assignment of white-skin privilege to Euro-Americans, which has ranged from the differential treatment of white and black bondpeople during the colonial period to white-only suffrage, has hindered a sustained anti-capitalist, multiracial movement and undermined the formation of shared, transformative working class identities among Americans of different races (Aronowitz 1992; Roediger 1994).

Debates and Depictions of Black Social Stratification

Various genres of writing and imagery discuss and portray socioeconomic differentiation among African

Americans. Early data exists in the words of black elites who lived during the 18th and 19th centuries. As far back as the 1750s, black educators, activists, and journalists publicized their viewpoints and life experiences in autobiographies, speeches, essays, newspaper articles and manifestos. These works indicate tremendous variation in the values and aspirations of this minority within a minority -- African Americans who were literate earners of income when the majority of their counterparts, whether enslaved or free, were impoverished.

Incipient treatises on Pan Africanism, black nationalism, and afrocentric-feminist thought document the early existence of economic stratification among blacks and highlight budding debates in African American ideology. These writings also reveal the present-day salience of old ideas as many of these past issues continue to be embraced and/or argued over today. In David Walker's "Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World" (1829), for example, this free-born Bostonian exhorts African Americans to militant action against those who hold them captive. Educator Maria Stewart's 1835-pamphlet, "Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart," calls on African American women to strive for education and political rights and cast aside the shackles of both racism and black male chauvinism (Busby 1992).

Harvard-educated physician Martin Delaney wrote of African American's need for a separate home on their continent of origin decades before Marcus Garvey began his "Back to Africa" movement.

Many of these writings reveal the extent to which many free blacks saw their fate as intrinsically linked to that of the African American majority who remained unfree. In many instances, these authors were set apart by their educational background, oratory skills and/or travel experiences, more so than income and wealth. They were vulnerable to economic hardship, poor health and short life-expectancy. Many also faced the constant threat of white retaliation against their outspoken advocacy. A number of free blacks neither expressed anti-racist concerns nor experienced economic disadvantage. By 1830, close to 4000 free African Americans owned enslaved people (Harris 1936).

The historical biography is another literary format which aids in the study of African American social stratification over time. Elite family histories detail the cultural and material components of high socioeconomic status. Thornbrough's full-scale biography of editor and journalist Thomas T. Fortune, for example, discusses this activist's rise to and fall from prominence during the late 1800s. Through it we learn of strategies used by Fortune

and others to negotiate the color line and move beyond the limits of racially-designated positions in the social structure. Thornbrough also explores the intra-racial tensions and political maneuvering behind the scenes at "the Tuskegee Machine," where Booker T. Washington consolidated his position as the most influential African American of his time (1972).²

The biographies of Ida B. Wells (Duster 1970), Booker T. Washington (Harlan 1982) and W.E.B. DuBois (Marable 1986) also explore the pivotal post-reconstruction period and address the connection between black upward mobility and middle stratum-activism. Other useful sources for both intra-racial economic differentiation and Harlem history during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, are *Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.* (Hamilton 1991), *A. Philip Randolph* (Anderson 1972), and *Father Devine and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Weisbrot

²Tuskegee Institute, located in Tuskegee, Alabama, was a black institution of higher learning founded by Booker T. Washington in 1881. Washington was a spokesperson for African Americans who emphasized blacks' acquire land and training in the skilled crafts, animal husbandry and agriculture, rather than push for civil rights and political self-determination (Harlan 1982). Both his public persona and writings have implications for the study of socioeconomic stratification within African American communities. This is apparent in the analysis of Washington's behavior as a black leader, his views on black upward mobility, and the conflicts he had with other African American leaders over his lifetime. In addition to T. Thomas Fortune, these political enemies included W. E. B. DuBois and William Monroe Trotter (Harlan 1982).

1983).

Studies about African American organizations and associations have also aided the analysis of black socioeconomic differentiation. Many secret and fraternal groups were particularly selective about the backgrounds of potential members. Membership of the free black masons, a lodge which traces its origins to 1770s Boston, for example, consisted largely of men who were literate, of mixed race and skilled artisans, like founder Prince Hall (Williams 1980). Gender, lineage, skin color and occupation also facilitated membership in voluntary associations such as The Society of the Sons of New York and The Mutual Benevolent Society of New York (Gatewood 1990).

The member-base and goals of the American Negro Academy (ANA) reflected socioeconomic differentiation among African Americans as well. The mandate of the academy was to study and disseminate information on the accomplishments of peoples of African descent from around the globe. Included among its members were Alexander Crummel, sociologist Kelly Miller, W.E.B. DuBois and other educated blacks. Feminist writer Anna Julia Cooper became the first female member of the ANA near the end of the organization's existence (Marable 1983).

The National Negro Business League is another important

organization for the study of class formation among African Americans. The League was started by Booker T. Washington in 1900 and became a black chamber of commerce in 1915 with 600 branches nationwide (Giddings 1984). Washington saw industrial education and growth in black-owned businesses as keys to overcoming white domination in the U.S. As part of his approach, he also eschewed political strategies for achieving racial equality and was, to some, too accommodating to those who felt blacks should "stay in their place." According to historian August Meier, Washington was disliked among many of the old black elite but embraced by both "self-made" middle stratum African Americans and lower stratum blacks who felt upward mobility was within their eventual grasp (1963).

Although Washington's response to American racism did not address gender inequality, gender issues were directly addressed in the black women's club movement as exemplified by the work of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). The NACW was founded in 1896; its membership was composed primarily of college-educated and professional women (Giddings 1984). In addition to stressing the importance of women's role in the domestic sphere, members also emphasized assistance to the impoverished among them. The NACW's founding meeting was attended by its first

president, Mary Church Terrell, novelist Francis Ellen Harper, journalist/activist Ida B. Wells, Harriet Tubman and the daughter of Frederick Douglas. Their motto, "Lift as we Climb" reflected members' determination to, in the words of Mary Church Terrell, "come into the closest possible touch with the masses of our women, through whom the womanhood of our people is always judged" (Giddings 1984; page 98). Despite the good intentions of club women, this quote could also be interpreted as suggesting that the elite and educated women of the NACW were, to some extent, motivated by the ways in which the behavior of low income women and non-privileged women reflected on them. In his critique of "uplift ideology," historian Kevin Gaines notes that racial upliftment was a limited paternalistic anti-racist strategy because it emphasized socioeconomic distinctions and patriarchal authority and was rooted in notions of black pathology which needed to be reversed (1996).

African American churches have been another site for the study of economic stratification in black communities. Much of the literature on the African American church directly or indirectly addresses class differentiation (Frazier 1974; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990.) Some works indicate black elites most readily affiliated with African

American Episcopal and Presbyterian churches during the 19th century. According to Gatewood, this practice reflected their preference for undemonstrative and "bookish" services over the energetic styles of worship associated with Baptist churches which were associated with lower income blacks (1990). A study of black churches in Brooklyn, however, shows some Christian places of worship were centers of cross-class interaction where janitors shared positions of power with members of the elite (Taylor 1994).

Turn of the century sociological research provides further documentation of economic differentiation among African Americans. Mary White Ovington sought to enlighten whites on racial inequality with the publication of her ethnographic report *Half A Man: The Status of the Negro in New York City* (1911). Based on data she gathered in Harlem as a fellow for the Greenwich House for Social Investigation, this Niagra Movement co-founder describes occupational distributions in the black community and presents data on the organizational affiliations, spending patterns, and general lifestyles of black professionals and entrepreneurs at the time. Ovington noted the erosion of the color hierarchy which accorded a higher status to light skin. She viewed this change as marked by the disappearance of the elite black households whose members shared the

surnames of prominent Dutch and English families. Ovington concluded that, even for the privileged, black city life was one where racial injustice was not only anticipated but encountered at every turn.

Another early study of black class differentiation was *The Negro as Capitalist* (1934) written by African American economist Abram Harris (1899-1963). The book opens with a chapter on the history of black business enterprise from enslavement to the present. The bulk of the monograph focuses on the growth of the black banking industry in states across the U.S. In it Harris includes a directory of "Negro banks" established since 1890 and totals the resources and liabilities of these between 1899 to 1932. Black History Month founder Carter G. Woodson was a contemporary of Harris' and also researched aspects of the black professional experience. He published some of his findings in an article entitled, "The Negro Professional Man" (1934).

Two decades after Ovington investigated Harlem, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, again, surveyed conditions in this community³. Commissioned by the city to ascertain the causes for the riots of 1935, Frazier launched an

³The Moorland Spingarn Center of Howard University, Box 131-128, Folder 7, and Box 131-131, Folder 4, Washington, D.C.

extensive research project which looked at health, education, recreation and employment in Harlem. Issues of stratification among African Americans arose in many areas of his report, particularly as it pertained to the small, but functioning, black middle class' access to important resources. In one section Frazier describes elite blacks' use of debutante balls to steer daughters toward the "right" kind of families.

Frazier documented black socioeconomic differentiation further in his landmark study *The Black Bourgeoisie* (1957). This book portrays the "black middle class" as a population which consists of superficial individuals the author sees as isolated from the masses of African Americans and obsessed with seeking compensations for their damaged self-esteem and exclusion from American life. Frazier maintained that, in their attempt to shield themselves from the vagaries of racism, this population inhabited a world of "make-believe" where all the trappings of economic achievement were exaggerated (page 27). This controversial book, although received with wide acclaim, has been criticized for presenting a static and unidimensional characterization of middle stratum African American life (Lawrence-Lightfoot 1994).

Black Metropolis (Drake and Cayton 1945), Deep South

(Davis, Gardner and Gardner 1941), and *The Philadelphia Negro* (DuBois 1899) are among the few anthropological studies of class differentiation among African Americans. All three are important early contributions to the ethnography of the U.S. *Metropolis*, in particular, has been acknowledged for its combined use of the historical method with field-data gathering techniques. This study has been criticized, however, for pathologizing urban black life (Kusmer 1986). This is a practice which can be partially attributed to the influence of both the "Chicago School" and African American uplift ideology.

Inquiry into the lives of black PMW began to wane precisely around the time this population was experiencing its most marked increase. As we have seen, their numbers doubled between 1955 and 1970 (Landry 1987). With the exception of *The Black Bourgeoisie* (1957), however, only a handful of books and articles were published on the subject. This lapse occurred during the black studies explosion which was ignited by civil rights movement demands. African American writers who did receive a lot of attention during the 1960s, such as James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Nikki Giovanni, Ralph Ellison and others, were from the field of literature.

In the social sciences, two works, *The Black Anglo-*

Saxons (Hare 1965) and *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (Cruse 1967) issued searing indictments of a black middle stratum which was projected as not remaining true to black political and cultural ideas and aspirations. Cruse, focusing his attention on the black artistic and literary intelligentsia, criticized the integrationist impulses of Paul Robeson and Lorraine Hansberry, among others, and expressed skepticism about the motives of members of the white left making overtures to the black community. The writings of both Cruse and Hare portray African American upward economic mobility as an inevitably whitening process which is prone to produce racial "sell outs." Their uncompromising polemics do not contribute to a fruitful and nuanced discussion of black socioeconomic differentiation. Stunted by adherence to rigid notions of black authenticity, neither writer acknowledged the lines along which black PMW fragment, nor the work of progressive forces within African American elite or middle strata. This narrow view, indicative of the some of the limits of cultural nationalism, is all the more puzzling considering the fact that educated and privileged professionals like themselves are part of the professional-managerial workforce.

In the decades following the 1960s social scientists have questioned whether cross class racial solidarity among

African Americans has "dissipated as the priorities of work and living a middle class lifestyle" supercede racial attachment and identity (Evans 1995; pg. 215). My research found a number of factors pointing to the contrary. Various connections intertwine the fates of blacks who occupy different positions in the socioeconomic hierarchy, even if this does not obliterate the potential for class antagonisms to occur.

Research into what has been labeled the urban black underclass often contains discussions of African American PMW. Wilson posits that, in addition to global-economic restructuring, the increasing entrenchment of urban poverty in the U.S. is also caused by "black middle class" abandonment of cities (1978, 1987). Tax base erosion and the disappearance of role models are among the purported consequences of this demographic shift. However, the relatively low rate of black suburbanization, particularly in northern regions of the U.S., negates the cogency of this argument (Massey and Denton 1993). Although some measure of professional-managerial out-migration has occurred, significant numbers of the African American middle stratum continue to live and work in urban areas across the country.

While in the field I learned how firmly-held the notion of the absent, urban black role model was among project

participants, particularly the elders. This prevalent idea is problematic because it reifies a largely undocumented process by which professional men and women supposedly instill ideas about achievement into neighboring youth which lead to upward mobility. This perspective also rests on the nebulous concept of "middle class values." Frequently used by a number of informants, the vague notion makes the legions of working class blacks who conform to normative ideas about hard work and delayed gratification invisible. My research speaks to the need for more ethnographic research on the community involvement of college-educated, professionals and entrepreneurs in cities and suburban areas. This type of data will reduce our dependence upon nostalgic myths of intra-racial cooperation which often overlook a long history of class-based tensions and conflicts in black communities.

The Black Middle Class in the 1990s

The 1990s have seen a resurgence in the study of African American PMW. Historians, psychologists, and sociologists have generated reports using a wide range of data-gathering techniques and presentation styles. Black journalists have been particularly prolific in publishing memoirs which trace the trajectories of their achievement,

document experiences with racial bigotry and highlight their unique approach to professional challenges (Staples 1994; Fulwood 1996). In *Voluntary Slavery: My Authentic Negro Experience* (1993), for example, former-*Washington Post* writer Jill Nelson discusses her upbringing as the daughter of a black dentist whose family summered at their Martha's Vineyard home. Nelson also discusses the events which motivated her to leave *The Post* and pursue a career as a freelance writer. Her account demonstrates that, contrary to popular opinion, black women are not always perceived as non-threatening to the white, male-dominated corporate power structure.

This memoir, and others, depict black professional alienation and anger in confrontations with hostile workplaces, police brutality, glass ceilings and racial insensitivity. Newsweek-writer Ellis Cose offers another example of this in *Rage of a Privileged Class* (1993). Reporters for *The New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*, Isabell Wilkerson (1993) and Sam Fulwood (1991) have, respectively, written about the difficulties endured by privileged and college-educated blacks and what this indicates about the progress of race relations in the U.S.

Studies which specifically focus on structural outgrowths of racial inequality in the U.S. have examined

the continued presence of housing discrimination and racially-segmented wage systems lurking behind the stories of "black middle class achievement" (Cotton 1990; Feagin and Sikes 1993; Minerbook 1993). These reports are corroborated by surveys and investigations which repeatedly show how blacks are denied the services and resources Euro-Americans routinely take for granted (Austin 1994; Chideya 1995; National Urban League 1998). Race-based discrepancies in wages further shape the economic status of African American households by impinging upon their ability to accumulate wealth for their children's educations and their own retirement, and close the economic gap between themselves and Euro-American households (Oliver and Shapiro 1995).

Other studies of the lives of African American PMW published in this decade include the work of sociologist Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot who presents the life histories of six accomplished black professionals and explores themes of liberation and loss in *I've Known Rivers* (1994). Banner-Haley's *Fruits of Integration: Black Middle Class Ideology and Culture* highlights the artistic and literary contributions of college-educated blacks from 1960-1990 (1994). Another is Watts' analysis of black intellectual life in *Heroism and the Black Intellectual: Ralph Ellison, Politics, and Afro-American Intellectual Life* (1994).

A handful of ethnographies are represented among the more recent studies of black middle class life in the U.S. Mary Pattillo-McCoy's groundbreaking *Black Picket Fences* deconstructs stereotypes to reveal a community of black PMW in Chicago whose professional attainment does not shield them from the vagaries of racism. More specifically, housing discrimination puts these communities in close proximity to neighborhoods with "higher poverty rates, more crime, fewer resources, less political clout and worse schools than most white neighborhoods." The result is a picture that, contrary to what Wilson and others may say, speaks strongly to the idea that race has not declined in significance, even in the face of socioeconomic achievement (1999).

Gregory's research on a community in Queens, NY makes an important contribution to exploration into class-based tensions and inconsistencies in African American communities (1992; 1998). This anthropologist documents manifestations of class position and concludes that home ownership, intrinsically tied to attainment of a middle stratum economic position, motivates the black middle class to act politically in ways which will preserve property values.

One important ethnography does not directly focus on the black PMW but illuminates many of the issues and debates

presented in this literature review. In *Slim's Table* (1992), sociologist Mitchell Duneier constructs a masterful portrayal of poor and working class black men. His subtitle, *Race, Respectability and Masculinity*, points to the view that "middle class" blacks do not have a monopoly on decency or industriousness.

These three ethnographies contribute much to our understanding of the layers of the black urban experience. Ethnographic data using socioeconomic status and race as central units of analyses enable us to get a better handle on what the dominant themes are in intra-racial class relations and help us understand what kind of world African American PMW are attempting to carve out for themselves.

The overall dearth of anthropological voices in this literature review, particularly regarding studies on African American socioeconomic variation in the 1990s indicates a void in the study of black class differentiation in this discipline. There are no contemporary ethnographic studies which look at how the current economic and political climate impacts the sensibilities of African American professionals. The historical record documents blacks' disproportionate involvement in public sector employment but what is not well known is how this pattern has changed and why. What patterns can we uncover demonstrating the ways in which

family members of different socioeconomic backgrounds interact with each other? Answers to such questions can indicate what type of world African American PMW are attempting to carve out for themselves. In addition to looking at issues and topics which remain unexplored in contemporary works, my study also points out additional questions that require answers through ethnographic inquiry.⁴ In addition to exploring the experiences of an understudied population in anthropology, data generated by this research will also enhance discussions of the relative significance of class and race in the African American experience.

'It would be helpful to have ethnographic data about the role of black executives in transnational corporations. To what extent could the involvement of African Americans be either transformative or consistent with upholding the status quo? Are blacks who work in corporations used to exploit black communities and if so, how? These are just a handful of questions we could benefit from answering.

CHAPTER THREE
Professionals, Entrepreneurs and Artists: Harlem's African
American PMW

A discussion of the circumstances which led respondents to reside in Harlem is a good way to introduce the women and men who participated in my study. Much of these data are found in the oral histories which served as the richest source of information I collected in the field. These narratives convey the multi-textured and sometimes contradictory contours of African American life. The information participants in the project shared about their families and past experiences also presents elements of the black experience that are shared across the divides of gender, class and place of origin. Equally significant, these oral histories reveal the salient lines along which fragmentation occurs within the African American population in general, and black PMW, in particular. These findings led me to delineate conceptual sub-groupings among participants which I argue are produced by this simultaneously splintering and cross-cutting process.

Family histories are helpful in many ways. In the most basic sense they draw attention to differences among persons who are perceived as belonging in one category -- "the black middle class." One way to begin to negotiate the boundary

between what informants do and do not share experientially is to reconstitute these pasts. This historical focus also aids in the clarification of whether we are looking at old or new patterns. Delving into the past experiences of kin groups, moreover, provides us with more data on the significance of class position in shaping the lives and perceptions of project participants. History also allows us to speculate about the extent to which the behaviors, ideas and experiences observed are consistent with old patterns or altogether new.

DR. CYNTHIA JOHN

Dr. Cynthia John, resident of a high-rise apartment building in central Harlem, was born in Antigua, W.I. in 1914. Her father immigrated to New York City four years after her birth and took up residence on 135th Street in central Harlem. He was followed by his wife and children in 1919. A fixture among Afro-Caribbean and African Americans in Harlem, Dr. John recounted a portion of her family history during one of my visits to her Harlem office. Her narrative, and those which follow, speak to such larger concerns as mobility paths and the distribution of opportunity. They also point to how such factors are altered over time to affect subsequent generations

differentially. In the words of Dr. John:

We arrived in Ellis Island and, in fact, they have some of our family memorabilia on exhibit at the museum there. In one photograph, my father is seated and his brother and sister are standing on either side of him. One of the people who saw his photo commented on how his eyes were so prominent and that there was so much character in his face. He was a very unusual person. He was very active. He was a journalist in Antigua and at that time we lived under colonialism -- British rule and he spoke out frankly about the kind of oppression and what not to the extent that they told him he better leave. He was getting himself in trouble and was told if he didn't leave he would be out of a job and his family wouldn't work either. So he decided to come here and study medicine because he believed that, as a doctor, he could say what he wanted and wouldn't be beholden to anybody.

So he came and did any kind of work he could. Went to City College at night, got his medical degree and then went to Howard. He was a guy who never lifted anything

heavier than a pencil and he got a job at the ship yard. Poor guy, he was desperate because his job was climbing up on all that scaffolding and catching bolts in a cup and screwing them into the scaffolding. He said people were falling off the scaffolding all the time. The ambulances were screaming up and down the street all the time. I don't know how he got the nerve but it was good pay evidently. When work was available, he took it.

After the war, Dr. John's father had a choice of working as a stockman, elevator operator, or porter. These were among the limited number of jobs that were open to black men, particularly those not educated in the U.S. While attending medical school he utilized his skills as a former newspaper reporter and sold his lecture notes to both students and professors at Howard University. In the summer he would come to New York and rely on whatever work he could get. The last few summers of medical school he worked for Marcus Garvey as a consultant and adviser.

The impact of her father was apparent as Dr. John spoke of him. She spoke through a smile as she characterized him as, not only highly motivated and hard working but, kind and loving. She completed the picture of her parent's

occupational history with a discussion of her mother:

In the meantime, my mother got a job in the garment industry. There were only two avenues for black women who were not educated. One was the garment industry and the other was domestic work. Some people were fortunate to get a job with a family where they lived in and took care of the house and cooked. Those were the nice jobs. Other people did day work, you know where women would stand on say 3rd Avenue in the Bronx and white people would come and choose who they wanted to clean their house for the day. Maybe these women could string together 2 or 3 days of work each week. The other possibility was getting a job cleaning cars on the Pennsylvania Railroad. This is what my aunt did after my father helped her and her son immigrate from Antigua.

So my mother went into the garment industry and in those days it was like an assembly line where each person did a particular thing. My mother was a finisher -- some were cutters and operators - and I don't know the whole gamut but as a finisher,

she would take the garment after it was sewn and cut off thread. You had to complete a certain amount of garments per day or per week in order to keep the job and she was able to fulfill that basic requirement. She worked there until my father finished medical school.

Dr. John's father returned from medical school and joined the family in their "railroad" apartment on 131st Street, between Lenox and 5th avenues. Her family rented out portions of their apartment to relatives, a common and practical means for minimizing household expenses. In describing the layout of their space and how curtains were erected to offer some measure of privacy in cramped quarters, Dr. John related how their five-room dwelling accommodated her parents, sister and father's siblings. In time, her mother and father were able to turn two rooms into waiting and examining areas while her family lived in adjacent quarters.

To further supplement his income, her father worked for a wealthy and well known black physician who lived one block over. Dr. John explained that it was both customary and savvy business sense for a new or young physician to become acquainted with the other physicians in the area. In doing

this her father offered his services to see the elder doctor's patients at night. Dr. John continues:

He made enough money to put money down on a brownstone between Lenox and 5th. He finished training medicine in 1925 and started practicing maybe in 1926. By 1927 he had made enough money in savings. He was a good saver because in those days you knew how to save money you didn't fool around. He made enough money to put down a deposit on the house. In the meantime, my mother quit her job and became his secretary, receptionist, housekeeper and everything else.

We filled our house with relatives and friends who were coming over who could help pay the mortgage and the expenses. We helped them too because first they had to find jobs and find a place to live. As they got themselves together and moved out, we got ourselves together and occupied more and more of the house.

Education, pooling resources among extended kin and minimizing spending were key strategies for the John kin

group. This would become a frequent pattern in the oral histories which discussed household organization.

CAROLYN STRICKLAND

Born in Harlem, Carolyn Strickland doesn't know exactly what year her parents migrated to the community:

I do know it was during the time when Harlem was becoming black. My mother was from Virginia and my father was born somewhere around 1901 in Oklahoma. He had a large family and his family moved around a lot.

My grandfather eventually wanted to move his family to Canada. They were trying to get away from the racism and discrimination, and what have you. They made it to Canada but then heard of Marcus Garvey and came to New York. They bought the bonds and wanted to relocate to Africa. After Garvey's arrest and the troubles with the money, my father's mother said she was tired and it didn't look like they would reach their quest for freedom. That was how they ended up in Harlem. My father was in his early twenties at that time.

Strickland attributes her father's entrepreneurial successes, in part, to the spirit of his extended kin. She describes their motivation as an almost inherent drive not to accept the racial status quo:

Their business evolved when they came to New York. As I said there were a lot of them and they did whatever they had to do to live and to eat. This is what they had done all along the way. They got together and one would paint a house, one would do the plumbing and another was the ice man. My aunt used to be the secretary and she she couldn't even type or spell. You look at some of their old papers and it is just amazing but they just kept at it until they improved.

One of the brothers got into real estate and my father followed suit. Eventually they got together. They started with purchasing a piece of property and then it went on from there. Eventually my father developed his own real estate business.

Prior to meeting Strickland, I would frequently drive by a street in Harlem which was named after her father. A

photograph of the elder Strickland embracing Jesse Jackson further indicated that his involvement in the community extended beyond the real estate business. Carolyn Strickland informed me that her father, like his father before him, was active in grassroots political movements.

LOUISA MAE CAMPBELL

Louisa Mae Campbell and her husband Elijah Campbell have extensive roots in the Harlem community. They currently live in the house in which Mr. Campbell was born in 1919. Mrs. Campbell once showed me a photograph of her husband as an infant, clad in a white bonnet and sitting in a baby carriage outside of what was then his parent's Striver's row home. Mr. Campbell's father was one of the first African American dentists allowed to practice in Harlem Hospital.

Louisa Mae Campbell's parents were southern migrants who moved to central Harlem after living on the upper east side of Manhattan and in the Bronx. She was 13 at the time of that move. Born in 1926, Mrs. Campbell waxed nostalgic about her early years in Harlem during one of my visits. She and her sister often got in trouble for lingering too long at the dance halls and music clubs. She also attested to some confrontations where she had to deal with the

bigoted attitudes of white teachers and classmates. She recalled a particular occurrence which resulted in her father being called to school.

I was standing in a line with the other children when a white teacher came up and told me to pick up a piece of trash that was on the floor. Well I didn't answer and walked into my home room. This teacher followed me right in there and asked if I heard what she requested. I told her I did hear what she said but that I wasn't a custodian. Well they didn't like that and took me to the principals's office and called my father. They wanted to know what was wrong with me and I told them I didn't throw away any trash and why didn't they ask a white student to pick it up and my father said, that's right, why didn't you ask a white student to pick it up?

Mrs. Campbell said it is her father who cultivated her reputation for not "responding properly" to these racially-tinged scenarios. She spoke lovingly about the role her parents played in her life and those of her three siblings:

My parents were wonderful people. My father was one of the first black men to work on the subway, he was a motorman and he was a minister. My mother worked for the school system -- she worked in the lunchroom. My father finished Columbia studying theology. He was a very, very bright man. He used to always tell us -- take the test, take the test. He made us take these civil service tests because, in those days when you took the test for city or state jobs, you got work.

I remember this one job I had, it was during World War II and everyone was working. I got this job operating some large machinery when I was about 15 or 16. I was so happy that I ran home and told my father I got this job. Well one day, I was working and I looked up and who should I see but my father watching me work. Well he goes over to my supervisor and tells him to take that girl off of that machine because she is too young to be operating that machinery. Well, I went home and I cried and cried and I asked Daddy why did you make me lose my job and he told me once in a factory, always in a factory. He thought his children were too good for that kind of

work.

Like others of their generation, these women spoke of an upbringing in Harlem which was infused with memories of opportunity and nurturing -- attitudes and values they say that contributed to the formation of a positive sense of self-worth. These women conveyed their beliefs that segregation made racial prejudice and discrimination less subtle during their youth. However, the economy was also expanding and elder informants describe the community as a place ripe with the promise of new beginnings for arrivees from the south and the Caribbean.

John, Strickland and Campbell were born into two income families where the male head of household was to eventually become a college-educated professional or entrepreneur. As the oral histories of younger project participants will show, subsequent generations would face a different social and economic environment in this community. All three were the product of households where there was sufficient access to cash, food, and shelter. In these families, the pronounced concern for material need was absent and this was no major accomplishment considering John and Campbell both lived through the depression. They noted how any "extras" afforded, such as overseas travel or clothing for special

occasions, were often obtained through the strict management of household finances. The possibility for overseas travel and college education expanded the experiential boundaries of these informants and markedly distinguished their households from those of their African Americans acquaintances from lower socioeconomic strata.

As additional indicators of the advantages of such origins, moreover, these women grew up being connected to formal and informal social networks composed of Harlem's black business and political leadership. As a journalist who became a physician, Dr. John's father became acquainted with many black physicians practicing in New York City. Strickland's assemblyman-father knew an even wider array of African American professionals, some of whom were highly influential. Each woman discussed how her parents used these contacts to obtain educational or employment opportunities for their children, as well as strategic information. These are factors which foster social awareness and enable individuals to better negotiate the road to upward mobility. The fact that both John and Strickland followed in their father's occupational footsteps supports the assumption that persons who are products of professional-managerial households are able to pass their socioeconomic status on to their children. This conclusion

is further strengthened by the additional fact the children of all three women, a combined number of seven offspring, have graduated from college and pursued professional careers.

LAWRENCE PARKER

Like Dr. John, Carolyn Strickland, and Louisa Mae Campbell, Lawrence Parker also grew up in Harlem. Born in 1954, however, his memory of the community is not imbued with metaphors of migration and opportunity inherent in the experience of previous informants. The Harlem of Parker's teen years was a gritty, beleaguered, and less promising environment. By the mid-1970s, the country was on the threshold of what would later be called "the white backlash." Parker was a teen when the community was also feeling the weight of de-industrialization. While Harlem was yet to see the great reductions in social programs which would characterize the 1980s, the rising tide of unemployment coupled with an influx of addictive drugs proved to be a volatile and destructive mix for the community. The harsh realities of urban poverty feature heavily in Parker's biographical narrative. His father was shot and killed at the age of 34. For him, class, age, and possibly gender, differentiated his past from the

experiences of older, female informants.

What Parker does share with them, as both a Westchester County fire fighter and graduate of law school, is his position as an African American PMW. Like John and Campbell, he also made a choice to remain in the community of his childhood. Dr. John, an octogenarian, migrated to Harlem from the Caribbean and remains. Mrs. Campbell has lived here since she was a pre-teen and remains there. Although Carolyn Strickland both socializes and works in Harlem -- managing the real estate business her father started in the 1960s -- she lives in Mt. Vernon, a predominately black suburb of Westchester County.

BRENDA GREEN

Brenda Green is also a part of the post-World War II generation. She was born in 1955 when her parents lived on 143rd Street and 7th Avenue. Her father traces his origins back to the Caribbean nation of St. Kitts and her mother was born in New York City. Green shared with me that her mother, Mrs. Delores Green, was the product of an interracial relationship. As a baby, Mrs. Green was abandoned by her biological mother, Sarah Geyser, and informally adopted by a close personal friend of Geyser, Frances Minor. Through these events Minor became Brenda

Green's grandmother. Below I piece together fragments of the story she shared about her mother's complicated origins:

She [Frances Minor] was like extended family, a close personal friend that my mother [Green] was left with. She [Geyser] gave her to my grandmother [Francis Minor] because my biological grandmother [Geyser] was white and living in Harlem. My mother doesn't know who her father is so all I know is he never lived to see me. My grandmother Francis died when I was 18 years old. She and my mother's mother [Geyser] were best friends.

My discussions with Brenda Green were the first time the subject of fictive kin came up. It would frequently resurface in subsequent interactions with project participants. Green's own siblings are not the biological children of her mother, Delores Green. Instead, in a repetition of the events which characterized her own upbringing, Green's brother, Johnston Green, and her sister Evangeline Bower, are the biological children of Delores Green's best friend, Sheila Watkins. When I asked if Ms. Watkins died, Green gave the following response:

No. She didn't pass away. She got involved in a bad lifestyle, I guess you call it. She didn't want the responsibility of raising her children so she abandoned my brother Johnston first and gave my sister Evie to her father and his parents down in Virginia. I forget the part of Virginia but when my mother found out, they brought her back up here to New York to live with us and they eventually adopted her.

When I commented on what a fascinating story she has shared with me, Green replied, "truth is stranger than fiction." I was surprised to hear that this "bad lifestyle" which prompted Watkins to abruptly leave her marriage and abandon her children was not involvement in substance abuse but a lesbian relationship. Regarding her family's employment history, Green said:

My [maternal/fictive] grandmother did day's work. She worked for white people. My grandfather was a green grocer. They always worked. I remember them telling me that even during the depression, they were never without work. These were my

maternal grandparents. The others ones [her father's parents] were dead already.

Green sometimes drives by the building in which she grew up on 143rd and 7th. She said it was great living in their huge apartment within a "family-oriented" building where Green said, "everybody knew everybody and everybody had each other's key." The building began to decline in the 1970s when drugs "got bad" and neighbors began getting robbed more frequently. Green says:

We had a huge apartment and I never knew anything about poverty. I knew I was poor, I mean I didn't have what a lot of other people had but I never knew about being poverty stricken.

I had my own room all the time and we had a six-room apartment. The living room was twice the size of this apartment [she gestures around her small Bronx apartment], and we had an eat-in kitchen and three other bedrooms. I always had a place to go in the house and I always had something to eat if I was hungry.

If I didn't want to eat at my mother's house, I would go next door and eat. I used to love going to my cousin's⁵ house and eat because they always had a lot of food.

Green talked more than Lawrence Parker about some of the activities she engaged in for fun growing up in Harlem. She said she had been traveling on the subway trains alone since she was eight or nine years old.

I knew the whole city. There was no place that I couldn't go. My mother could take me downtown...we used to go to Radio City then because it used to be five dollars but you would get a full-length movie plus the floor show.

It wasn't segregated and I never had prejudice too tough there but my mother went through that experience with me because she looks white and I was black so we used to get prejudice.

⁵Brenda Green's cousin, Sharon Jackson, is also a part of her fictive kin network. Jackson was Green's best friend growing up on 143rd and now lives on Gun Hill Road in the Bronx.

I guess people used to think like, what is she doing with this black child or something. I didn't know what real prejudice was like until I went to high school because I went to a private, white school. I got a scholarship and went to that school in 1968. The school had to integrate so I went there through a scholarship because my parents couldn't afford the tuition. I went to school with Caroline Kennedy and jazz pianist Billy Taylor's daughter was a grade or two beneath me. The school is located on 91st and 1st Avenue. It is in a former mansion. It is still there.

LASHANDRA HASKINS

Lashandra Haskins is the youngest of all the informants I interviewed. Born in 1969, she has been a resident of west Harlem for most of her life, with the exception of the years when she was a student at a university in the midwest. Currently, Lashandra lives with her parents and two younger siblings. (Additional siblings are attending Howard and Hampton Universities). As she completes requirements for a PhD at an area university, it makes good economic sense for Lashandra to continue to reside in the home of her

professionally-employed parents.

The life narrative of Lashandra Haskins is peppered with riveting anecdotes that symbolize both the reaffirming and hazardous aspects of contemporary, urban life. Although her memory is filled with fond recollections of childhood friendships, Lashandra's Harlem history is also a place of frightening events. One such occurrence happened when an intruder jumped through the front window of her family's brownstone while she and a sibling lay watching television. The man ran out of the front door and was shot and killed by a neighbor. Bulbous iron bars now guard the picture window facing their street.

Lashandra knows the full range of what this community has to offer. Her continued presence in this community is indicative of both economic necessity and personal preferences because she maintains a very positive attitude about the area today. As a member of the post World War II-generation and a child of middle stratum African Americans, her life experiences combine such varied elements as the advantages of professional-managerial positioning and the gritty realities of the post-industrial, urban landscape.

Contours of the Adult-Arrivee Experience

There is an equal amount of diversity among project participants who are not native to New York City. Men and women in this group range in age from their early thirties to the late seventies. Three came to attend college while the others moved to New York City later in life. Some of these adult-arrivees have lived in Harlem for decades while others have only recently begun to call this community home. A few have rural roots while others moved here from other U.S. cities. Individual narratives reveal some of the ideological and material implications of these varied origins and experiences.

EUGENIA HASKINS

Eugenia Haskins is an adult transplant who has lived in Harlem for decades. Born in Memphis in 1948, she was drawn north in search of opportunity and drawn to Harlem in search of community. The mother of informant Lashandra Haskins, she and her husband raised their five children in this community and express no interest in leaving.

I moved to Harlem on Valentines Day in 1967.
We first moved to 151st and Broadway. There
were a lot of Cubans around then but they have
since moved to New Jersey. The building I moved

into was predominantly black with many upwardly mobile people. Many of them had been there since the 1930s. The building is still very nice although the surrounding area has declined.

When asked what the impact of this decline has been for these upwardly mobile blacks to which she referred, she said "people find and associate with those that are like them."

Eugenia Haskins' upbringing exemplifies the positive role of black extended families in mitigating against the impact of family crisis. As children, she and her siblings were abandoned by their mother. Her father moved her to New Orleans to be raised by his brother and sister-in-law. The love and acceptance she received from her paternal uncle and his wife forged strong feelings in her about family support systems. Eugenia Haskins is adamant in her view that black men do not get the credit they deserve for working to keep their families intact -- a perspective fostered by the way her uncle sacrificed to raise a daughter who was not biologically his own.

Mrs. Haskins' life is also indicative of how a legacy of achievement can be passed down to subsequent generations. Her father was the first of his family to graduate from high school and her mother who was both the daughter and sister

of school teachers, became a nurse. A self-described anti-capitalist and feminist who expressed being unimpressed with the Million Man March, she counts herself among African Americans whose work keeps them "in the trenches." Mrs. Haskins directs a state-funded program geared toward preparing black and Latino women and men for employment. While she has no immediate interest in leaving Harlem for quieter surroundings, Mrs. Haskins doesn't rebuke blacks who feel otherwise.

LWINDA CHARLES

Luwinda Charles was born in 1943 and moved to Harlem from Ohio in the mid-1960s. With the exception of the period when she left New York to attend graduate school at University of Chicago, she has lived in this area of west Harlem since her arrival. When I first met Ms. Charles she was expanding her Riverside Drive apartment by knocking down a wall to expand her accommodations into an adjacent apartment. During one of a few discussions in her midtown Manhattan office, she spoke to me about the ups and downs of her upbringing:

Both my parents were from the south and they came north during the 1930s. My mother was from

Georgia and my father was from Jefferson, Alabama. They married very young and my father was entrepreneurial.

He worked for Goodyear, which is what brought people north to Akron during that period -- the rubber companies. He worked there for about six months and decided that was not for him. He then quit and started his own business. He was a very bright man but wasn't well educated. He had a high school diploma. He was a good-looking and very articulate. He was armed with a charismatic personality and went into the automobile business selling used cars.

He made a lot of money. I'm not sure if he was close to being a millionaire or if he had a few hundred thousand. I have a picture of him on his lot and I can remember going there when I was a very little girl. That is where he made his money and he went on to build a substantial house in Springfield Township, Ohio. My parents owned a ranch with a hotel and riding academy. People came out for

hay rides and the lake. All this from a man with a high school education. I think, however, that was his downfall -- not keeping up with the industry at all, not being educated -- because he lost all of his money. I kind of remember when that happen. I was still very young but we moved from our grand house to lower living standards.

My mother didn't graduate from high school until my father was sick with cancer and then she went back to school to occupy herself. She kept us going through financial difficulty by taking in laundry. Even us children -- there were six of us -- had to work. My mother later studied to be a practical nurse. I got a lot from my parents about the work ethic. I had lived a particular way with particular standards from a very young age.

The financial travails of her parents gave Charles first-hand experience with the vicissitudes of socioeconomic mobility. She is the only one of her siblings to attend college and as a banking executive, she now earns an income substantial enough to afford a home in any number of the

suburbs of New York City. Charles is deliberate in her desire to live in an African American community and describes Harlem as a place where she feels at home and at peace.

I came from Akron in the mid-1960s and moved right to Harlem - three blocks from where I am now. I lived on 142nd Street. No, actually the first apartment, this is ironic... at the beginning of my residency here I lived in this apartment where I am now. My cousin has this apartment so I had the apartment next door. I then knocked the wall down and came to occupy both.

Charles loves this community and "loves to be around black people. I wouldn't want it any other way." Her positive feelings toward Harlem have not been altered by the fact that she has been mugged once and that she travels to New Jersey to shop for groceries.

CRAIG SKYERS

Craig Skyers, 35, is another informant who came to New York as an adult. He moved to the city from Gastonia, North

Carolina and decided to move "uptown" while completing a master's degree in architecture at Columbia University. Skyers knows only a few people in his four-story walk-up which is across the street from an elementary school and adjacent to series of abandoned buildings. An avid reader, he admits being enthralled with life in a community so integral to African American cultural and political history. He is fascinated with the design and embellishment of the buildings in Harlem and considers the old housing stock in the area a bonus.

When I was in the 7th grade, my school took a trip to New York City. One of the last things I saw as the bus was driving away was the George Washington Bridge. When I got back to school, I did a block print of it and this was what really got me interested in architecture. There is no other place in the country or even the world for the beauty of the architecture. It is a world city.

In addition to recording his oral history, I also learned about Skyers' upbringing and extended kin while he and I thumbed through a photo album one Saturday afternoon.

The pictures suggested a love of family and showed his passion for world travel. He was able to combine these two interests when he took his parents to Switzerland and Paris years ago. His father had been to Germany during World War II but that was the first time his mother had experienced visiting abroad.

Skyers also has an aunt who lives in Harlem. At the time of the interview, her son, Marcus, was temporarily sharing the apartment with him. This arrangement was not arrived at to split living expenses, but was set up in order for Skyers to help his cousin "get his life together."

We went to undergrad together in North Carolina. He was always complaining about how nobody helps him and this and that so I said, OK, let's see about this. He was also having conflicts with his mother. So he lives here now but I don't really see any change.

I observed project participants offering this and other kinds of assistance to extended kin with some regularity and return to this subject in the chapter on interaction across class lines. By the conclusion of my field study, however, cousin Marcus no longer lived with Skyers.

MERCY MCNAIR

Mercy McNair and her husband Dennis McNair were owners of a thriving hair salon at the time of the study. The McNairs are two of the eight self-employed project participants. Before purchasing the salon, Mercy was a busy, full-time fashion model. In those year, her face graced the covers of Essence and Glamour magazines. Work is much more intermittent today, however she still generated some income modeling.

Their impeccably appointed Mt. Morris Park-home, made so in part through Dennis' acquisitions as an antique dealer, exists on a block which includes abandoned row houses and single room occupancy buildings. As was most often the case when interacting with the couples of my study, the bulk of my time was spent talking with female residents.

A native of South Carolina, Mercy has lived in New York City for 25 years. On a balmy, fall afternoon she shared with me portions of her life story:

I grew up with eight brothers and sisters and I was the youngest in the family. We always had a lot of children in the house and my brothers and sisters had children who also lived with us. We had a

really good time because we were never alone and we always had someone to play with. My mother worked really hard and my father worked in the laundry room of a hospital. That was also the first job for all of my brothers and sisters -- working in the laundry room. My father died when I was thirteen in the midst of integration in the schools. I really needed him then and it took me a few years to get over that.

My mom was a very strong force not just in our home but in the community growing up. She worked at everything from school dietician in the lunchroom of an all-black school we went to. She cooked there and was close to us on another level. She also worked as a housekeeper and took care of sick people. She held these jobs simultaneously and by the time I was 11, she went back to school and got her education in nutrition.

Most of my brothers and sisters are teachers so I grew up feeling like I was always in school in the house because you couldn't speak wrong - talking about you be this or I be at this place. So you were always in check.

We were tickled by the fact that the community thought we were affluent, when in fact with all these children in the house, we were eating beans and cornbread, and all that good stuff. We had land and in my small town, where most of the black people lived, we had maybe an eighth of an acre. We still had enough land to have a little farm with pigs, goats, cows and chickens so there was that feeling of food and a garden. We had that closeness with the earth and the insulation of a small community.

Mercy and her husband own a country house and take winter vacations in tropical climes. The couple enjoys many of the leisure activities and quality of life advantages associated with class privilege. While many of my project participants fall into the age range of thirty to forty-something and are college-educated professionals, few of them possess the surplus income of the McNairs.

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JADA PINCHOT

Entrepreneur, Jada Pinchot was born in 1949 at Lincoln Hospital in the South Bronx. In her oral history were some of the same kinship complexities Brenda Green discussed.

Both women were both born after World War II and were also linked by previously discussed skin color issues brought about by interracial relationships. In the case of Pinchot, however, her family was much more secretive about missing links in their genealogy.

My mother was Pauline Gordon and I don't know who my father was. I have subsequent information about his heritage but I don't know his name. I think he was Spanish, [this information] coming from a relative. [He was] somebody who wanted to marry my mother but she is a very difficult women so...I have given some thought to tracking it down but I just don't know where to start because I would have to dig deep and probably search through the aliases of people.

The relative that told me is my cousin but I don't think she knows his name. So, I would have to then start backtracking into neighbors at that time or friends of my mother's. My mother is not alive and she wouldn't have told me if she could. She took that to her grave

because it was a very difficult thing for her to have a child that looked like me in terms of color, in terms of hair, in terms of looking different from the rest of my brothers and sisters. I think I was difficult for her because of that so she buried all that information as if it didn't exist.

Jada Pinchot's mother had 6 children, some of whom were fathered by different men. Mrs. Gordon cleaned houses to generate an income and when Pinchot was 13, they moved to South Ozone Park, Queens. This is a neighborhood Pinchot laughingly describes as really being a part of South Jamaica, Queens. She said the new place-name was given to this area after an influx of upwardly mobile people occurred and realtors and residents attempted to distance themselves from neighboring areas perceived as low income. According to Pinchot, Ozone Park was an upwardly mobile black community while neighboring South Ozone Park was more of a mixture of the "mentally upwardly mobile, but not financially matched." It was here that Pinchot reports learning something about class labels and hypocrisy because:

Most of those kids, didn't make it through.

They didn't make it because somewhere in my teens, heroin hit Queens and a lot of those kids just went under. They had two-parent households where both were working and it still hit them pretty hard. The parents of these kids I knew worked extremely hard for all they had but the kids were getting high in a big way. This had to be like 1964 or 1965.

I didn't go to college. I took the SATs and got really good scores but there really wasn't much talk of college in my house. I think the emphasis was on existence and survival because we grew up poor.

1962 was also around the same time that Pinchot's "stepfather" came into her life. She clarifies the use of the term because he didn't live in the household Pinchot shared with her mother, Delores Gordon, and her five siblings. Pinchot attributes some of this to her mother's penchant for "not being happy." Her conversations on kin hit on this theme of fatherhood a few times:

Only two of my siblings shared the same father. The result of that was a mother who was extremely frustrated in her life. My stepfather was the parent of my younger brother and sister and he was a wonderful person. I really think they had this wonderful love thing because he left the woman he had been married to and his family to be with my mother, but poverty and guilt and a whole bunch of stuff kept her from being happy. So you know, it's just sad because he was really a good guy and that father image was there. He worked for Amtrak for 45 years and then retired. He died thirteen years after he retired. He was the most decent person I ever met and he died of lung cancer because he smoked himself to death. My mother died of liver cancer because she drank herself to death.

EVE IRONS

Dancer/teacher Eve Irons was the second youngest participant in my study. She was born in 1963 in Los Angeles, California. Her parents are divorced but she grew up being very close to both of them, particularly her father who is also an artist. Irons has an older brother and a

younger sister who is the product of her father's second marriage. She has lived in Switzerland with the whole family and then with her father in Washington, D.C. and Tallahassee, Florida after the divorce. Irons also lived in Cuba during the 1980s when she worked as a performer for their national Dance Company. Her mother, a psychologist, remains in Los Angeles and works as a counselor at the University of Southern California. Irons' father died of a heart attack in 1999. She said of her bond with her father:

We definitely need that male bond because men show us the world in ways that women do not. We need them. It seems that society stresses male with male and female with female but I would say that a female bonds with her father so tightly that it affects what choices you make with the opposite sex later. All the women that I know are trying to marry their fathers in some way.

I just regret that for a lot of women their fathers were not there. I do know that if my father wasn't there for me in those ways, I don't know quite how I would be now. I know

that I would not be chasing my dreams. My mother wouldn't allow me to chase my dreams the way my father does. My mother says things like, 'when are you going to get that professor job so you can get your medical insurance together.' All these things are at the top of her mind.

JOHNETTA BUTLER

I met Johnetta Butler during a HBR focus group meeting at our offices on 125th and St Nicholas Avenue. She was invited to talk about the impact of budget cuts on the city and I asked if she would talk to me about the black middle class in Harlem. She only gave me a post office box address and I wrote her a letter requesting an opportunity to interview her. It was difficult to arrange the first interview but Butler responded to my letter weeks after it was initially sent. She only allowed me 2 interviews via telephone but both proved helpful.

I have been here since about 1980. I lived on East --- Street before and was the only black person in that building. I guess I didn't have any expectations. I was really looking for a place where I could have a home and be with

family and meet people, you know that I could work with or socialize with or whatever and met some very nice people when I first lived here. There was a dancer and his wife and another person who was in theater. There were quite a few people who were in various professions. We sort of established a little network and would cook at each other's houses and do things together.

It turned out to be very nice, but the people sort of scattered. One couple got a divorce and other things happened where people moved. In fact I moved myself in about 3 years into a bigger house.

Butler loves this community and sees a new energy as young professionals move in.

SARAH GOINGS

Sarah Goings is one of these young professional who is not native to New York City. She lives in the Mount Morris Park neighborhood where Butler resides. I met this banking executive through Ohioan, Luwinda Charles who was a former colleague. I spoke to Sarah in visits to her Mt. Morris

Park home and in telephone interviews. The parents of two young girls, she and her husband, Michael, had recently completed second and third-floor renovations when I met them. They purchased the house in 1988 and lived in another of their homes in Queens while the work on the Harlem row house was being completed. While they shared the same positive views as many of my project participants regarding the value of residing in a predominately African American community, she and Michael were unsure about how long their family would remain in Harlem. Sarah Goings was worried about the quality of a public school education her daughters would receive and lamented the fact that they would not be able to play freely on the streets in front of their home. This couple was among those informants working to reconcile the idea of living in Harlem with its implications for everyday life. For the PMW participating in my study, it appeared the social, cultural, and economic rewards of living in Harlem seemed to, at least at the present moment, outweigh the disadvantages.

These introductory profiles reveal similarities and differences in informants' socioeconomic backgrounds, early household compositions and migratory histories of extended and immediate kin. The patterns I note are primarily indicative of generational and gender differences. The

threads connecting these processes will become more apparent as we move through this dissertation; however, it is already clear that the African American women in project participant's kin networks have actively manipulated categories of familial belonging to include and exclude household members through marital choices, secrecy, and informal adoption, among other strategies. Women are overwhelmingly responsible for making and remaking family and this characteristic is represented across the generational boundaries.

What differentiates the experiences of the pre and post-World War II generations is the political economic climate of each period. The narratives of elder informants who grew up in New York city hold metaphors of promise and growth. Native New Yorkers who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, also shared happy stories and reports of enjoying an upbringing in an exciting city. Their narratives also have more reports of decline and danger, however. These negative developments have been linked to the influx of heroin and later, cocaine, into urban, black communities.

Two processes or conditions remain constant, although not unchanged. The ethnographic data already presented and that ethnographic data which is to come indicate that racism continues to be a part of the African American experience.

Whether it is barriers to purchasing a home, police harassment, racial insecurities, or a disadvantaged position in the racial division of labor, the long fight against racism is yet to eradicate the structures of racial inequality in the U.S.

As previous discussions also indicate, socioeconomic heterogeneity remains a longstanding component of Harlem life. The contemporary political and economic landscape, however, has produced increased room for blacks to pursue opportunities which were few and far between in the past. Civil right legislation may not gone far enough but this social movement has opened doors that have led to the further fragmentation of an already diverse population. As a result, a number of the younger professionals have been educated with whites and spent a significant amount of time in integrated residential settings.

These same younger project participants have had the benefit of hindsight and openly reflect on past events and accomplishments as they attempt to work out current options. Younger professionals, in particular, are rethinking earlier emphases on integration which were so prevalent in struggles for racial equality in the U.S. decades ago. Racism has not been eliminated as a factor in the African American experience but the realignments of the 1960s and 1970s have

altered the way many blacks envision desirable living spaces and how they define or think about success. Their quest for community and belonging has led some to taking up residence in Harlem. The next sections present possible explanations for these processes.

Another new development in Harlem is gentrification. This relates not only to the seemingly growing presence of white professionals in west and central Harlem. Are we witnessing the reversal of those processes which led to the formation of "Harlem -- the black ghetto" at the turn of the century? Much more statistical data are needed to deal effectively with these concerns but the presence of black professionals among the incoming numbers of urban professionals puts a different twist on events. Again, more time is needed to assess these shifts. However, it appears the ideological pendulum has swung away from the traditional focus on breaking down the barriers of racial residential separation and ushered in a pseudo-nationalist emphasis on blacks relying on the African American community to fill a variety of needs.

CHAPTER FOUR**Work and Its Impact on Income and Housing**

Labor and its broad impact on the human experience is the phenomenon most central to class. Work affects the natural environment, local infrastructures and transnational processes, as well as social identity, access to resources and prestige. Work is the primary factor in determining how socioeconomic status is both perceived and experienced. This chapter focuses on income generation among informants. In particular I endeavor to illuminate both the historical continuities within these processes and differences from past patterns.

The profiles of project participants indicate that Harlem's African American professionals work in a wide range of occupations. The following tables indicate classification of workers age 16 and older in the U.S. and in the communities of west and central Harlem.

Table 5.1**Occupations of African Americans**

Private wage/salary workers	72.6
Federal government workers	5.1
State government workers	6.0

Local government workers	12.6
Self-employed workers	3.7

Source: Bureau of U.S. Census, 1993
www.thuban.com/census/tables/wrkcls93.html

Table 5.2

Occupations in Central and West Harlem

Private wage/salary workers	76.6
Federal government workers	2.5
State government workers	3.3
Local government workers	12.0
Self-employed workers	5.4

Source: New York City, Department of City Planning, 1990

A comparative view of these charts indicates the similarities between these quantitative data on blacks nationally and statistics in Harlem specifically.

Exploring the Link Between Work, Income, and Wealth

Obtaining information on informant's earnings was an important, yet elusive possibility. While conducting field research, few respondents conveyed the exact amount of their earnings to me and in accordance with the social taboo against openly divulging the kind of information, I never directly questioned project participants about the specifics

of their salaries. As discussed earlier, I, instead, made estimates about respondent's earnings through indirect information. I considered the incomes range associated with particular occupations based on the sector of the economy the informant was involved. I was mindful of participant's comments or complaints about their financial status and would initiate informal discussions about money and spending. In some instances, we talked about budgeting and plans for major expenditures. I observed the appearance of each informant's household and attire in consideration of what this may indicate about earnings. I present my discussion of income in a more general way since these strategies had limitations for the generation of hard numbers.

The earnings of study participants' range between \$35,000 and over \$100,000 per year. It appeared that those with annual salaries below \$40,000 constituted a distinct minority among project participants. The high end of this income-earning scale was dominated by dual income earning household members and some respondents had cash-flow problems due to job loss or the tenuousness of self-employment. Income variation was consistent with other areas of experiential difference found among participants. This level of diversity has important theoretical

implications and points to the need to reevaluate the practice of categorizing members of this diverse grouping into one class division.

Another strategy for better understanding how income and other aspects of socioeconomic stratification impact on informants is to contrast their experiences with the lives of residents from low-income Harlem households. These comparisons reveal both the subtle and direct ways in which socioeconomic status divides these two populations. This is why I include data collected while participant-observing and interviewing unemployed and non-professional or low-income women from these same parts of central and west Harlem throughout this study. These comparisons bring conditions among PMW more clearly into focus.

The following are descriptions of economic conditions in some of the households in which I interacted. Some of the profiles are of informants already introduced while some are presented for the first time.

EVE AND ANTHONY IRONS

Eve and Arthur Irons are situated at the lower end of the income-earning spectrum among participants in my study. This couple heads a blended family which includes three boys. According to Eve, as independent artists they live

economically tenuous, yet "spiritually reaffirming," lives. Anthony's income as a musician derives from recording contracts, performances in New York and other U.S. cities, and tours of Europe and Asia. Eve is a dancer with a master's degree in fine arts. Most of her work involves choreographing and performing but she also earns an income by periodically leading workshops and teaching at universities and artistic centers. The summer and spring are Eve's busiest seasons. She spent one summer traveling to Paris and Japan to perform and instruct. At this time, she reports work being infrequent and hopes to obtain a permanent teaching position at a college or university in 1998.

One day I went over for a visit and Eve complained that she had been dealing with their taxes all day. She said she and Anthony file as self-employed and that they had been working with an accountant to obtain the status of a company because they have worked together a lot recently. I had the distinct pleasure of seeing them perform together at the Dia Center for the Arts in downtown Manhattan. The choreography and costuming were unique and Arthur played the tenor saxophone while she danced.

Eve and Anthony Irons are most often remunerated in large sums of money which are paid at irregular intervals.

As a result, they experience times of plenty often followed by periods of dearth. The couple compensates for these fluctuations by spending conservatively and relying on a network of family and friends in times of need. They infrequently spend money on clothes, home furnishings or recreational activities and attempt to cut down on the money they spend for food. This is accomplished by buying in bulk and participating in food cooperatives. The fact that everyone in the house is a vegetarian assists with this effort.

In addition, Eve will gratefully receive second-hand children's clothes from friends and acquaintances. Since she had one daughter a few years older than mine and another 2 years younger, we frequently exchanged clothing for our girls. She openly expresses her desire for a higher income and discontinued long distance telephone service in an effort to decrease household cash outflow. Eve also braided or twisted hair as a source of additional income. She is particularly adept at using her personal network as the basis of a support system for her and her family. While pregnant with her second child, she encouraged the organizers of her baby shower to arrange for guests to contribute money to help her buy a washing machine and clothes dryer. These efforts enabled Eve to purchase a

space saving washer/dryer which she placed in the kitchen of her three bedroom apartment.

CRAIG SKYERS

Craig Skyers was one of the few project participants who volunteered to convey his salary to me. He has a master's degree in architecture and earns an annual salary of \$35,000. Skyers works in an extremely hierarchical profession and, compared to his colleagues, was situated near the bottom income-earning scale at his firm. This hierarchy was reflected in the distribution of work space at his midtown Manhattan office. The CEO, his senior partners and other top ranking architects worked on the top two floors of the building while Craig and others occupied the bottom two. Craig expressed his lack of interest in his assignments and frustration about the increasing number of hours he worked while his salary remained stagnant.

A relatively low monthly rent and the absence of dependents lessened the impact of his inadequate earnings. Skyers drove a used car and was able to help family members by periodically providing cash to them. With low rent, no car payments or children to provide for, Craig was able to take vacations, eat out and frequently attend concerts, movies and plays. Despite his dissatisfaction with work,

Skyers was able to carve out what he described as a satisfying personal life.

KAETLIN TYSON

Kaetlin Tyson is another informant at the lower end of the income-earning spectrum. With a degree in English, this college graduate worked as an assistant to a television journalist for the bulk of the time I spent in the field. This was a job she hoped to use as a stepping stone to "something else." Near the end of my study, however, Kaetlin lost this job when her employer relocated to Washington, D.C. Her boss offered Kaetlin the job at the new location without any promotion or salary increase. As a result, she declined the offer and hustled to create other economic opportunities for herself.

As an unmarried mother of one, the constraints of single parenthood weighed heavily on Kaetlin's budget. She is an engaged parent who gets her daughter, Ayana, involved in numerous extra-curricular activities. She views music lessons and art classes as tools for enhancing her daughter's development. These activities stretch her salary beyond its limit and are just one of the many areas to which she must direct her income. Kaetlin confessed to sometimes being so overwrought that she has to forgo doing something

important with her daughter in order to take care of household chores or just rest.

Kaetlin and Ayana sleep in the same room and share their two-bedroom apartment with another tenant. She arrived at this decision in order to split the costs of the apartment which rents for \$1100 per month, not including utilities. This is an economically strategic arrangement but is also causes a number of inconveniences. Kaetlin and Ayana have primary use of the main living space and a private bath off their bedroom. There is an additional bath off the kitchen in the hall.

Some project participants had salaries in the six-figure range. In most cases, this group resided in one of the three Harlem neighborhoods most readily associated with African American PMW -- Striver's Row, Hamilton Heights, and the Mt. Morris Park area. These communities have large and spacious homes, many of them are designed in the Victorian style and constructed with rich architectural detail. These same areas are also attracting increasing numbers of white homeowners to Harlem. In an telephone interview with realtor Regina White, she reported recently selling a home Hamilton Heights home to a white surgeon and his family for approximately \$400,000.

MERCY AND DENNIS MCNAIR

Mercy and Dennis McNair are among the top income earners of my project participants. As previously indicated, their income is derived from multiple sources. In addition to the busy hair salon the couple owns, Dennis and Mercy respectively also sell antique furnishings and work in the fashion industry. Although Mercy's modeling career reached its zenith during the 1980s, as a graduate of the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), she continues to work in this industry. On the surface, the McNairs appear financially comfortable. They drive a luxury car, own a country home and take frequent vacations. They have no children but like to spend time with her nieces and nephews.

EUGENIA HASKINS

The Haskins family is another high income earning household. As a project director and high school teacher respectively, Eugenia and Dennis Haskins also earn a six-figure income. Unlike the McNairs, however, their home does not look like a showcase for interior design. African and African American art did adorn their walls but the Haskins-home had more of a lived-in feel. These differences are probably attributable to the fact that the Haskins had five children, four of whom were attending college and/or

graduate school at the time. Given the expenditures this mandated, I surmised that the Haskins' did not have the surplus income other high earning respondents earned.

Wealth accumulation is another component to socioeconomic status. Increases in black income levels have not been associated with correlating rates of growth in wealth accumulation over the past decades. African Americans still lag behind Euro-Americans in this area and rely on the building of home equity as a primary investment strategy (Oliver and Shapiro 1995). This disparity has been attributed to the long term effects of racial inequality.

The majority of informants with stable employment had investment plans with their jobs. I discussed her stock holdings with Luwinda Charles during an interview at her Lexington Avenue office. She owns blue chip stock in IBM and checks the value of her investments daily. Lawrence Parker and I also talked about investing for the future. His financial planner advised Parker and his wife to invest as little as \$50 each month, saying they could accumulate over \$83,000 by the time they retire. Parker also wants to purchase another brownstone as an investment property for his two year old son.

The inter-generational transfer of wealth in the form of inheritances and loans from parents and other kin is

commonly utilized by Euro-Americans to purchase a home or start a small business. The employment discrimination faced by previous generations of African Americans diminishes the opportunity for elder kin to make this type of contribution to their children and grandchildren. As a result, the households of upwardly mobile African Americans often are disadvantaged when compared to Euro Americans of similar professions or with the same level of education.

The following tables are taken from Oliver and Shapiro's *Black Wealth, White Wealth* (1995) and provide the statistical picture of this form of economic inequality. These numbers appear in dollar amounts and percentages:

Table 5.3

Home Ownership by Race

<u>Household income</u>	<u>whites</u>	<u>blacks</u>	<u>difference</u>
under \$11,611	47.3	27.4	19.9
\$11,611-24,999	54.9	40.8	14.1
\$25,000-34,999	61.5	45.5	16.1
\$35,000-49,000	76.5	66.8	9.7
above \$50,000	85.4	75.0	10.4

Oliver and Shapiro 1995; page 109

Table 5.4**Parent's Occupation, Wealth and Race**

<u>Parent's Occupation</u>	<u>Net Worth</u>		<u>Net Fin Assets</u>	
	<u>white</u>	<u>black</u>	<u>white</u>	<u>black</u>
upper white collar	\$47,854	\$21,430	\$9,000	\$230
lower white collar	51,864	2,483	9,500	0
upper blue collar	54,172	7,179	8,774	0
lower blue collar	38,850	4,650	3,890	0

Oliver and Shapiro 1995; page 162

One cause for this type of inequality is the relatively short period of time African Americans have had access to those jobs and salaries available to Euro-Americans historically. That blacks are decades behind whites in this way also translates into limited access to information networks where knowledge of investments is shared.

Characteristics of Public Sector Employment

Thirty percent of informants are employed in the public sector. These women and men are teachers, social workers, physicians, lawyers and members of other professions commonly associated with the "new black middle class" of the post World War II period.

A discussion in a previous chapter noted how public sector employment became a key resource for black workers.

This was particularly important because African Americans were "locked out" of the restaurant and retail industry entry-level positions which they dominated in earlier periods (Waldinger 1996). Many among public sector PMW obtained degrees in higher education during the 1950s and 1960s and were the first of their families to attend or graduate from a college or university. These jobs were both prestigious and invaluable, due in part, to the groundbreaking educational accomplishments of those who obtained them.

Public sector employment took a variety of forms among project participants. All but one of the physicians and nurses in my study were employed by city-owned hospitals. Two others were managers working in publically-funded corporations. Pauline Ward and Eugenia Haskins had the unique experience of directing progressive, state-funded community projects. Ward, a native Harlemite who married and moved to suburban New Jersey, works in Harlem while Haskins, a resident of Hamilton Heights works in a working class community in the Bronx. The jobs of both women were characterized by a great deal of workplace autonomy.

I conducted participant observation in a variety of public sector work environments. As a field-researcher with HBR, I interviewed managers at job and educational training

centers, WIC service centers, and the Department of Social Services. I provided clerical support to a city agency and also accompanied project participants on pre-natal care visits to a city-run obstetrical care clinic. During these interactions I observed a number of work environments and had the opportunity to question PMW on their views about work.

Inadequate funding was a characteristic that public sector work sites had in common. This was reflected in the old and run-down appearance of a number of offices. In some instances furniture was insufficient or dilapidated. Pauline Ward had the unique experience of working in an attractive brownstone. Surrounded by art work and antique furnishings, Ward's job was to obtain additional funding for and organize educational opportunities and materials for children in New York City public schools. When she was not in the field drumming up funding or strategizing with community leaders, she worked here.

Another shared aspect of public sector work was the large percentages of African American and Latino co-workers in such environs. The private companies I visited as an ethnographer were most unlike this, particularly in instances where the informant had significantly advanced up the corporate ladder. A large minority workforce shapes

public sector work environments in a variety of ways. Some workers reported a sense of familiarity and comfort about working among other "minorities." In one setting where white workers were a distinct minority, tense conflicts between co-workers existed. The most virulent of workplace feuds I was aware of at this office occurred between upper-level managers and project leaders immediately beneath them in rank. These observations indicated that the potential for workplace tension or conflict was not minimized simply because individuals shared racial or ethnic backgrounds.

In Harlem, public sector workers are employed in area hospitals, universities and a number of social agencies. As an ethnographer for HBR, I participant-observed in a Harlem office building for a few months. During that time I was a temporary employee for a city agency and met two female project participants who allowed me sustained access. Barbara Green was one of these women. As an ethnographer in the Harlem State Office Building, I spent most of my time with Green, assisting her with clerical support or just engaging in small talk. She worked near the rear of the large office, next to a lengthy wall of glass. The high ceilings and sun-lit space made up for the cramped cubicles which were occupied by all but the most upper-level of managers. Green's was 5 x 9 feet and was loaded with file

cabinets. Her walls were decorated with pictures of friends and family members, as well as postcard from the European countries she and her boyfriend have visited. She looking upon these images helps to relax her during the work day.

There was not much Green liked about her job. She described it as 90 percent shuffling paper with the rest consisting of phone work. She has a master's degree in public administration from Baruch College in Manhattan but does, what she calls, "customer service" work for this community service organization. She also griped consistently about the under funding which is reflected in a dearth of resources, as well as the lack of computer efficiency among the staff. She lamented that, "the computers are here but few people know how to use them. I think the company should offer classes to employees but the management doesn't have the big picture on improving efficiency."

Green was not alone in her feelings toward her employer. Another manager talked with me about the incompetence of the director of this agency. Byron Harriston worked as a school teacher before coming to this line of work. He thought the agency director was ill-equipped to offer the necessary leadership skills and attributed this to the conspiratorial strategy of "hiring a

ninny at the top" as a means for undermining the success of the agency. While I was in no position to verify or deny this possibility, the level of inefficiency at the agency was palpable. The attitude of many of the employees I interacted with was demoralized. They showed little enthusiasm for their work and seemed to not have enough assignments to complete. I noticed several employees reading or chatting with co-workers. My overall impression of this agency was that it was markedly underutilized.

Another troubling aspect of work was the role of gender inequality. I worked with or got to know approximately ten employees and formally interviewed four. Most of these participants were female and during these informal and structured interactions, all but one complained that power relations at the agency favored men. Although he was named as a beneficiary of these privileges by one of the female PMW, Byron Harriston attested to this also. All of the upper-level managers at the agency are male.

Unemployment is a looming threat for these public sector workers in Harlem. The potential for job loss stems from one of two overlapping political processes. One relates specifically to the impact of budget cuts, where funding for city services and programs is decreased in a purportedly general effort to decrease spending. The other

pertains more directly to post-election realignments in patron-client relations which result in the replacement of old employees with those loyal to the new administration. This may not be a rigid dichotomy as it is my guess that the, alleged, broad-based need for fiscal austerity can be used as an excuse for more directed politically-motivated lay-offs.

While working at an office building in Harlem, office assistant Natasha Newberry was another employee I had extended access to. Like Brenda Green, I was able to record Newberry's genealogy and participant-observe with her at her apartment in Washington Heights. This is a neighborhood north of Harlem which has a large population of people from the Dominican Republic. Newberry was a graduate of a university in the south and former fashion model. She knew her job was in jeopardy and was attempting to carve out a career as an on-air sales personality on The Home Shopping Network. She was in the process of interviewing at the present time.

Following the election of Republican governor George Pataki, both women were laid off at the office building. I visited Brenda Green in her Bronx apartment 10 days after she lost her job. She said that the director of the agency told his employees to "look for work" weeks before this. As

we talked about the events leading up to the firing, Green told me that the staff received a memo saying employees will receive only one more check. On the Wednesday after that there was a board meeting to form the new corporation. The media was there and the atmosphere was like a "jamboree" which she said upset the employees terribly. In the following days the majority of the employees, approximately 75 women and men, lost their jobs. A few individuals were kept on either because they had vital knowledge of running the agency, such as the former director's secretary, or due to political connections to the Republican Party.

Newberry and I did not stay in touch, but it is my guess that she left New York. Green filed for unemployment shortly after this and received 8 weeks severance pay. Her health insurance was scheduled to expire in 90 days and then she would be required to pay \$11 monthly to the Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) HIP.

Green expressed her hope to develop a small business to months before being laid off. During one visit to her apartment, she showed me the business cards she had made which describe the service she would provide in interior design and floral arranging. She also put her name in a data bank for professional workers and uses a placement center run by Goodwill on Grand Concourse in the Bronx.

Green was also considering openings at Barnes and Noble book store on Central Avenue in Yonkers, a Westchester community in close proximity to the Bronx. She did not appear hopeful.

Janice Douchette worked for social services in a midtown location. She had also considered the prospect of job loss and planned to pursue doctoral studies in the event of such an outcome. Douchette was concerned about what the future would bring but also seemed to take comfort in her contingency plan to salvage her professional career. She said she wanted to get a PhD in sociology. Graduate school may be a good choice for Douchette, who has a spouse with a solid income. However, it is not a viable option for all who experience unemployment. The poor and working class in particular, have a limited number of choices when faced with this prospect.

As previously stated, both political patronage and monetary concerns are the channels through which budget cuts are enacted. As an ethnographer with HBR, I attended a focus group meeting to discuss with Harlem activists how the community was being affected by the decrease in the funds provided the city. A range of people were in attendance, including PMW and non-credentialed community activists who were as knowledgeable and effective as the attorneys and

physicians at the meeting. Participants discussed decreased availability of funds for drug treatment and other types of care for those in need. Dr. Cynthia John attended and spoke about the impact of budget cuts on Harlem Hospital. A key portion of the meeting centered around representatives from an organization that facilitates access to free legal services for the poor which has been drastically affected by the cuts.

The undermining of legal services for the poor was a particular issue at the time the focus group meeting was held on November 1995. Attorney and legal aid representative, Robert Lacey talked about the wealth of services his organization provides. They range from assistance with consumer matters, health and housing concerns, as well as criminal justice issues. At that time, politicians hostile to this organization in both city hall and Washington were working to erode the viability of this organization's mandate by forcing staff reductions and the elimination of programs.

One strategy for cutting spending is the privatization of government-run agencies. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani was attempting to gain support for the sale of Harlem Hospital by stating publically that the general public doesn't use municipal hospitals. Activists were attempting to discredit

the Mayor by stating "the facts" which, according a member of Community Board 10, "prove that you don't save money that way because people fall through the cracks because legislation does not guarantee that they will not fall through the cracks in another system."

Budget cuts are a double-edged sword. They affect the delivery of vital services such as health care, safe transportation and education, hence, the quality of these services has ramifications for public health and safety. Low income households are particularly vulnerable in these areas as they do not have the surplus income to pursue costly alternatives to public services. The unemployed are particularly at risk in this area. In addition, attacks on the public sector reverberate across socioeconomic lines because African American PMW are among those experiencing these job losses.

Individuals born prior to World War II predominate among informants working in the public sector. No respondents under 40 worked for the school system or social services. This pattern may indicate that in New York City, younger African Americans are taking a different path to employment opportunity than previous generations of PMW. This was certainly the view of Harlem-resident Janice Douchette. Public sector employment has been a key factor

for the upward mobility and well being of her Striver's Row household. Her husband is a senior government official and Douchette is a mid-level manager for social services. She is matter-of-fact in explaining the employment trajectory she and her peers took after finishing school. While she acknowledged the limited amount of choices available to her cohorts in the past, Douchette also suggested younger blacks have a diminished commitment to community service today:

When you left college you went to work. You taught or you became a social worker. That's what we did. The thing that saddens me is who is going to take care when we leave? Who is going to do the social work because we have raised a generation of kids who are not satisfied with human services? They want the business and they want to be lawyers. There are so many fields open to them now but somebody's got to do this work. But some of these kids today have got their heads so set in the clouds that they're just out of work.

Douchette believed that the younger generation of professionally-trained blacks are unable to accept public

sector employment even when they find themselves shut out of the kind of job they desire or were trained for. The accuracy of this assessment notwithstanding, Douchette's attitude and demeanor suggested a spirit of activism and resistance that I also witnessed among project participants of varying ages and occupations.

I would argue that these generational changes in occupational choice are not due to the absence of civic duty among the post World War II age group. African Americans now work in occupations which were neither significantly open to or highly sought after by blacks born prior to the 1950s. Younger, college-educated blacks feel entitled to work which is both lucrative and meaningful. Although this population may resist being forced to choose from the limited number of employment options determined to be appropriate for blacks decades ago, such a shift does not necessarily indicate an lack of obligation to community.

Characteristics of Private Sector Employment

Project participants working in the private sector included a diverse group of individuals. Like their counterparts in the public sector, perseverance, training, luck, and motivation enabled them to circumvent persistent obstacles. Luwinda Charles earned an MBA from Harvard and

is one of the few African American vice presidents at a large bank in New York City. Sarah Goings is another banking executive traversing generally uncharted territory, while Striver's Row resident Robin Jackson works as an attorney at a mid-town law firm.

The surroundings in private companies differ significantly from those of PMW in government. The publishing houses, banks, architectural firms and advertising agencies employing these women and men had appearances bespeaking corporate wealth. These high rent, midtown Manhattan addresses were serviced by armies of maintenance workers. The offices bustle with janitors, landscape workers, and the comings and goings of bike messengers and other delivery persons who move quickly throughout these modern structures of steel, glass and marble.

In the businesses I visited, the pace of work was faster than anything I observed in government offices where more individuals outwardly expressed feeling disaffected and overburdened. It was unclear whether these patterns reflected a more energized and competitive or exploitive work environment. During one visit to a television station, I was kept waiting by an informant for almost an hour before she could free herself from her work responsibilities. When

she finally came down to the lobby, we chatted in Central Park for almost an hour during her lunch break. The demands on her time, however, made such interviews infrequent.

There were also more whites working in these private concerns and this has a number of ramifications. Many of the blacks who have penetrated previously all-white work environments experience "the only black syndrome." It is common for these individuals to have no African American co-workers with whom they can interact and form friendships. Heavy work loads and diverging personal interests limit the possibility for the black professional to form ties with black lower-level service providers such as mail room, cafeteria, or housekeeping staff. This type of isolation can foster loneliness and alienation and a handful of informants reported having racially-charged confrontations with white co-workers.

The experience of Clarissa Parker, a surgical nurse and the wife of fireman/attorney Lawrence Parker, is a case in point. During one of a handful of interviews conducted at her Striver's Row home, she spoke of the insults she endured at work at a privately-owned hospital in Manhattan. A particular colleague had a weekly habit of approaching Clarissa with discussions of crimes committed by African Americans in New York City. She finally became fed-up one

morning when this same co-worker wanted to go over the details of a gruesome rape and beating allegedly carried out by a "pack" of black youth. Coming to work was so stressful during this time, Clarissa began wearing a walkman when she could; literally attempting to block out her co-workers.

African American-owned magazines such as *Emerge*, *Black Enterprises*, *Essence*, and *Ebony* celebrate the achievements of blacks who, like many of my informants, have gained a measure of authority within the boardrooms of corporate power. The accomplishments of individual blacks notwithstanding, it would be misleading to overstate both the availability and transformative powers of such job opportunities. The presence of "black faces in high places" does not negate the fact that African Americans continue to face discriminatory hiring practices and glass ceilings in private sector employment. Bari Roberts, formerly a financial analyst with the multinational oil company Texaco, sued the corporation on behalf of herself and over 1000 African American employees who maintained mobility up the corporate ladder was stymied because of their race (Roberts 1999). Yet another book tells the story of African American attorney Lawrence Mungin. Educated at Harvard, this Queens, N.Y.-native filed a lawsuit against his employer, the law firm of Katten, Muchin and Zavis for racial discrimination

(Barrett 1999).

Whether public or private sector employees, African American PMW have gained a number of advantages from their placement in the occupational hierarchy. Compared to the experiences of the non-professional working class blacks I researched earlier, remunerations are well-above the minimum wage and work environments are safer and cleaner.

Respondents have greater schedule flexibility in comparison to physical laborers, lower level service providers and factory workers. These factors promote job satisfaction but are experienced unevenly by project participants based upon income, training, seniority among other components of rank.

Many women and men complained of being overworked. In some instances, participants discussed being assigned the responsibilities of two or three co-workers without any compensation in the form of either increased pay or prestige. Employers often attribute the need for such adjustments to budgetary constraints. Patricia Covington juggled myriad work assignments on her job. As style director for a children's fashion magazine, her duties included organizing fashion shoots, assessing trends, and writing articles. Covington was required to work long hours and meet stressful deadlines. She taught two courses at the Fashion Institute of Technology and was pursuing her

undergraduate degree at another area college. Her earnings exceeded \$100,000 annually and the job carried the added perk of being able to travel to Europe to attend fashion shows twice each year. Before his death, she and husband, Calvin, turned these "working" trips into mini vacations but with all its challenges and joys, the quick-pace demands of Covington's job were taxing.

Job insecurity is another drawback of private sector work. Media reports of "downsizing" indicated that lay-offs and budget cuts are not just a part of public sector employment. Banking executive Luwinda Charles came close to losing her job in the wake of a bank merger. She was able to hold on to her job and title only by taking on additional responsibilities and agreeing to a smaller office. These examples show that African Americans and private sector employment is a combination fraught with contradictions. While the potential for conflict can accompany any involvement in income-generating activities, racial inequalities exacerbate any difficulties individuals confront at work.

Typologies of Self Employment

Entrepreneurship has been touted by conservatives and black nationalists alike as a means for African Americans to

achieve maximum financial security and job satisfaction. During the presidency of Richard Nixon, "black capitalism" as African American business ownership was erroneously dubbed, became the ideological lynchpin of an attempt to bring about economic parity between the races. A continuing emphasis on increased black self-employment as a cure for urban ills is a questionable one given the difficulties African Americans have faced raising start-up funds and keeping their businesses going. While segregation may have been viewed as a time of great vitality for black-owned businesses, and, by extension, African American communities in general, the fact remains that the majority of blacks have never been employed by such establishments. For many, entrepreneurship may represent a way to achieve independence from hostile and delimiting work environments but it is not the panacea some present it to be.

Historically, self-employment has not been a predominant income-generating strategy for African Americans in New York City. In recent time, this distinguishes native-born blacks from the myriad immigrant groups who have used entrepreneurship as a means for upward mobility. Scholars have offered a number of explanations for this sociological conundrum. Particularly useful are studies which show, for example, how immigrants are "embedded" in

their communities of origin (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). With their emphasis on assimilation, African Americans have relied on public sector employment in the same way immigrant groups have relied on self employment as a means of generating income (Waldinger 1996).

Fewer than twenty percent of my project participants are entrepreneurs and even fewer of these rely upon self-employment as a sole income generating activity. Many of them straddle multiple categories by shifting between salaried work and self-employment. They include independent consultant, Johnetta Butler, the adult-members of the Walker household who are co-owners of a nursing service, Carolyn Strickland who is a realtor, Regina White who is an event-planner with a wage-earning job as a realtor, the McNairs who are owners of a hair salon, freelance performing artists Eve and Arthur Irons, and Jada Pinchott who is vice president and co-owner of an entertainment-industry production/promotion company.

Work environments are as diverse as the jobs these individuals hold. The work of performing artists Eve and Arthur Irons, for example, takes them across the country and around the world. Their work lives are antithetical to a 9 to 5 existence. Unlike most of the respondents working in the public and private sectors, the self-employed are not

confined to an office throughout their work day.

Giving attention to office management is a necessary component of owning her small business; however, realtor Carolyn Strickland's work also involves showing properties to prospective renters or buyers and promoting her company through networking. Regina White is a salesperson for midtown real estate brokers. In addition to her work showing properties, White helps recent transplants to New York adjust by familiarizing them with the ins and outs of life in the city. White is also an independent event planner. Her second job is linked to the first in that her success rests heavily on her familiarity with the goods and services available in the city. White has had a number of high-profile clients and earned a brief mention in *Essence* magazine one year.

Mercy McNair owns a hair salon but has structured her business so that she is not responsible for the details of daily operation. Since these duties are carried out by her managers, McNair utilizes her time away from the salon to manage household and family responsibilities, and to pursue both leisure and other income-generating activities. The latter has resulted in some interesting opportunities for McNair, including her continued work as fashion model, as well as the use of their home as a dramatic backdrop for a

television show.

Brenda and David Walker are visiting nurses who travel from residence to residence as they carry out their professional duties. The couple has Walker's fictive sister as their business partner. Mrs. Walker talked about the impact of this work on her life:

What is good about it is my sense of freedom.

I have better control of my time and I like being in the field and seeing my patients.

Of course I don't have any benefits but I don't mind being in control of that stuff.

As a result of setting their own schedules within the limits of patient availability, as family members, the Walkers are able to spend much time together.

Three self-employed informants have their offices in Harlem. Carolyn Strickland and Jada Pinchot expressed a tremendous affinity to this urban community, although Strickland now resides in Westchester County. These sentiments were not shared by Dr. Albert Thompson, a black physician who owns a private practice in Harlem. During my sole interview with Dr. Thompson, he communicated his disdain for community members -- loudly referring to his

client base as lazy and irresponsible. His distance from the community also seemed to be reflected in the appearance of his waiting room which consisted of a varied assortment of old and run-down chairs. Dr. Thompson scoffed at the idea of anyone considering him a part of this community. He adamantly informed me that he was not involved in any community-based organizations and rarely patronized any of the area's restaurants or bars before going to his home in the Westchester County suburbs at the work-day's end.

One theme which constantly surfaced in discussions with these entrepreneurs was respondents' concern with the quality of their work life. I spent a few days volunteering in the office of Jada Pinchot. Pinchott was working her way up the corporate ladder in the record business when she decided to go into business for herself. Compared with her former work environment, the office of her company was informal and lively. The music of radio station 98.7 KISS/FM was piped throughout the office and the sounds of "smooth R & B" serenaded our workday. As we stuffed envelopes for a huge mailing to advertise an upcoming event, I joined in some good natured banter with Jada, her 23-year old son, college-student and part-time staff member, and a couple of young volunteers. The enthusiasm in this office stood in stark contrast to what public and private sector

employees showed toward their work.

Property Ownership as an Outgrowth of Work and Mobility

While in the field I attended meetings of the Hamilton Heights Homeowners Association (HHHA). During my first visit to a HHHA meeting, members discussed their success in blocking the establishment of a West African refugee service center in the neighborhood. Those who opposed the center argued their community was over saturated with such facilities. I made numerous visits to the HHHA; one with Patrice Covington who owns a home in this area. The significance of generational variation was apparent during these meetings and became an issue regarding property ownership in general. The majority of those in attendance during my visits were whites and elderly African Americans, with black professionals aged 35 and younger notably absent. Covington reported the reluctance of her peers to become involved in this and similar groups. She said her acquaintances who were born after World War II are disinterested in HHHA because they are alienated from the value system of older African Americans which they perceive as centered on superficial matters. I explore this point further in the discussion on class and ideology.

Approximately 65% of project participants owned the

properties in which they lived and many of these owned rental units above their living spaces or in the basements of their row houses. All property owners in my sample fall in the high income earning category but not all high income earning respondents owned property. Some, like Elijah and Louisa Mae Campbell, owned second residences -- Martha's Vineyard and Sag Harbor, Long Island, being popular destinations for black New Yorkers. The Campbells also rent out their summer home for an additional source of income.

Buying a home is both a common investment strategy and an act laden with the symbolism of economic achievement. The social implications of home ownership are that the purchasers have "good" jobs which enable them to earn a surplus income and accumulate savings. The idea that the purchasers have good credit, and are financially shrewd and responsible individuals can also be conveyed in the process. In the scheme of the American dream, home ownership is a singular component of middle class attainment.

Historically, "home" has represented a refuge from the outside world; a place to find solace among loved ones and away from the harsh realities of the outside world. Feagin and Sikes concluded that the home "represents one of the few anchors available to [black families] in an often hostile white-dominated world" (1994: pg. 224). In this study on

the contemporary lives of black professionals, corporate executives and college professors discuss the importance of owning their own home. This same study also shows how purchasing a house has not been an easy endeavor for African Americans, however. Today, only 43% of African Americans are homeowners, while 67% of whites own their homes (U.S. Census Bureau 1991). The reasons for this discrepancy include a racial division of labor resulting in lower salaries for black workers and discrimination in the lending and real estate industries (Turner, Struyk and Yinger 1991; Thomas 1992). When African American homeowners or renters arrive in predominately white communities they can be subjected to the surveillance or "unneighborly scrutiny" of white neighbors, police harassment, and isolation (Feagin and Sikes 1994; pg. 255).

Respondent's status as property owners distinguishes them not only from the low-income women in the HBR study, but also from project participants at the lower end of the income-earning scale. It is no coincidence, for example, that Craig Skyers, Kaetlin Tyson, and Eve and Arthur Irons, all of whom earn less than \$40,000, are not property owners. Natasha Newberry and Brenda Green are also included among project participants who rent their residences. In addition to having salaries in the low range, these renters are

unmarried and all born after World War II. All attended college, three have graduate degrees, and each has expressed a desire to purchase a home or condominium. Some would be able to afford paying a monthly mortgage, but their low earnings have, so far, made saving for a down payment difficult.

Households with double incomes predominate among property owners of my study. There were three unmarried female homeowners but neither of the two single men in the study owned their home or condominium. The cost of living and the price of real estate in New York City today, however, has prompted young buyers to purchase homes in need of much repair and renovate them over a period of years before moving in.

Lawrence and Clarissa Parker purchased their Striver's Row home in 1990 and moved in 1992. The parlor or first floor of Sarah and Michael Goings' house remains dusty and unfinished, although they have completed renovations on the second and third floors where the primary living space is located. They lived in Queens while waiting for the initial restorative work to be completed and then moved in while the first floor was being finished. It took film maker, Jason Brighton over a decade to finish renovation work on the Hamilton Heights apartment building he purchased. He and

his family now occupy a duplex-apartment on the two top floors. These difficulties notwithstanding, Harlem is the final frontier for middle class African Americans and others in search of property to purchase in Manhattan. For most of my informants, and people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds in New York City, the cost of buying a home in Greenwich Village, the upper east side or any area south of Harlem is prohibitive.

There are some pitfalls prospective home-buyers in Harlem face with greater frequency than those in other parts of Manhattan. One hurdle in this particular community is the need to acquire the essential certificate of non-harassment. This is important for individuals purchasing former single room occupancy buildings (SROs). This certificate would indicate that neither the former or current owner has been charged with any housing violations by prior or current tenants. Even if such charges were made against the former owner, the current owner may have to pay a huge settlement fee prior to closing.

Socioeconomic status is conveyed in the safety and attractiveness of residential space. Even project participants who underwent periods of economic uncertainty had access to affordable and well maintained housing. Eve and Arthur Irons rented in a historic apartment building a

few blocks away from a primary shopping corridor. Their building has a well-lit lobby and a working buzzer and intercom system for security. Its walls are mirrored walls and its ceilings high. Modest works of art adorn the walls outside their door and the hall floors are cleaned frequently. Their apartment has hardwood floors and a lengthy hallway stretching from the front door to the bathroom. It consists of two bedrooms, an eat-in kitchen, dining room and living room which they have converted into another bedroom. The apartment is roomy and would be out of this couple's range of affordability elsewhere.

In addition to their rent being manageable, the couple's landlord agreed to accept periodic lapses in rent payment. According to Eve, he expressed an understanding that their income was derived from intermittent work performing and leading workshops and allowed them to make up the difference when they were able. The fame garnered by Arthur's work as a jazz musician is a part of what made this arrangement with their landlord possible.

Class and Access to Strategic Networks

Personal networks are an important outgrowth of socioeconomic positioning. In "The Forms of Capital," Bourdieu uses the concept of social capital to discuss the

ways in which membership into respected, richly endowed or powerful groups can facilitate exchange relationships and transfer prestige (1986). This theory shows that there are factors indirectly related to income and wealth, which can significantly impact material conditions and reflect socioeconomic stratification.

PMW are advantaged over the poor and non-professional working class by their relationships with strategically-connected people. Networks of friends and kin can foster resource access through a number of interconnected processes. An interactive web of people can promote the flow of important information which can improve access to goods, services and opportunities, thereby helping PMW find bargains, obtain new skills or seek out lucrative investments. Some advanced their careers through the relationships they and/or their families maintained with particular individuals or groups.

Regarding this issue of networks and social capital, Craig Skyers recalled his experiences attending Columbia University:

When I think about some of the people I was associating with in college I am like, wow!, I should have been networking my ass off. But

it was like I was so repulsed by the people and I didn't want to be around them. I just went around screaming but some of them were very high powered and I had the opportunity to hob-nob and get my name into their circles. I rejected them though because it was kind of sickly as to how the system was operating. You had it much easier if you moved in certain circles.

Skyers' words are important for two reasons. They show his awareness of the myth of a meritocracy. This is an understanding many African Americans have and, in part, this underscores their support of affirmative action strategies. Secondly, his words attest to the importance of having access to social capital and the link between this and upward mobility.

I have already discussed the examples of Carolyn Strickland and Dr. John; two women who chose the same professions as their fathers. Eve Irons also benefitted from the profession of her father, a well known sculptor before he died in 1999. Regarding the assistance she received from him, Eve said:

I ask him for help during emergencies. He

sells some of his smaller pieces for \$15,000.
He is not funny about money like my mother is.
Some times I use his work in my performances [to
repay loans].

In another example of PMW using social capital,
Johnetta Butler helped her adult children obtain comfortable
and affordable residences by renting out to them the top two
floors of her brownstone row house. In addition to showing
how opportunities for upward mobility are enhanced through
networks, these examples also reveal that class is
reproduced over subsequent generations, through membership
in a families where adults are knowledgeable about
educational and economic opportunities. However African
American PMW do not have, by virtue of socioeconomic
positioning, open access to the same networks into which
Euro-American PMW are inserted.

The workplace is another location where networking can
occur. By using her boss' address, Kaetlin Tyson was able
to get her daughter into their public school of choice. Her
working relationship and friendship with this nationally-
known, television personality facilitated this. Whether an
individual is turning to a supervisor, co-worker or former
employer, contact could be initiated in an effort to find

new work, fill a job opening, or locate a mechanic or babysitter. In addition to reaching out to someone at work or by telephone, pertinent information is also being exchanged while socializing at particular bars or restaurants and while attending conferences and seminars.

Upward mobility is also gained through access to highly-regarded educational institutions. In addition to improving skills, building confidence and increasing job market credentials, schools widen personal networks to incorporate individuals unknown to family members and/or their personal acquaintances. A study of African Americans who attended elite boarding schools revealed the life long impact of forming friendships with classmates, some of whom are children from wealthy white families (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 1991). Some project participants discussed the importance of contacts made during college, particularly with other African Americans. Other respondents became involved with fraternities and sororities as a means for facilitating contacts in networks which may help them get jobs in the future. All told, people and information are important forms of social currency.

Not surprising, networking took place during the course of this ethnographic study. During one focus group, I observed participants making plans to get together with

others for both personal and professional reasons. At the end of one meeting, individuals passed out business cards and discussed the potential for getting together in the future. Patrice Covington and Craig Skyers met on several occasions in relation to her search for an African American architect to make improvements in her house.

The absence of spatial separation among African Americans of various socioeconomic backgrounds belies the sharp inequalities in the distribution of opportunity among Harlemites. Individuals without social capital in the form of access to the people, education, training, or social experiences which facilitate entry into and an understanding of the inner-workings of professional arenas are at a disadvantage. This would describe most low income African Americans who are often locked out of this process. The attacks on the rights of working class people to higher education during my time in the field further delimited the distribution of opportunity and, hence, the potential for upward mobility for those below PMW.

There are other ways in which networks and resources affect differentiation. Striver's Row informants discussed the marked difference between the provision of city services on their blocks and those of surrounding, low income residents. Janis Douchette cites the fact that street

cleaning and other forms of maintenance are regularly carried out on her block as evidence that this enclave receives preferential treatment from the city. In later interviews, I learned her husband was a high-level manager with the sanitation department. This could be the impetus for a higher-level of city maintenance in this area of Harlem.

This view of better services was echoed by Jada Pinchot who lived on the parallel street. Compared to other parts of Harlem, Pinchot observed that the street lights in her community were frequently checked and changed. During a number of visits to the area, I observed workers filling pot holes and paving the streets. These repairs included the 137th and 136th street blocks parallel to Striver's Row but did not extend beyond 139th street to the north. I was aware that 136th and 137th also had a number of professionals in residence. Living on 136th was a librarian I knew, as well as an African American philosophy professor who lived with his architect-girlfriend more than a few doors down. At one end of this block stood a block of row houses which were under construction. The development was designed to bring more moderate-income, homeowners into the community.

Participant-observing on Striver's Row indicated there

was some measure of privilege in this area, as compared to surrounding areas. It was the opinion of many respondents, however, that there remained a lot of room for improvement. Some expressed their dismay over the condition of the alleys behind their houses. These back corridors were frequently traveled by transients and littered with trash and garbage. The city considered alleyways private property and, hence, the responsibility of the residents to clean and maintain.

Informants in other parts of Harlem also expressed dissatisfaction with the delivery of city services in their neighborhoods. Patrice Covington did not consider the city to be a cooperative partner in her efforts to improve conditions in her Hamilton Heights block. Her street had a number of abandoned buildings, one of which was being used by drug addicts to smoke and distribute crack:

I got one of these buildings over here boarded up because it was a crack building. I got on the city's back about it. People have children playing out here and it doesn't make sense for them to have to trip over all these crack vials. The city owns this building and I told them they needed to board it up because no one is living there. We fought and fought with them and they

finally closed it up.

It took me literally a year and a half to get this building next door closed up. The sidewalk was dilapidated and I was concerned an elderly person would be injured. I was on the phone with them every other day and they knew me.

At the community meetings I would tell them I lived on 71st Street before moving to Harlem and it seems like things are done differently up here. Below 96th Street people get services. Up here, they figure we are low income, not paying taxes, on welfare. It's all this negative stigma that is attached to us up here.

This study just touches the surface in looking at the link between urban conditions and the presence of PMW. This examination is necessary since it addresses the notion that a professional-managerial presence contributes to improvements in communities. A consideration of quality of city life from this perspective is important because it speaks to a larger debate about the role of "black middle class" out-migration in fostering declining conditions in

urban areas across the U.S. In a subsequent study we may ask, for example, how the socioeconomic status of community members affects the course of grassroots organizing? Do the successes of Covington and those like her relate to their abilities as college-educated professionals? This is a topic which remains largely unexamined in anthropological literature. It is clear that additional ethnographic research directly focused on community organizing in urban settings is needed to get at the root of these questions.

CHAPTER FIVE

Lifestyle, Consumption and Ideology

The impact of socioeconomic stratification extends beyond the most salient components such as employment, income, wealth, and access to strategic resources, to take in less tangible factors. Belief systems, social practices and personal tastes are also outgrowths of economic differentiation, albeit more difficult ones to systematically characterize in comparison with the material and structural.

Scholars looking at a variety of regions note that the specific ways in which socioeconomic status affects lifestyle are determined by the specificity of geographic location and history. An ethnohistorical study of middle class life and history in Sweden (1880-1980), for example, discussed how the middle classes disseminated the idea that discipline and cleanliness made "their kind" superior to peasants and the industrial working class and imbued them with a stronger moral authority (Frykman and Lofgren 1987). This virtuosity was evidenced by such practices as keeping houses free from the smell of animals or human wastes and avoiding discussions of such "disquieting" topics as love,

death, bodily functions or human frailties⁶.

Regarding the African American experience, the formation of socioeconomic hierarchies and related ideologies have evolved amid persistent exposure to racial subordination and socioeconomic change. The impact of Euro-American material and psychological supremacy on these processes has been discussed in various literary genres. Gatewood's *Aristocrats of Color* examines an assortment of primary and secondary sources which reflect the themes of race, class, behavior and ideology from the late 19th century to 1920 (1990). In a chapter titled "The Genteel Performance," Gatewood describes the importance elite blacks place on cultivating "proper and refined" practices. Under this rubric, "respectable" Negroes would always maintain a clean appearance and avoid loud talk and ostentatious behaviors. Many of the citations on this topic reference church circulars, as well as newspapers and magazines aimed at African American readers. In many instances, this focus on decency and decorum was emphasized to help whites distinguish between elites and the more common Negroes found among the "ill-mannered masses." (Gatewood 1990: pg. 187).

⁶A more contemporary examination of stratification in urban Brazil points to the centrality of the consumption of international goods to the construction and maintenance of middle class Brazilian lifestyle and identity (O'Dougherty 1996).

In the late 1950s, E. Franklin Frazier characterized the "black bourgeoisie" as a superficial population caught up in an obsessive quest to be like and accepted by the white middle class (1957). Subsequent critiques have shown that many of Frazier's descriptions were gross generalizations, however the idea that whites have influenced African American views on worthiness and class attainment would seem logical given centuries of co-existence and domination. The challenge in arriving at valuable insights comes in sifting through the stereotypes and biases of both professional and amateur social observers.

The impact of Euro-American ideals and values was a recurring theme in discussions with black PMW about their socioeconomic stratum. Some themes were expressed consistently by informants of various ages. Eve Irons was among the youngest of my project participants. She spoke about the spiritual and emotional differences between black and white people. Her view presented Euro-Americans as superficial beings who live through the acquisition of goods and information rather than through the quest for spiritual peace, understanding and human companionship. To Irons, the accumulation of material things is a key indicator of a Eurocentric lifestyle or value system. Commenting that she,

"lives very close the earth," Irons also told me that the only circumstances under which she displays art on her walls is when she is knowledgeable about the meaning of the pieces and their practical uses. She shared this when we were discussing African masks and other artifacts.

Talks with my friend, and short-term Harlem resident, Chauncy Powers echoed this theme of superficiality:

Being middle class bases itself on the idea of buying into a white notion of what life is all about. I am thinking about my neighborhood in Queens where I grew up in which was very much like a John Waters film except it was all the nice little black people with professional jobs and they had their houses and their cars and they put on all these facades and all these faces but within the confines of their households, all hell was breaking loose. I mean, they were doing all this messed up stuff to their kids.

Some ideas expressed by project participants showed a racial essentialism which was not complimentary to blacks but, like Irons' comments, still descriptive of behaviors deemed unlike those of Euro-Americans. Brenda Green

frequently made disparaging comments about African American people. During one of my visits to her workplace, she complained that "black people think you are supposed to be poor all your life." She said this in response to some mild opposition a community development agency encountered in their attempts to build condominiums in a Harlem neighborhood. Some residents maintain this type of housing is cost prohibitive to most Harlem residents. Green's response to this was that "black people don't want to own anything and they can't be trusted."

While initially offended, after spending months with Green, I began to see these types of remarks as the utterances of an individual who used brashness to cloak her insecurity about being obese and alienated. Moreover, this wasn't the first time I had heard this kind of "folks wisdom" about blacks not being sophisticated enough to take those intricate steps toward financial independence and well being. As the discussions of Eve Irons, Chauncey Powers, and Brenda Green show, informants touched upon the topic of race and behavior in different ways.

Realtor Regina White was born before World War II. She attributes the latter-day decline of Harlem to the desire of upwardly mobile African Americans to "have what whites have." Again, the issue of race, superficiality and

consumption was raised. In one conversation she said:

The notion of living somewhere else was not only foreign but certainly prohibited in many ways. Of course, as soon as we get the money we do the same thing white people do. The minute we are allowed to live in Westchester or take up a room in the Hilton, Harlem no longer becomes the center.

Regina White describes African Americans who move to the suburbs as vacuous and self-centered people who model themselves after the actions of Euro-Americans. In addition to African Americans moving to the suburbs, over the years I have heard judgmental blacks accuse others of "trying to be white" or emulating white behaviors based on the homosexuality, interracial dating, or the lack of Black English vernacular speech patterns of the accused.

Community activist Pauline Ward mixes racial essentialism with contextualization in her discussion of the myriad choices upward mobility presents to black PMW. She says:

Becoming middle class changes the perspective

of persons aspiring to make it. They are so busy trying to fit the standards set by the white world.

That world enforces its own codes. Some are written and some are just practiced and blacks going into that world find that they are not accepted as is. There was a time, in the corporate world, when there was a tendency for blacks to speak out and confront and challenge. What has happened since that time is that the economy has continued to be affected by downsizing and mergers where we are usually the first to be ousted because we were the last to get in. No one would do anything to further erode their chance of staying in there.

As a former executive for Xerox, Ward based her opinion on direct, past experience. In two formal interviews at her workplace, she told me about the political activism of up and coming black executives during the 1970s as they carved out space for themselves and those who would hopefully follow them. Ward maintains that, in the wake of the white backlash of the 1980s, the political climate in the

corporate realm has changed markedly.

Ideology, Consumption, and Aesthetics At Home

Ideology is reflected in the actions of informants, just it is revealed in discourse. The analysis of spending habits can disclose elements of a person's beliefs and values. Analysis of contemporary African American consumption and commerce has generated two competing interpretations. Alienation theory views African American conspicuous consumption as an attempt to compensate for the racism blacks encounter in daily life. In this way, "blacks use their dollars to buy what they cannot earn, namely status" (Austin 1995: 236).

The second approach characterizes consumption as an act of defiance, engaged in to avoid the internalization of black degradation (Nightingale 1993). Both viewpoints have been critiqued for their limited ability to address African Americans' desire for a meaningful and enjoyable life as a prime determinant of standards and behaviors. The repeated tendency to construct all African American actions as reactions to racism precludes conceptualizing the black experience in all of its complexity. By acknowledging the role of human agency, racism can be recognized as, not all-determining but, a cogent historical and social force which

reverberates within the ethnographic present.

I view a number of different practices as household consumption. This category would include the acquisition of goods and services needed to nourish and nurture household members -- including luxury items which please consumer's aesthetic senses and/or connote prestige. The term consumption is also used to refer to recreational activities and/or practices in leisure and self-nurturance such as visiting hair and nail salons or working out in a gym. In each case, consumption implicates an individual's position in the socioeconomic hierarchy through the cultural links between socioeconomic status and habits or tastes, as well as the ability of household heads to avail themselves of particular goods in the marketplace. These factors mark African American PMW and distinguish them from low-income, black working class and the unemployed residents of Harlem.

Unlike lower income informants, for example, the majority of my project participants, owned automobiles. Most PMW did not have luxury vehicles, as some may expect, but drove older sedans or 2-door imports. Cars were most often used to get to work, attend church and shop for food and clothing. Informants visited friends or vacationed in the Catskills, out on Long Island or in New England. Martha's Vineyard was a frequent destination for PMW of this

region. They also used their cars to visit friends and, inevitably, a friend would need a lift to the airport. Eve Irons drove to dance class in lower Manhattan. Motor vehicles were an important resource which informants used for recreational fun, convenience and the procurement of important goods and services. Being a motorist in New York City also exposed one to the possibility of car theft and break-ins, traffic tickets, and the additional stress of simply finding a parking space.

The connections between occupation, income, and consumption have also been observed in the appearances informants' of homes. My recorded observations showed that considerable time and concern was invested in the quest to establish a comfortable and attractive surroundings. The majority of the residences were carefully appointed and the living spaces of high income earning participants, in particular, were arranged with the greatest amount detail and originality.

Pride and interest in the appearance of one's home is not unique to PMW. What was specific were their tastes, as well as the amount of surplus income available to outfit households in accordance with resident's aesthetic sensibilities. Informant's ideas about what constitutes an attractive home are varied but many instances revealed

familiarity with specific architectural design genres. This was a reflection of what informants have learned as college graduates, by reading design magazines, through interactions in personal networks which include architects or other persons employed in design.

Each residence reflected the range individual tastes and orientations. The ambiance in Janis Douchette's three story row house was indicative of the time and money she and her husband have spent on furnishings and renovations. The twenty-five years of work on their Striver's Row home created a warm and inviting country feel. In the same part of Central Harlem, entrepreneur Jada Pinchot's duplex held huge house plants and large pieces of original African American art. Her home was sleek and modern with combined use of glass and metal.

The Mount Morris Park home of Mercy and Dennis McNair was particularly outstanding in appearance. The first floor of their Victorian house had a sumptuous feel with its palm trees, dark wood trim and unique pieces of folk art juxtaposed with sturdy antique furnishings. In a row house broken into apartments two doors down, Kaetlin Tyson had a child's *Fisher Price* playhouse in her living room which was placed across from a grand piano. On top of the piano sat a photograph of her daughter upon the lap of Bill Cosby. A

few streets over lived the second young, black architect who participated in my study. Garrison Cane decorated his apartment with leather furniture and built-in cabinets he designed. As these last two examples indicate, attention to design and detail was not limited to homeowners.

Patrice Covington's Hamilton Heights home was done in a minimalist, retro design with furnishings from the 1950s and 60s. Brenda Walker's, located in the same neighborhood, was filled with original art and a substantial collection of antiques. With the exception of an apartment building on the corner, Walker's entire block off of Convent Avenue consisted of large homes that she told me were owned and occupied by judges, physicians, and other well-paid PMW who were both black and white. No other participants lived on a block as homogeneous as that of Brenda Walker's, but all lived in buildings which were secure and well maintained. In some instances, as was the case for Craig Skyers and Eve and Arthur Irons, participants rented nice apartments on blocks with abandoned or run-down buildings. Income and/or personal connections, however, enabled them all to shun the type of conditions with which residents of many of low income blocks I visited had to contend.

Many project participants enhanced the look of their homes with the display of artwork and souvenirs purchased

during vacations. Psychiatrist Brian Stoddard decorated his home with Asian artifacts collected over years of travel to China and countries on this continent. These ways of accessorizing their homes distinguish PMW and set them apart from both the poor and working class of their communities. None of the poor and working class women and men I met in the field had the money or opportunity to travel. Only one of the women on public assistance had been on an airplane. These were outgrowths of socioeconomic stratification. The appearances of the low income households I visited also reflected individual's attempts to beautify their environment and make their homes more comfortable. The style in which their decorative strategies were carried out, however, was in many ways indicative of a more limited access to income, wealth, information, and opportunity.

It would be inaccurate to uniformly characterize low income areas in Harlem as unsafe and in physical decline. There were, however, marked differences between PMW residential environments and the public housing complexes and other dwellings with a majority of low-income tenants. During my research with HBR I visited people living in buildings with open or unlocked entrances, graffiti on hallway walls, broken elevators, unscreened windows, and, on one occasion, a trash-filled courtyard which smelled

unpleasant and attracted insects. Residents of these dwellings include the elderly, persons on public assistance, drug-addicts, the marginally employed, and low-income workers. The presence of the African American PMW in such residential settings is meager although they do reside in close proximity.

Ideology, Consumption, and Mobility

Mobility strategies are another component to the consumption of goods and services. Informants, across the board, stress education as the primary facilitator of their professional achievements. Not only have college degrees enabled PMW to obtain "good" jobs, project participants also worked to provide their children with the training and experiences they hoped would help their kids to become self-sufficient.

In homes with school aged children, the emphasis parents put on the education as a tool for personal achievement was visually apparent. The walls of children's rooms were plastered with pages from books and the children's own artistic renderings. Some rooms were decorated with wallpaper or borders which had alphabetical and or numerical motifs. More importantly, project participants spoke to their children about the importance of

higher education. Both directly and indirectly parents frequently expressed their expectation that their children will attend a university after high school.

I met young Harlemites who were either attending or had graduated from Brown, Howard, Wesleyan, Hampton and Harvard, among other schools. All of these college-age adults benefitted from their parents' status as college-educated professionals. This form of social capital facilitated students' ability to navigate this terrain.

Parents' attempts to get their kids into specific primary schools is one of the earliest strategies utilized by black PMW to start children off on the road to upward mobility. This often means circumventing local institutions to gain access to schools in higher-income neighborhoods which are better funded and also predominately white. This was the exact strategy Brenda Walker used:

First we put him in St. John the Divine. When we first went for the interview, they told us they had a lot of black children there. Then we found out he would be one of two black kids in his class. For me this was not a problem because I feel he needs to learn what it means to be around them. That's what helped me.

Olu then attended a public school, PS-171, but it became apparent he was bored with the level of class work. The Walkers spoke to school officials about having their young son skip a grade but were informed that this was not possible so, at mid-year, the couple moved their son to another public school, located downtown on 84th street and Columbus Avenue. Regarding her success in getting Olu into a school outside of Harlem, Brenda Walker says:

The reason why we were able to get him in is because we went there twenty times and made our presence known. If you want your kid in a particular school, you just have to go a lot and let them know how involved you are in your child's education. Olu got in because of his test scores. We were also lucky because they wanted a dark face and he fit the bill. I am not going to short-change him when it comes to his education because for a black male child, this will be the most important thing.

Brenda Walker's friend and neighbor also sent her young child to a public school outside of Harlem. As mentioned in

a discussion of access to strategic personal networks, Kaetlin Tyson used the address of her boss to enroll her daughter into a predominately white school downtown. These parents use persistence and even a little subterfuge to ensure their children get the education they want them to have. None of the parents were passive or equivocal about this.

PMW Working at Play

The leisure activities of informants also have implications for the analysis of race, consumption and socioeconomic status. Expressing his amusement about how whites may spend their weekends engaged in recreational activities that most African Americans will never do in a lifetime, comedienne Steve Harvey once joked that, "white people have wonderful weekends but black folks just have a couple of days off." Harvey was referring to everything from skiing and boating to the increasing popularity of extreme sports such as ice climbing and sky diving.

There is some truth to the performer's statement on race and recreation. No project participant ever discussed going mountain climbing or hang-gliding. However, many were avid world travelers, patrons of the arts, and fitness enthusiasts. The type of leisure activities which captured

their interests set their experiences apart from those of persons from low-income Harlem-households. There was also a lot of variation in what people did with their free time. As was the case with aesthetic tastes, ideas about what is fun are determined by personality, age, travel experiences, upbringing, and friends.

Brenda Walker met with neighbor, and fellow project-participant, Eugenia Haskins a few days each week to jog at the River Bank State Park along the Hudson River. In the Walker-household, family members enjoyed simple pleasures together:

We get together every evening. We do not have a television for a purpose and that is so that we can talk. We all eat dinner together. On Sunday we all went to church, including my eldest son.

Jada Pinchot was an active participant in the New York City's night life. She went out to meet people, listen to music, and dance but Pinchot also used these outings to network and generally support her work coordinating theatrical productions and entertainment industry events. Pinchot also made periodic jaunts to the Caribbean each year.

Calvin and Patrice Covington would reserve every Friday evening for each other. They would eat out, take in a movie, enjoy some other form of recreation or just relax together at home. Patrice was also very active with her reading group activities. As a founding member of a nationally-known book club, she is responsible for organizing meetings and award ceremonies. Covington gets a lot of satisfaction out of her work with the club -- an activity which puts a lot of strain on an already overburdened schedule.

Travel experiences were something almost all of the informants were enthusiastic about. Whether making excursions for business or pleasure, African Americans are seeing the country and the world. At airports and popular vacation destinations, however, black service workers often outnumber black travelers. The women and men in my study knew how it felt to be the black exception among sightseers and visitors -- a status made particularly apparent when riding in first class. White, fellow travelers stare and whisper, perhaps thinking you are a famous singer, actress, or, if you have a young appearance, a rapper.

Patrice Covington showed me a photograph taken by her deceased husband as the couple stopped at an antique market in Lisbon, Portugal. Craig Skyers, Garrison Cane and

Lashandra Haskins had visited southern Africa and became enthralled with the area. Eve and Anthony Irons traveled to Israel and Egypt. Friend and temporary Harlem resident, Chauncey Powers, also traveled to Israel. Brenda Green visited a number of countries in Europe including Switzerland, Germany, Italy and France. Some made it a point to fly to Europe and the Caribbean at least once every two years.

The travel experiences of project participants were not limited to jaunts abroad. The Banks and the McNairs owned vacation properties in Sag Harbor and South Carolina respectively. Regina White made a special point of going to New Mexico every year for a spiritual retreat. Even those PMW on the low end of the income scale were able to travel periodically. They accomplished this by choosing inexpensive accommodations to cut travel costs, borrowing money from friends or family, obtaining research grants to fund travel, or extending business trips to include independent touring.

Women and men claimed that these opportunities enhanced their lives in immeasurable ways. Many gained a greater understanding of other parts of the world and were able to pass on this knowledge to their friends and family. Some even established lucrative business relationships with the

contacts they made in other states and countries. Jada Pinchot, for example, was involved in producing a benefit performance for the children of South Africa. In this way she was able to use her socioeconomic status to both expand her business opportunities and experience the personal rewards of world travel.

These kinds of opportunities have largely been out of the reach of Harlemites from low income households and informant's parents and other kin. Project participants talked of their older relatives who were unable to foresee the freedoms African Americans now enjoy. This uneven distribution of opportunity and resources which African American PMW benefit from has infused their experience of socioeconomic stratification with meaning.

There are additional aspects of engagement in leisure activities which differentiated black professional experiences from those of lower income African Americans and informant's elders. Another characteristic is PMW insertion into multiracial personal networks which included close white friends. Blacks and whites generally do not live alongside or worship together and racial segregation can work against the formation of cross-racial friendships. However, the workplace can be a spring board for trans-racial communication and bond-building.

Most of the black PMW in my study work with whites with whom they shared comparable goals, interests, and backgrounds. Unlike participants in the HBR project, many participants in my dissertation study interacted with whites regularly. For example, most of the guests at a cookout at the home of Sarah and Dennis Goings were white. Most were close friends of Dennis and worked with him at a television network. On this particular occasion, this gathering was planned to coincide with the annual Mt. Morris Park Housing Tour -- an event which increases the number of whites in Harlem for an afternoon.

An additional factor differentiating blacks by socioeconomic status pertains to the foodways of African American PMW. The predominance of Caribbean and African American southern or soul food restaurants in Harlem attests to some of the prevailing food tastes in this community. While few of my project participants would balk at a plate of fried chicken, collard greens, and black-eye peas, the food tastes of black PMW reflect an expanded knowledge of world cuisines, as well as different approaches to food preparation. They also show a familiarity with new ideas about what it means to eat healthily. Reading, traveling and their racially diverse circle of friends and acquaintances expose young professionals to an increasingly

diverse set of food tastes and styles of preparation.

Harlem's black middle stratum are regulars at Thai and Indian restaurants. They devour couscous and regularly consume mixed field greens with arugula and any number of vinaigrettes. Some are very particular about eating only low fat, high fiber foods. During a visit to her home before a book club meeting, Patrice Covington was preparing a vegetarian feast which included polenta and navy beans. Eve Irons is also a vegetarian who minimizes her intake of eggs, dairy products and traditional medicines. A few days a week, Eve requires her children to drink daily doses of tinctures made from the herbs golden seal and echinacea.⁷ There is a generational component to this also, for the younger informants showed a great proclivity to experiment in these areas.

PMW and The Semiotics of Personal Appearance

Viewing outward appearance as an indicator of socioeconomic status reveals the cogency of symbols in processes of social construction. This analysis also brings this chapter back to the topic of PMW and ideology. I observed that the personal grooming styles of informants and

⁷I do recognize that low income people also purchase herbal products. One product, wood root tonic, has become particularly popular among segments of African American and African-Caribbean populations.

the larger Harlem community have implications for race, gender, identity, and generational variation.

The cultural revolution of the 1960s sought to redefine beauty aesthetics which equated dark skin with ugly and labeled black hair bad. Despite the advances of the black power and black is beautiful ideological movement, African American women remain conservative in their choice of hairstyling options today. Music videos, fashion layouts and song lyrics attest to the popularity of uncombed hair or dreadlocks among young black men and throngs of male youth can be seen embracing this style in the urban setting. The same cannot be said for their female counterparts, however, as even the casual observer would have difficulty locating young women with either natural or locked hair on Harlem streets.

A number of the women who participated in my study represent a departure from this, however, and experimented with hair-grooming styles which remain unpopular for many African American females. Four had locks or uncombed hair, two wore short "naturals" and another, Eve Irons, had a completely shaven head. All of these women were older than 25 and younger than 55. It takes confidence and independence for a black woman to make this choice in a community which frowns upon it. In addition to showing a

sense of awareness and historical continuity, these choices also reflect the "freedom of expression" which can accompany upward mobility. This occurs through an individual's exposure to new ideas and a view that past behaviors were circumscribed and constrained. In addition to having a broader sense of what constitutes an attractive and acceptable appearance, the social circles in which these women move minimize their need to adhere to more conservative ideals. Moreover, PMW may also be less vulnerable to those who are threatened by these styles.

This ideological reworking is part and parcel of a critique of white supremacy fostered by a feminist analysis of how androcentrism and patriarchy function within African American communities. The literature reviews I presented in earlier chapters show that skin color is another component of outward appearance that has historically been associated with black "middle class attainment." As with the issue of hair texture, the 1960s ushered in alternative perspectives to the notion that the absence of melanin created a "bright", "fair," or more lovely appearance among women and men. It is common knowledge among African Americans, however, that skin color continues to play a role in how blacks view and periodically treat each other to varying degrees. Throughout this study, a handful of project

participants attest to how this phenotypic trait has influenced both past and present experiences and ideologies. This study presents comments made by Jada Pinchot, Brenda Green and Lawrence Parker as they discuss this continuity with the past.

This chapter shows that upward mobility can carve out the space for individuals to explore and embrace belief systems, social practices and personal tastes which may be uncommon or unpopular in their communities of origin. In this way, a pulling away process is taking place as participants move beyond social boundaries to reject the status quo. In other ways, however, informants are also reaching for conformity, as demonstrated by their working long hours and/or succumbing to consumer imperatives. The African American PMW experience resists easy categorization. Instead, the population exists as a fragmented, informal social group formed through an ever-dynamic process, constantly in motion due to the diverse origins of people and shifting social contexts. What is definitive about all of this is that informants are awarded some degree of opportunity, prestige or advantage. As previously stated, these factors are key parts of PMW identity and experience.

CHAPTER SIX

Negotiating Socioeconomic Boundaries in Kin Networks

Based on notions of race and class more so than empirical data, writings about relations within African American socioeconomic hierarchies have characterized these as either conflicting or cooperatively uplifting. Some have portrayed PMW as an isolated and white-identified population (Frazier 1957; Hare 1965). The movement of upwardly mobile blacks to suburban communities is often seen as an indicator of this disconnect or disjuncture (Wilson 1978; 1987). To demonstrate the opposite, historians and other observers note the role educated black professionals have played in the struggle for racial equality in the U.S. (Franklin and Meier 1982; Giddings 1987; Gilkes 1988). Only a handful of studies attend to the varying, and sometimes contradictory, forms that relationships take among African Americans of different socioeconomic strata (Gaines 1996; Gregory 1998).

Methods of ethnographic inquiry help researchers grasp human complexities which may be overlooked by other social observers. My study was undertaken in a heterogeneous socioeconomic setting in order to enable me to observe interactions between low-income blacks and African American PMW. In gathering oral histories it became quickly apparent

that, throughout the web of connections informants maintained with family members, relations across these boundaries were common.

Socioeconomic Diversity in African American Families

The majority of informants grew up in low income households so interactions across strata frequently occurred within kin networks. Even participants whose parents were college educated or professionally employed had contact with extended kin who were poor or working class. Regina White's mother, father, aunts and uncles all worked as household servants for wealthy white families in and around New York City. The parents of Craig Skyers and Natasha Newberry both worked in factories in North Carolina. Patrice Covington's mother and father left the south to seek work in a tire factory in Syracuse, N.Y. Over the years, aunts and uncles followed their northerly migratory trajectories to labor in this same industry. Two project participants had mothers who did food service work and a number of people experienced periods when a parent, most often a father, had to contend with unemployment.

Although the labor performed by the parents of many project participants is considered "unskilled" or "menial" by today's standards, men and women showed pride in the

accomplishments of their parents and elder kin. Employment in factories, hospitals, post offices and/or the homes of Euro-Americans signified important transitions in African American labor history and most project-participants understood the value of these jobs in years passed. Informants talked about the sacrifices elder kin made to provide for their children and the extended kin of subsequent generations. They were knowledgeable about how these types of work improved their own lives.

Eve Irons knew a great deal about her grandparents' employment histories. Her maternal grandfather was born in Louisiana and migrated to Los Angeles with his family as a child. He worked as a dispatcher for Goodyear for 15 years. During the time of this interview (July 15, 1995), her grandfather was the director for one of the largest funeral homes in Los Angeles. He accomplished this with only a 5th grade education.

His wife was born in Little Rock, Arkansas and also migrated to Los Angeles as a child. Eve showed me a glamorous picture of her "Grandma Janie" who was one of the first black women to get a contract with a well-known film studio in Hollywood. She competed with Lena Horne for the lead role in the film *Cabin in the Sky* but decided to use her talents in the church after giving birth to Eve's

mother, who is her only child.

Eve doesn't know as much about her paternal grandparents. She attributes this to "some tension that exists between them and my mother." Eve also said, "they didn't show us a lot of love or like for us to come over." Both her father's parents were born in Texas. Her grandfather was a custodian and her grandmother was a maid.

Patrice Covington spoke fondly of her deceased father who, in addition to his work for Firestone, was also a janitor with a company that made manhole covers. At the time of his death, he was supervisor of his entire department. Covington described him in the following way:

He worked real hard and he was real quiet. He was so quiet that you would never hear him coming in the house. You would never hear the key turning the door but my father would come in the house and say hi to you and you would jump out of your skin because you would not hear him.

While she expressed appreciation of his quiet and dignified manner, Covington admitted being dismayed by what she observed was the subservient way in which her parents responded to white people when she was growing up.

Both of my parents really disturbed me when they'd get around white folks and grin and laugh all the time. I read all these slave narratives about how it was a way of getting away from the grief that white folks could bring on you because you would smile, laugh and giggle at everything they said. I found my parents would do that a lot and they would always ask me why I was so angry.

My brothers brought it to my attention. An insurance man used to come to our house all the time to collect the money. He would come once a month and I used to be like "why can't you mail it?" and "why does this man have to come to our house?" He would always call my father "Jimmy Boy." Everything was, boy, boy, boy and my brothers used to get so mad. This was during the black panther period and black power. My brothers would say, "he is not supposed to call you boy" and go off but my father would just tell them to be quiet and that he could handle it.

Informants use past events and ideas to measure and evaluate contemporary conditions and personal progress. By

contrasting their experiences against those of parents and other elder kin and acquaintances, they are able to ascertain the significant ways in which things have changed over the decades and the topography of their own privileged existences.

Generational differences combined with variations in socioeconomic status have a huge impact on kin relations. This can oftentimes lead to differences in standpoint which can have major and minor ramifications. Regarding the latter, the mother of Natasha Newberry was uncomfortable eating in restaurants. Patrice Covington's mother had the same issue and also could not understand her daughter's love of antique furniture. "I'll buy you some new furniture," was her response every time she visited. The lifestyle and sensibilities of realtor Regina White were so unlike her mother's that she was given the moniker, "Mrs. Astor Puss." Like many of White's elder female kin, for many years her mother worked as a servant for a Euro-American family in Westchester County. One aunt worked for the wealthy Astor family. Use of this label was White's mother's way of poking fun at what elder kin thought were Regina White's peculiar tastes and habits like attending a spiritual retreat in New Mexico each year. White also thought it was her mother's indirect way of showing pride in her daughter's

professional accomplishments.

Earlier anthropological research on kin networks finds that one way people typically involve family in their daily lives is through relationships of exchange (Boissevain 1966). In her pivotal ethnography, Stack documented poor and working class African Americans recruiting participants for reciprocal gift-giving among relatives and friends who become defined as kin (1972). One of the ways I observed exchange relations with PMW and their kin involved helping a family member negotiate unfamiliar social terrain. This was particularly evident in interactions between informants and elderly kin. Women and men would sit in or direct discussions between elders and representatives of institutions and businesses such as lawyers, mortgage brokers, and/or insurance salespersons.

Brenda Green helped her elderly parents purchase a home in Long Island, New York. Not only did she lend her professional-expertise, Green also loaned her parents a portion of her savings to help them with the downpayment. She then hired a person to periodically clean their house now that her parents are physically unable to do so.

Jada Pinchot was another informant who assisted a family member. She moved her ailing mother into her large apartment years ago:

My mother came to live with me when I was living on 160th Street. I had a very large apartment and she had just been diagnosed with cancer. She and my stepfather were struggling financially; their house in Queens was falling apart. I just thought it was ridiculous to be, you know, about to die and still worrying about paying bills. I kind of pushed the issue because I just felt that maybe she could have some peace before she died.

Peggye Dilworth-Anderson, and other specialists in aging, culture and society, show that older African Americans are twice as likely as whites to receive care from family members when their health declines (Dilworth-Anderson, Williams and Cooper 1999). A four-year study currently being undertaken by Dilworth-Anderson looks at blacks taking care of relatives in North Carolina and has documented the tendency for working class kin to mobilize extended family networks to care for elders (Rimer 1998). According to this research, PMW readily relied on and paid for formal services to assist parents and other elderly kin. Similar findings were generated by the Institute on Aging at the University of New Hampshire. Dean of health and human services, Raymond T. Coward, found that blacks were twice as

likely as whites to have elderly kin move in with them (Rimer 1998). Women accept the role of caregiver for elderly parents more readily than do adult male children (Coward and Dwyer 1990). Although these practices may be common, they exact a toll on care-givers who often approach this endeavor with meager resources.

In my study, participants utilized formal and informal strategies to care for elderly kin. As a result, the composition of their households waxed and waned as family members came and went over time. Family sentiment and life cycle changes are two factors which contributed to these fluctuations. The pooling of resources and the exchange of services also fueled these processes. Sarah Goings maintained an extra room for her mother who made frequent visits to help her daughter and son-in-law care for their two young children. Johnetta Butler shared her four-story row house with her engineer son and attorney daughter who maintained separate apartments above her living quarters.

The household of Brenda and David Walker's is a blended family, composed of individuals related through biological and fictive ties. David formally adopted Brenda's twenty year old son from a previous marriage. Brenda refers to her house mate, Pauletta, as her sister although Pauletta is not a sibling but her brother's ex-wife. Rounding out the

household was Pauletta's adopted daughter Nkechi and Olu, the youngest son of Brenda and David Walker.

This home was headed by three working adults who shared the responsibilities of maintaining a household, running a business, and caring for children. Their interdependence enabled Brenda, David, Pauletta and their children to live in an attractive and well furnished house on an upscale Harlem block. With the escalating cost of real estate in Manhattan, it is their hope that this stately property will also serve as a good financial investment.

There were other instances where respondents shared their home or apartment with a relative in need. Craig Skyers let his cousin live with him for a period of time. The case of Patrice Covington reflected an even greater commitment to a family member. Covington's mother had legal custody of a granddaughter who lived with her in Syracuse, New York. Following her mother's tragic murder, Covington obtained custody of her niece, Belinda, and moved the young woman, her infant son, and teenaged boyfriend into the Harlem home she shared with her husband.

The help informants offered also came in the form of periodic phone calls, or financial assistance. Stories of aid and cooperation are only one aspect of these type of interactions. In other instances relationships with kin

across socioeconomic boundaries were characterized by tension and discord.

Following their mother's death, for example, problems developed between Patrice Covington and her male siblings. In their efforts to dispense with their mother's estate, heated arguments ensued about how the money should be distributed. Covington and her younger sister, Chantall, were in conflict with their marginally-employed brothers whose attempts to appropriate their family's inheritance was, in their opinions, motivated by greed and need. This conflict took a toll on Covington but, because her mother prepared a will making her eldest daughter executor of the estate, it was eventually resolved through the court system.

A number of other family conflicts were affected, not only by issues of socioeconomic differentiation, but also gender difference. Three female informants had brothers who, to quote one, "just couldn't get it together." The eldest of Brenda Walker's four brothers was in prison. She spoke to me about how she viewed this brother as a product of his environment:

My father was very negative when it came to the boys. Maybe because of his own personal lack of self-confidence, I don't know. But

he was very physical with them and with me as well until my mother stopped him from beating on me. I guess that is how he got his anger out. So in any event, my brothers, between having an unsupportive father and living upstate and being seen as something less than human by the people up there, had a serious impact on them. So my oldest brother ended up on drugs and he is in prison now in the Midwest. He has been there for a good ten years now and by the time he gets out he will probably end up [inaudible] because he is getting too old to do anything.

Her eldest brother wasn't the only sibling with whom she had problematic relations:

My youngest brother lives right here in New York. I do my very best to have as little contact with him as I can. Prior to this I was very involved in trying to get him to stop drinking and finally realized he was just using me and really didn't have any intentions of changing so I don't have contact with him right now.

When he calls, I don't even have a sense of empathy for him anymore. That is just how it is.

Another of Walker's brothers also had problems with substance abuse and has gone through recovery twice. He now lives in Oneonta, N.Y. and works as a truck driver. He owns his own home in this part of upstate New York.

Like Brenda Walker's case, relations between informants and male siblings were, in many cases, strained and infrequent. Some of the women expressed concern and sympathy for siblings who had persistent problems with unemployment, substance abuse or generally irresponsible or destructive behaviors. Covington was unapologetic as she described one of her brothers as shiftless and lazy.

Some of the hostilities between respondents and family members who had not experienced their professional successes involved farther reaches of the kin network. Craig Skyers regretted his decision to temporarily share his one-bedroom apartment with his younger cousin. Skyers walked about wanting to provide his cousin with a supportive environment, help him get a job, and offer a little independence from his mother, Skyers' aunt. Skyers became quickly disenchanted with his cousin's behavior, however, and terminated the

agreement when his cousin stopped pursuing the goals they discussed.

Patrice Covington ended the live-in arrangement she had with her niece, Belinda, her baby, and the baby's father, following a string of, what Covington and her husband described as, irresponsible behaviors. Patrice and Calvin Covington devised a plan for Belinda to follow which included attending job training sessions and getting the baby immunized, among other strategies. The Covingtons became increasingly frustrated when Belinda repeatedly failed to follow through on any of these "self-improvement" schemes. They were particularly perturbed when Belinda used social security checks to purchase expensive clothing and gold jewelry for herself and the baby.

Informants had a range of responses to these failed family arrangements. Women and men spoke compassionately about the siblings, uncles, and/or cousins who struggled through bad luck and the many difficulties associated with living in poverty. Some project participants expressed a desire for continued close involvement in the lives of kin while others were jaded to the point of avoiding any further suggestion of helping relatives who are experiencing social and economic difficulties.

This pattern of avoidance did not uniformly

characterize relations between PMW and their lower income kin, nor can I reduce the tensions between kin to socioeconomic difference alone. Gender plays a role in fostering conflict as brothers and sisters in this sample seem to have the most conflict. Female informants shared comments on how men and women are socialized differently by their parents. These sometimes diverging styles of upbringing may also be fostering conflict among adult siblings. Drug addiction is certainly a culprit although this is a social problem that affects people from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Hostilities and fractures between kin are affected by dissimilarities in age. Beneath what is seemingly rooted in class position are additional causal factors which drive relationships between members of kin networks, whether supportive or disharmonious.

CHAPTER SEVEN**Negotiating Socioeconomic Boundaries in Community Life**

In Harlem, interactions between informants and persons they were not formally acquainted with also took place across socioeconomic boundaries. Levels of heterogeneity in this community combine to create an environment teeming with cultural richness and diversity. Each day residents have interactions with people from different geographical regions or socioeconomic backgrounds and this would happen during such "everyday" occurrence as walking down the street or waiting for the subway. Neighbors may converse at the mail boxes in apartment building lobbies or while patronizing area businesses. In each of these settings I observed community members exchanging pleasantries and/or information.

One set of interactions taking place outside of the household and across socioeconomic boundaries occurred through tenant/landlord relations. These could be amicable but one informant told me about her legal action against a renter before I began my research. In other examples, African American nurses, social workers, and educators encouraged, ignored, taught, and/or argued with low-income blacks within the corridors of office buildings and

hospitals. I observed in this pre-natal care clinics, job training and WIC centers, as well as other areas where African Americans formally interact across barriers of economic stratum.

In other examples of such interactions, project participants would periodically hire handymen to make repairs in or around their homes. Janice Douchette and Louisa Mae Campbell paid men to shovel the snow and complete other odd jobs occasionally. As long-time Harlemites, both women knew most of the residents on their blocks. Campbell was retired and, hence, keenly aware of the comings and goings of many area residents. Elder respondents like her were particularly adept at using their windows, doors or front stairs to observe community activity. I stood with an older respondent on his Convent Avenue stoop one balmy early evening while he pointed out various neighbors as they walked down the street. He greeted most of them by name and would share with me some minor detail about their work or personality after they were out of earshot.

Participants from both urban communities and rural areas maintained relationships across socioeconomic boundaries with people from their old neighborhoods. In discussions with informants, I was told stories about old friends who didn't have a chance to go to college and about

how the old 'hood is "so terribly" affected by unemployment and hopelessness. During visits with extended kin respondents speak to or hear about childhood friends. A handful of participants, particularly men who grew up in Harlem, keep in touch with guys from the old block. Men and women use conditions in neighborhoods of their youth to measure their personal successes much like they compare the previous generations' experiences with racism and hardship to poignantly contrast their own lives. For many, these dissimilarities become forceful symbols of economic attainment. Some of the black professionals I spoke with reported a desire to avoid old acquaintances. Malik Harriston said he feels:

... uncomfortable with the differences between us. I feel like I am flaunting my success in their faces when I come around and that doesn't sit well with me. So many of these folks have made no progress at all and at this point, it ain't going to change. It is a system of inequality they are trapped in and in some ways, I represent that.

As both an ethnographer with HBR and a field researcher

engaged in doctoral study I did not find much evidence of resentment of African American professional-managerial achievement. Jennifer McDuff worked for the local chapter of a national civil rights organization in Harlem. With regard to class resentment she said:

I'm not going to say they don't exist but I have never personally experienced it. I really can't tell you what is going on between the people further down the block and the privately-owned, well-maintained brownstones. I get the impression that folks who walk out of the community in suit and tie and head for the subway or to call a car service may experience some of that on their way to and from work... you know, from the people sitting out on the street all day, glaring at them because they are going someplace and doing something that they are not.

Patrice Covington thinks too many of her fellow homeowners, "basically go to their jobs, then come home, step inside their door and rarely get involved with things out here in the community." She and her husband feel that young professionals in particular show a lack of interest in

community involvement.

When I go to meetings, its like I am the youngest one there. Everybody is older and has been in the community for a long time. They can tell you what it used to be like compared to what it is like now. When I first went to the community meeting, they looked at me like, who is she and what is she doing here. They thought I was coming to scope out for drug dealers because they said no young people ever come to meetings. I was like, "no, I bought a house up here and I want to be a part of the community." I want to help makes the changes that need to be made up here.

Covington said she did not resent her neighbors' prejudgment of her. She learned that many of them had personal experience with street crime and were motivated by fear. Despite the initially chilly reception, Patrice and Calvin Covington joined the Hamilton Heights Homeowners Association and the Adopt-A-Block Program within a month of moving to the community. By belonging to both groups, she was one of the few people on her block who was acquainted with both homeowners and apartment-dwellers.

Covington also helped mediate a dispute between one homeowner, a professional single mother, and area teens who played basketball next to her home. She used the case of her friend, Zakiyha Sterling, to support her belief that some increase in the involvement of neighbors in their Harlem Heights community has taken place. Sterling lived next door to an abandoned building and, after weeks being bothered by the young men who played ball under her window, she confronted them about the disturbance. When she complained that the noise was keeping her up at night, the young men said they were given permission to set up the hoop and play by a man who rents this building and plans to turn it into a restaurant. According to Covington, Sterling said:

Ok conflict resolution and they were like "what is this lady talking about?" She expressed her concerns saying she could hear them cursing sometimes up until 2 and 3 in the morning. She respectfully asked them to stop playing against her home and vowed to find where there was a safe place for them to play.

Sterling later told Covington that she felt so

empowered about the encounter with neighborhood youths that she planned on coming to the next community meeting to see where we can find a place for these kids to play basketball.

Approximately a third of all long-term participants I interviewed were actively involved in work as community volunteers. Kaetlin Tyson accompanied area children on weekly visits to the library as a way of promoting literacy and community involvement. Lawrence Parker organized a softball team for the children in his community. Through an active search for sponsorship, he was able to raise funds for equipment and uniforms. Attorneys Jason and Robin Jackson organized charitable events every year to raise money for young Harlemites to attend college. Community work put these informants in frequent contact with the poor and other working class people of their neighborhood. In most instances, such involvement was facilitated through the infrastructures of local churches.

While many informants expressed the belief that neighborhood involvement was important, the demands of work and family put limits on the ability of many to set aside time for community activism.⁸ Johnetta Butler also cited

⁸In *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (1992), Juliet B. Schor presents a powerful discussion of how Americans are working more for less, spending more time doing household chores and seeing their vacation time eroding. Schor argues that these are

apathy as a deterrent to greater involvement in community work.

A lot of people are concerned about the community but I also think people get tired. I have talked with people on this block who tell me that they used to be very active and they just saw no change. Unless the image of a place is changed, it is very difficult to fight. It is like going against the tide and eventually people sort of give in.

Butler has been involved in both remunerated and volunteer community work for more than two decades and had lived in Harlem for 16 years. A retired administrator for the Board of Education, she currently serves on a community board and contracts out her services as a consultant for the school system. She describes herself as very active in the community but is periodically tempted by the idea that she could "be bowling or on a island some place, not concerned with all of this stuff." Butler was particularly disconcerted about the drug-selling activity which takes place close to her house and expressed doubt about the

characteristics of advanced capitalism in North America are a departure from past patterns.

city's political will to change current conditions. In an expression of pessimism, she shared her belief that:

It can't be stopped. So, after a while you see drug dealers and you just go on about your business. You don't bother anymore because, how long can you fight it? You know you have other things to do. You have got to go to work, you have to come home, you want to relax, you have got to cook and you have got to raise your kids. Then you look at people who have gone before you and you say, well what did they do? They got out there and they worked really hard and the situation is still the same.

Sarah and Michael Goings became involved in their community after moving to Harlem from Queens around five years ago. They helped start a block association which has seen recent success in efforts to plant trees, establish better street lighting and replace a dump site with a green thumb garden. Much of this work was done by a small group of people who attended association meetings regularly. Sarah Goings' view of why more community members did not become involved pitted the sensibilities of newcomers

against residents who had lived in Harlem over a period of time. Her experience was the opposite of Covington's in terms of the role long-term residents play in homeowner associations.

We would have a core of five people at every meeting and other people would come to see what was going on but they don't want to work. They come like spies and then pass the word around. They are not doing anything to help and those are the people that have been here all of their lives and they don't want to do anything. It is the people that just moved in and bought property that want to see a change. Other people talk about change but they don't do anything about it.

Some residents were dissatisfied with the appearance of Harlem streets and how connected this to media portrayals and the community's reputation. Urban anthropology has documented how views about the built environment often reflect differences in class position with homeowners tending to view the spaces between the home and neighborhood as vulnerable and porous (Gregory 1998). In this context,

it is possible homeowners' concerns about maintaining property values is driving emphasis on these types of community-improvement strategies. In the case of Harlem, it is difficult to uniformly link this practice to class, however, because at least 25% of project participants do not own property and not all homeowners in Harlem are PMW. These type of complexities resist rigid categorization.

Potential links between socioeconomic status and notion of community work and improvement have implications for how current attempts at community revitalization in Harlem are discussed today. Neither attractive residential facades nor the personal successes of individual residents and business owners are valid indicators of sustained and wide-reaching community economic development. Without making simplistic connections, it is apparent that one of the ways antagonisms between persons from different strata are played out is in struggles over the use of "public space."

Johnetta Butler complained about "the amount of illegal activity that goes on around [pay] phones." She was tired of drug dealers on corners and in front of noisy bodegas, a term for Latino-run convenience stores which often stay open late. Patrice Covington had a long-running feud with small group of men who lived in apartment buildings across the street. During the summer months, these men would barbecue

or play cards and dominos in front her house. They would do this on tables and chairs they dragged from across the street to sit under the shade of a tree which stood at the entrance of her home. While Covington met a lot of resistance at first, she eventually convinced the men to cease their informal meetings in front of her home.

Brenda and David Walker had a similar problem on their block. In this case, male residents of an apartment building on Amsterdam Avenue would gather on the corner to grill and sell Caribbean jerk chicken. According to Brenda Walker:

The guys up at the corner are very good friends of my husband. They started cooking outside of this building, you know almost as if they are in Jamaica. Somebody cut these oil cans and they made these pits and started cooking jerk chicken. It didn't seem like it was going to be a problem but the people who own homes up at the corner said they couldn't open their windows because the smoke was coming into their homes and the smell.

That was the big thing on Monday evening. They

wanted them to be reported to the commissioner and the community board. At the next meeting someone plans to have a letter for community members to sign which they will send to everyone including the police. I didn't go to the meeting where this came up but my husband and sister did. When they got home I was livid. I thought you just can't report them, they are part of the block. I think it is only fair to hold another meeting with all parties present to hash this thing out and see if there can be a compromise. The last thing I want to do is to be seen as better than the people who are renting at the corner.

Walker thought it was a matter of respect to attempt to meet with vendors and resolve the conflict without involving city officials. She also understood the perspective of the residents of that corner for whom loud talking, beeping car horns, music was a nightly nuisance. Sometimes this continued until the early hours of the morning. Brenda Walker was torn between her allegiance to her neighbors and her understanding of the plight of the renters.

In other instances, informants used the socioeconomic differences between neighbors to their advantage. Dennis

and Mercy McNair traveled frequently and relied on a local "street hustler" who kept a look out for their home and car. As the eyes and ears of their block, he even updated them on the movements of two friends who house-sat for the McNairs while they were away. A variety of interactions occur and they resist oversimplified categorizations. Ethnographic research which narrows its focus on these topics would improve our understanding of these complexities.

The Social Construction of a Desirable Community

I frequently engaged project participants on the question of why they live in Harlem. I asked this during individual interviews and during a focus group discussion I organized which was attended by a small group of project participants who shared their feelings and observations about Harlem life one spring evening. Gathered this night in a church in Hamilton Heights were Kaetlin Tyson, Luwinda Charles, Craig Skyers, and Patricia Covington. Chauncy Powers a personal friend who had recently moved to central Harlem, was also a participant in the focus group.

Conversation and laughter flowed easily among these individuals who, with the exception of Craig and Chauncy, were not acquainted prior to this focus group meeting. The group spoke fondly about the "sweet old ladies" who observe

daily street activity from their windows. The women expressed loud amusement in discussing the young "brothers" who let you know you were looking good or the older "brothers" who informed you your slip was hanging or your dress was "hiked up".

Kaetlin Tyson gave the following explanation for why she lives in Harlem:

I like living in a place where people say good morning to you and really care. I like the mix of elderly people and I don't have to rely on the news media to tell me what's going on with black people because I live with them. I like the fact that I know drug addicts and winos. I wanted to be a part of our condition whether that be good or bad.

Anyway this is the mecca of black and this is the mecca of all things good that have ever gone on, with a historical bent that can't be beat. You know, it is something to hear that Ron Brown came from Harlem. Say he came from Poughkeepsie, we don't get the same bang for the buck. I'm here because I want to be entrenched with my people. I don't want to hear

about it from the media. I want to hear about it as I am walking to the train from the sisters in front of me. Many people share that view.

Craig Skyers also had feelings on this subject:

I think it is very relaxing to come home to Harlem. I have always lived in black neighborhoods, with the exception of being in college. It reminds me of some of those small southern towns because you don't have to leave Harlem, everything you need is up there.

Then there's the history. You know, the writers, artists, and all those people who came through, hey, I just want to be in the space they passed, and visit the places they went. I may want to sit in these spots just to see if I could hear what they heard because some of that is still there. That is some rich history. It feels real strange to hear white people say, wow you live uptown. Yeah, this is my neighborhood.

In a separate interview, community activist Sherill

Boston-Davis attested to the warmth of the people in the community. Never a Harlem resident, her comments are from the perspective of a person who has worked in this community for many years:

Every spring and summer the folks in the neighborhood come out of the buildings and pull up their chairs to sit out on Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard. Especially the senior citizens, they sit out and talk or play dominos, checkers or whatever. As you pass they ask, 'How are you doing today?' You are exchanging pleasantries and it is an everyday thing. They know who we are and who we work for. They let me know that Ms. so and so needs help down the street. 'Maybe yall could send somebody down there She can't get out of her apartment and I know she is hungry.' I tell them we will send a social worker down there and find out what is going on.

The portrait which emerged from all of these discussions was of a community which spoke to their origins whether these were Caribbean, urban, or of the rural south.

The atmosphere of Harlem evoked the black past of both individual history and that of the broader African American experience. For native-born and adult arrivees alike, this made Harlem a place both self-affirming and familiar.

Participants also discussed Harlem as a refuge from the daily grind of work life and its destructive effects on their psyches. The importance of this concern cannot be overstated. Medical experts have only scratched the surface in their movement toward understanding how the stress of living with racial inequality impacts African American physical and mental health. A discussion around the issue of race and a sense of well-being was initiated by Luwinda Charles and had everyone nodding in agreement:

I attended all white schools and lived in mixed communities in Ohio. Now I work with white people people all day long and I wouldn't live any other place. Really, you have to get away from them because you go through so much stuff with them every day. I don't care that Broadway is all Spanish-speaking. They are black and they are brown so I don't feel like people are looking at me in the wrong way.

All in attendance knew about people looking at them "in the wrong way." Before buying their home in Hamilton Heights, Calvin and Patricia Covington lived on the upper west side of Manhattan. They soon grew tired of white neighbors who treated them as threats to community safety. Patricia shared with me the humiliation and anger she and Calvin felt when neighbors called the police on them with reports of drug selling. This occurred while the couple waited inside their vehicle to move it upon termination of alternate side of the street-parking.

When she and Calvin were finalizing the purchasing of their 3-story home, co-workers would ask a number of questions. In addition to wanting to know if her husband was white (the assumption possible being you must have a white husband since you are purchasing a home), the main query was why Harlem? or why would you want to live there? She enumerated for focus group attendees the many factors which led her to Harlem:

Harlem has always had a mystique for me because I grew up in Syracuse, New York -- way up state. I got it all from books and I was like always like, when I grow up, I want to live in Harlem. That's where I wanted to live. So when I moved to New

York, I came to Harlem. I came by way of Central Islip, Long Island and I lived down by FIT where I went to school and then slowly headed west. We lived on 71st street for a while but I got sick and tired of white folks crossing the street when they saw me coming down the street. It was really frustrating and I was like, I don't want to be around 'yall any more than 'yall want me to be here. So I decided to go somewhere where people aren't going to cross the street when they see me coming.

Here you still get the elderly folks in the community walking up to you and saying, 'Hi baby. How you doing?' I want to hear that kind of language in my neighborhood, you know, people talking to me like I am welcome.

Patrice Covington's comments were met with reports of similar experiences from other informants. Chauncy Powers spoke of the psychological toll of receiving daily racial insults. "Especially in your home," commented Kaetlin, "where you want to relax and kick back." Reflected in these comments is the legacy of struggle for dignity and self-

worth which African Americans have engaged in for so long.

Realtor, and Harlem-native, had another perspective on why black professionals are moving to Harlem. In one of our two, long-distance phone conversations, White told me she had been working around the clock to show properties to black and white professionals so she knew that increasing numbers of African American PMW were relocating to Harlem. White was familiar with the idea that people claim it is the historical significance of the community that is attracting prospective residents but she believes the primary catalyst is the availability of affordable housing.

The majority of project respondents had the financial resources to reside any number of places in New York City. As the Covington's example indicates, several had formerly lived in other parts of Manhattan as well as the outer boroughs and surrounding suburbs before settling here. Antique dealer Dennis McNair moved from a quiet community in Westchester County to the Mt. Morris Park area. He recalled feeling empty and disinterested as he drove through the tree-lined, bucolic community in which he previously lived. The energy he felt moving through the streets of Harlem convinced him that this was where he should be. Harlem was a fast-paced village, which fed his senses in a manner that fostered excitement and belonging.

In addition to the emotional and ideological, there were aspects of community infrastructure which project participants also found as desirable aspects of Harlem life. Informants cited proximity to buses, subways, highways, and bridges and places of employment in midtown-Manhattan among these. Such access to mass transportation made commuting to work and visits to friends and kin in surrounding areas a lot easier. The stress of trips to the airport was minimized by proximity to Queens via the Triboro Bridge.

According to Luwinda Charles:

Riverside Drive is beautiful. I look out of my window and I see the river and the George Washington Bridge so that has got me hooked right there. The transportation is great. That is the reason I could come to work during the storm because all I do is walk half a block up the drive and up the hill to the train. The train takes me into the city and you also have buses on Broadway, so the transportation is tremendous. It is an ideal community in this regard.

In another area of concern, apartment dwellers spoke of getting more space while paying lower rents than what is

usually found in other parts of Manhattan. Similarly, homeowners talked of purchasing a home or building in Harlem as beneficial because of the low property taxes. Lawrence Parker found it amusing that his co-workers pay such high taxes in Yonkers and other parts of Westchester County. He feels incurring the cost of a private school education for his son is a reasonable price to pay for living in a community he and his wife both care about and feel comfortable in.

As with many areas, urban or otherwise, Harlem also has aspects of community life which detract from its appeal. While access to mass transportation is good, a common complaint is that the area has a shortage of grocery stores and retail outlets. Recently, however, an increasing number of clothing, book, and record stores have opened. At the time I was in the field, Latino-owned bodegas or convenience stores and green grocers substituted for supermarkets in this community. The opening of the Fairway, a large, discount grocery located on 133rd Street under the West Side Highway, has partially alleviated this problem. A Pathmark also opened on 5th Avenue in east Harlem but the community could certainly support more grocery stores.

Health food is also difficult to obtain in Harlem, although some of the green grocers may carry a few such

items. Project participants Eve Irons, Jada Pinchott and Patrice Covington are all vegetarian. Irons called one afternoon to ask me to drive her to a health food store in Brooklyn. She eats neither fish, eggs, red meat or poultry but she does eat cheese and milk. Mostly, however, she eats whole grains, fruits and vegetables. She also supplements her diet with a variety of vitamins, juices and herbal concoctions. Informants also complain about a dearth of dining and entertainment choices -- foods from the Caribbean and American south predominate among restaurant fare.

Crime is another concern of Harlem residents. Only a small number of participants reported having been directly confronted with this issue in the Harlem community. The Haskins family have been doubly affected by this issue. In addition to the previously mentioned, unlawful entry of a stranger into their home, Lashandra Haskins also told me of the shooting of her father, Robert Haskins, which occurred when he walked to nearby Amsterdam Avenue to get Chinese take-out for dinner. Thankfully, he did not die in this violent encounter.

Luwinda Charles reports "feeling safe" because, "there are always people out, I don't care what time you go out." She has had a few encounters with criminals, however. In one incident she described how she was:

...coming in the house and this kid crept up behind me. I have the habit of closing the main door to the building but didn't this time. He ran in and tried to snatch my bag. When someone else came he ran away. I didn't have anything in it but the bag was worth a lot. I also had my car stolen from Riverside Drive years and years ago.

During a precinct meeting which was organized by the Mt Morris Park Community Improvement Association, residents discussed their apprehension about occurrences of burglaries, muggings, car thefts, and murders. Although I did not encounter any project participants who voiced this concern voluntarily or in response to my questions on the subject, most did take steps to avoid victimization. These included installing bars on their windows and taking cabs late at night rather than public transportation. Such precautions are not unique to PMW, however. Many others in the community would take them if they had the incomes to do so regularly.

Patrice Covington discussed the lack of street cleaning which occurs and the increased burden in fines her neighbors must bear as an additional drawback to Harlem life:

Compared to when I was living downtown [not in Harlem], sanitation is not very conscientious. You are lucky if you even see a street cleaner. They give us fines constantly up here about the garbage staying in front of our buildings. They don't clean the street like they are supposed to which makes it harder for us. By law we are responsible for cleaning eighteen inches into the street. So we do that but the wind blows up here all of the time - what am I supposed to do, hire some one to clear in front of my house on a continual basis? And then when you go downtown to talk to sanitation about it there's all this bureaucracy and when I'm down there I see a whole lot of people from up here in Harlem. I don't hardly see anybody else. I said, well maybe this is like Harlem week or something. You've got all these homeowners when they should pick on people who own these big apartment buildings.

Social observers have written about the centrality of home ownership and investment protection in shaping both middle stratum identity formation and political strategies

(Gregory 1992; Haynes 1996). Census 2000 may provide more answers to the question of how property values have or have not increased in central and west Harlem. The connection between class and property ownership is tenuous in this case, however, because only a small portion of the PMW I met were homeowners and I encountered many homeowners who were not PMW.

The decision to whether or not to purchase a particular piece of property is influenced by the potential for reaping a profit upon eventual resale. Indeed, this consideration is often of as much importance in buying a home as the quality of area schools and neighborhood safety. Regarding this concern, purchasing property in Harlem poses a number of risks for prospective home buyers. The community does not have a positive public image around the issues of crime and the access to good schools. Moreover, the presence of African American residents, whether professional or otherwise, has not been synonymous with increasing housing prices in the US historically. Given this context, the economic benefits of investing in residential property in Harlem may be questionable. Race combines with class to create unpredictable conditions and outcomes.

CHAPTER EIGHT**Conclusion: Race, Class, History, and Identity**

African American PMW are viewed as having a rejuvenating and stabilizing effect on urban communities. Conversely, their absence is credited with hastening urban decay. As I have noted, one way in which the presence of a black middle stratum is believed to benefit the larger population in urban black communities is through the vaguely-conceived process of role modeling (Anderson 1990). In emphasizing the significance of the current "revitalization process," Horowitz also reports that Harlem lost its positive role models when black PMW left the area in droves during the 1970s (1997). This writer portrayed the "black middle class" as the cornerstone of both the community's economic vitality and its psyche.

Although this perspective is common, it falls short on a number of grounds. One reason this idea is problematic is that it assigns a normative behavioral status to PMW and implies that this population exhibits responsible behavior more readily than do African Americans from low-income households. Project participants often echoed this sentiment when they talked about the need to recreate communities of the past where middle and upper strata blacks set the example for the low-income blacks living in their

same communities. As discussed in the literature review, however, historical and contemporary studies exploring of resistance and respectability in black working class life suggest alternative views (Dunier 1992; Kelly 1995).

Privileging PMW negates the contributions of lower-income working class women and men in the areas of wage work, community activism and moral guidance. This process of erasure reduces Harlem's non-professionals to an indistinguishable group composed of "the working poor, the welfare-dependent, and a constituency of brewing dysfunction" (Horowitz 1997). Both the 1990 census and my field observations contradict such a narrow view of Harlem residents. Moreover, the middle class as role model paradigm is historically inaccurate in that it ignores the ways African Americans have used a high socioeconomic status to segregate themselves within black communities.

Patrice Covington observed that many of the black professional Harlemites she knew limited their interactions with low-income blacks in the community. The mere presence of individuals from this stratum is not sufficient to transform urban conditions alone. Importantly, a little over a third of women and men in this study were actively engaged in community work. Overburdened with the responsibilities of job and family, few have reached out to fellow residents in this manner. It is primarily through

heightened involvement in community institutions that PMW can help facilitate urban social change.

Most of the women and men in my study were raised in kin networks dominated by poor and working class African Americans and this also raises problems about the notion of black PMW as normative. The values for delayed gratification, loyalty and hard work have been widely exhibited by their less privileged kin extending back generations. Through individual example and direct lesson, family members have been influential in transmitting these values. More important, it is through opportunity that respondents are able to actualize these lessons.

I did observe role modeling occurring within households and described some of the steps PMW took to help kin who did not have their advantages. In some cases there was a positive impact but in many instances good intentions were not enough to cause sustainable change in either the perspectives of family members in need or in the material conditions of their lives. It is apparent that upward mobility is facilitated largely through access to resources over time, more so than the awareness of or even proximity to success stories.

Despite the socioeconomic diversity in PMW kin networks and the Harlem community, my observations of informants and their interactions with friends indicated that when

socializing, the majority sought the company of people like themselves. Close friendships existed primarily between individuals who shared their experiences being college-educated and professionally employed, among other traits and values. The urban African American middle strata is not physically isolated from the black poor and low-income working class but there is an experiential disjuncture which pulls against the bonds of race and shared history.

Opportunity, standpoint and quality of life differences create social conditions whereby individuals who occupy unequal positions in the socioeconomic hierarchy negotiate relations which can be simultaneously dependent and conflictual; mutual and divergent. These observations support my sense that class among urban, African Americans is processual and contradictory.

Breaks and Continuities: The Ethnographic Present and History

At points throughout this dissertation I refer to the miscellaneous links and fissures which exist between my ethnographic data and events or conditions of the past. The diversity among blacks in cities today, for example, mirrors the variety which typified urban African American communities of old. Also constant is the persistent strife produced by the unequal distribution of power, privilege and prestige based on the social construction of blackness in the U.S.

The perpetuation of racism is the glue that anchors the past to the present. As racism intersects with class inequality it creates new and complicated social configurations. Black PMW may not be shielded from racial profiling, for example, but many of them have the surplus incomes and expanded world-views which allow them to embrace expanded or non-traditional beliefs and practices. In this way, both breaks and continuities are apparent in their life experiences.

Black's anxieties and prejudices over skin color is another old issue. The literature review indicated that discord and trepidation over complexion has been an issue for centuries. Intra-racial color problems result from white supremacy and its role is facilitating the past ascendance of "mixed-race" African Americans into positions of power and prominence. Euro-American dominance has also had a negative impact on black aesthetics and self-esteem. This study documents informants discussing and experiencing color prejudice in their interactions with other African Americans in Harlem.

I also observed new twists on old patterns occurring in Harlem. One example of this is the centrality of African Americans in the process of gentrification. The influx of young professionals into a "blighted," urban area most often involves whites. The presence of African Americans in this process indicates some degree of experiential confluence as

shown by black professional's replication of behavioral patterns commonly associated with whites.

The fact that African Americans are symbolically or literally returning to Harlem also indicates a reworking of traditional emphases on integration as a strategy for upward mobility. The social climate is shaped in sociocultural and political-economic cycles with the present influenced by the post World War II struggle for racial equality followed by the backlash by whites against it. Now African Americans are involved in a backlash of their own of sorts which fosters a heightened motivation to residentially pursue "their own kind." Those engaged in this process who are homeowners have been receiving the most attention, but many of these are also apartment dwellers who lack the money to purchase a home in Harlem.

These developments point to two additional patterns which distinguish the present from the past. Housing costs were so high in Harlem after the turn of the century that blacks were forced to direct large portions of their funds toward the payment of rent (Ovington 1911). Currently, however, informants find rents to be less expensive than other parts of Manhattan. What does seem to be increasing is the price of purchasing a home in communities of Central and West Harlem. Further differentiating today from decades past is the influx of white professionals into this area. I met

and interacted with Euro-American Harlem residents while attending homeowner association meetings and during summer house tours. During my years as a qualitative researcher in Harlem, all of the Euro-American residents I met were homeowners and not renters. It also apparent that, like blacks, they too are attracted to the quality and appearance of the housing stock, as well as the proximity of Harlem to other strategic locations such as airports, New Jersey and midtown Manhattan.

Vying with racism as the most consequential, fixed element in this constellation of conditions and events is the historical significance of this place called Harlem. In the making of African American urban, artistic and political-economic belonging, this series of communities in northern-Manhattan has served as a potent symbol for what blacks in American cities can possibly achieve. Conditions in Harlem have also attested to the negative impact of racism and neglect. In this way, our discussion of breaks and continuities has come full circle.

Constructing Belonging and Negotiating Difference

I sat with project participants one evening as we readied ourselves for a focus group discussion in a Harlem church. While awaiting the arrival of the final participant, Patrice Covington turned to me and asked why I thought the

subject of the African American "middle class" was an important one. The skepticism expressed in her furrowed brows connoted a view I had encountered more than once in the field. Covington wasn't sure the middle stratum experience was consequential enough in black life to merit this kind of attention. Her doubt is an example of how African Americans interpret socioeconomic status in ways uniquely colored by their collective experiences with racial inequality, both presently and historically.

Regina White maintained putting blacks into the middle class category was much like:

Putting a round circle in a square hole. We have a hard time getting away from the memories of what it was like to grow up. So we may have some mobility, a summer place, having the ability to take a vacation or send your kids to a private school. I have been able to achieve all that and trust me, I have no money. I am making tremendous sacrifices and, yes, there is a certain comfort level but yet I don't think many of us are operating off of a daily level of comfort. We have daily struggles which challenge our level of comfort.

Jada Pinchot thought my dissertation was on an

interesting topic because:

The black middle class is not financially well-off. Middle class status has more to do with being bourgeoisie than anything else.

When asked what she meant by this, she stated that black PMW have only a superficial lifestyle but that the "real" components to "middle class life" such as financial security remain elusive.

My use of the concept of PMW reflects the view that the participants in this study are not members of a grouping distinct and separate from the working class. They occupy a position that is an extension of the working class position. More specifically, the women and men who participated in my study are elite members of the working class population. Two central findings support this theoretical position.

The first pertains to where informants are structurally situated in the socioeconomic hierarchy. The majority of the PMW I encountered are wage workers. They are salaried employees who must perform a service for a person or institution in order to be remunerated. Even those who are self-employed shift in and out of wage work. Eve Irons and Mercy McNair did this and both Regina White and Johnetta Butler who worked as an event planner and consultant,

respectively, were not being paid through the extraction of surplus value from the labor of others. What characterized both women as self-employed was their independence and creativity in devising income-generating activities for themselves. None of the people in this category worked full-time, 9 to 5 jobs.

The women and men who participated in my study are people who must work for a living. As PMW specifically, they are professionals and managers who labor in a class system. They have more prestige, education and income earnings than lower-level workers. They have better access to resources, distinct patterns of consumption, higher wages and more opportunities to accumulate wealth, however, in a fundamental way, they are not unlike those workers who are not professional-managerial because, when compared to the ruling class, they are forced to sell their labor for subsistence. I acknowledge this relation to capital that PMW and non-professional workers share through the use of the terms socioeconomic stratification and socioeconomic status rather than class.

The second justification for my theoretical view is that despite similarities, fragmentation also makes lumping informants into one social class difficult and occupational diversity is a key component to this. PMW have varying roles in the economy. Some, like advertising executives, bankers,

and a host of others, work to facilitate capital accumulation while others attempt to subvert this process or undo the damage. The former are upper level corporate executives and governmental managers, as well as persons working their way up the managerial-ladders in either the private or public sectors, who may, at least superficially, share the imperatives of capital. The work of significant numbers of others', a portion of whose incomes are generated by the state, involves non-profit concerns.

There are also generational and residential differences to document key differences among the experiences of PMW. These elements influence material condition, mobility strategies and ideology, as well as foster the creation of a dispersed population of African American professionals. Such varied economic and cultural conditions are generated through this process, this is an important part of what prevents this grouping from exhibiting definable or uniformly "middle class" socioeconomic patterns.

Socioeconomic divergence among professionals on one hand and lower income African American Harlemites on the other does have important implications for quality of life issues. However within this framework, access to social capital, aesthetic tastes and leisure activities which set PMW a part are not consequential enough to lead to the theoretical formulation of distinct classes. Again, informants are

operating within a class system but they occupy asymmetrical positions in the socioeconomic hierarchy and not separate classes. The primary class differential exists between workers and those who absorb profits from social labor.

One set of criteria social analysts have used to delimit class positions center on the extent to which populations collectively advocate for their political and economic interests (Aronowitz 1979). An example of African American PMW organizing to implement or maintain policies to narrowly benefit themselves would fit this description. Members of the ruling class have used money and political influence to implement policies beneficial to their interests. Unions provide workers with the opportunity to wield political influence and articulate shared needs and ideologies.

The literature review indicates that African American professionals have worked alongside and led other blacks in the push for policies which would lead to broad-based societal reforms. Mitigating the view that affirmative action and similar policies were designed by the black middle class to benefit them solely is the fact that the push for greater representation in the professions and more access to higher education have all along been part of a broader strategy which included job training, early childhood education, school nutrition and remedial education. These schemes are meant to offer remedies to racism which reach

across socioeconomic strata in African American communities.

Some social observers point to homeowner's associations and professional organizations as vehicles for advocating professional-managerial interests (Gregory 1998). During my field work, for example, I documented members of a homeowner's association in Harlem rallying against the proposed establishment of a home for African refugees in their midst. On the surface, this could be viewed as an example of middle class people acting out their community concerns as an economic class. This study has shown, however, that home ownership does not necessarily correspond to professional-managerial positioning. I met homeowners who were laborers, retired domestic workers and factory employees and other individuals who worked hard, saved and were lucky and/or business savvy enough to accumulate property. I met one couple who lived in a house in Hamilton Heights that was previously owned and occupied by a Euro-American woman for whom an aunt of the couple worked as a domestic servant. The white woman did not have any kin to leave the house to so she left it to her black maid. There were many components to home ownership and all of them could not be reduced to class.

Generational variation also has a huge impact on the lives of project participants. Age influenced the content of historical memory, type of work engaged in, and, to some degree, the use of community resources. My interactions with

elders of the community indicated a generational component to viewpoints about socioeconomic stratification. Negative views of the black poor, for example, were more openly expressed among older residents. Older women, in particular, attributed many of the difficulties experienced by lower-income women and men to a "culture of poverty" chain of events and conditions.

The younger segment of project participants, those ranging from 25 to 40 years of age, were critical of the "black middle class" label and less likely to embrace it. A few discussed how they associate this label with the idea of a "black bourgeoisie," which they viewed as apolitical, uncaring, and overly concerned with upward mobility and the outward indicators thereof. Many elders, on the other hand, seemed to embrace this notion of blacks needing to be "a credit to their race" whereas the post World-War II generation seemed to have abandoned such concerns.

Age-based ideological divergences in this black community were made particularly apparent during a focus group meeting. One participant repeatedly used the phrase middle class values to describe what she referred to as African American core virtues regarding a strong work ethic, good child rearing, and overall "proper" behavior. A discussion on this subject followed Patrice Covington's comments on her early experiences after moving to New York

City from upstate New York. She expressed surprise at the number of children she saw hanging out on street corners. She wondered aloud why it seemed so few adults were involved in taking these kids to a park, library, or museum, "most of which cost them nothing", she said. Covington didn't understand why, in a city that offers so many free activities, adults didn't expose the children to more. The following discussion is a portion of what followed from her comment. It revisits the issue of ideology.

Luwinda Charles: That is because you have middle class values.

Craig Skyers: Is wanting exposure to something new a middle class value? You mean because I read a book that makes me middle class or because I go to a museum that makes me middle class? I don't think so.

Luwinda Charles: I didn't mean that in a discouraging way because I think that even those people who are struggling may have middle class values even if they don't know where the next meal is coming from. What I define as middle class values, I think, is working hard and playing by the rules.

I work with a man who was just promoted to Senior

Vice President and I took him to lunch the other day. I always thought he grew up in Scarsdale or something but he didn't. He grew up in the projects with a single mother who worked two jobs. He told me how he met her at the bus stop every night at 11:00 to walk her home. She was working two jobs. He went on to attend a prep school, Dartmouth and then Harvard Law now he's a bank Vice President and he is only 45 years old. He grew up with middle class values.

Chauncey Powers: But if you can be poor and still have those values, why label them as middle class? That is not a label I aspire to and I really don't see how being a hard worker and being career-driven means that I have middle class values. I am not sure what that means and if middle class values are so good then I guess upper class values are even better?

Kaetlin Tyson: I think the idea of middle class values is very superficial. Things may look very nice on the outside but if you get inside people's homes people are living in filth and I don't just mean in terms of cleanliness, but in terms of how they are dealing with each other.

Patrice Covington: I think the fact that we associate certain positive behaviors with the middle class relates to how blacks are portrayed in the media. We don't know about the accomplishments are regular black people so when they act in what is thought of as an appropriate way, it is labeled middle class behavior instead of just black behavior.

Luwinda Charles was the only focus group participant in her fifties and the only person arguing in favor of this notion of middle class values. Younger participants were less rigid in their ideology and reluctant to use the label middle class to refer to themselves. I attribute this to a few factors. One was the superficiality many associated with being a member of "the middle class." Another possible cause for the disjuncture was the distrust young professionals periodically felt was directed toward them by older community members. I discussed how the elders of the Hamilton Heights Homeowners Association admitted their suspicion that Patrice Covington was a drug dealer in an earlier chapter.

Clarissa and Lawrence Parker said it took a while for neighbors to warm up to them when they moved into their upscale Harlem block. Attributing some of this to the color prejudices of some light-skinned African Americans against darker blacks, the couple said some neighbors would not even

say hello to them when they first moved in. "Once they know you are a professional" commented Leroy, "they get more interested."

The Parker's experience undercuts simplistic notions of both racial and class cohesiveness and unity, but is more in line with a historical record which is replete with examples of distancing and intra-racial segregation based on skin color and socioeconomic status. The historical and ethnographic data presented here indicate that race has not created a monolithic African American populace, but has generated some experiential similarity regarding shared minority status and a collective disenchantment with racism.

The process of constructing belonging and negotiating difference involves interpretations of interactions between project participants and their kin and neighbors, power relations and the impact of structural inequalities, historical memory and realities of group fragmentation. It is also fostered by PMW forced confrontation with a series of social dualisms: among the dichotomies African American PMW must deal with regularly are privilege vs racism; obligation vs distancing in kin relations; independence vs adhering to

tradition; alienation vs. acceptance; prioritizing work vs prioritizing community and family.

* * * * *

In the months after my field research ended and I left New York City, I began to see an increasing amount of attention being given to the presence of African American PMW in Harlem. There were depictions of this "new" PMW presence on television and in interior design magazines. *Metropolitan Home* did a cover story on a stylish Harlem residence (February 1999) and on the cable networks The Style Channel and Home and Garden Television (HGTV), air time was devoted to profiling restaurants, local artists, business owners and Harlem history. During Black History Month, HGTV broadcasted a thirty-minute special on Harlem's professional population which was depicted as absent from the area up until this point.

In addition to talking about the lifestyles and professional accomplishments of the women and men shown, the segment also focused on the architectural structure of their homes and the design elements used on interiors. A central part of the depiction was the documentation of this new influx of young, black professionals currently taking place in the community. While watching and recording the show on my video cassette recorder I saw interviews with people I met

and spoke with in the field. It was an unusual experience to watch participants in my study as they appeared on national television talking about their community work and income-generating activities.

The attention Harlem residents have been receiving on television is connected, in part, to trade in the home furnishings industry. These businesses are in constant search to quench consumers' thirst for unusual and beautiful objects. Many of the African American women and men profiled in these stories were architects, artists, and designers of clothing, jewelry and interiors. These are occupations where new opportunities appear to be opening up for black entrepreneurs. Internet commerce has created new spaces for generating income in these areas, as are the music and film industries.

Given such recent developments, the focus on Harlem in this media milieu is timely. It is possible that these media depictions of black PMW in Harlem are motivated by the "irony" of finding such talented and educated people in this "ghetto" setting. It is also true that this type of curiosity about processes of cultural production engaged in by contemporary black artists harkens back to the literary and artistic renaissance for which this community is internationally known. African American expressive culture has been central to the formation of American popular culture

for centuries so, from this perspective, some may argue that this focus on black craftspersons, artists and designers is an old story. This range of explanations speak to the question of historical specificity. Are we looking at patterns consistent with the past regarding race, class and culture or are we witnessing developments which are altogether new?

After my return from the field I also read reports crediting retailers and young, black professionals with orchestrating a cultural and economic revitalization of Harlem which began circulating in the print media. A *New York Magazine* story highlighted the major players involved in efforts to "rebuild Harlem" (Horowitz 1997). This article also gave credence to common misconceptions about socioeconomic differentiation in urban, African American communities. Forecasts for economic promise are generated by the reports that large, retail franchises such as Tower Records and The Gap will follow the lead of Blockbuster, The Body Shop, Rite Aid and others to locate in and around Harlem's 125th street shopping district. *The Village Voice* reported that the managing agent for the United House of Prayer brokered the deal which brought the Duane Reade drug store chain to this uptown community. Executive director of the company, Bruce Weitz, "promised to staff the store, about 35 positions, with Harlem residents as much as possible"

(Ards 1995).

Development schemes for a Harlem International Trade Center may have been scrapped in the wake of George Pataki's ascendancy to the governorship, but plans to turn the block where Frederick Douglass Boulevard, 124th street and St. Nicholas Avenue meet into Harlem USA -- a 6-story, retail complex which will include banks, a 12-screen movie house, an ice rink, HMV records, a Disney store, and other businesses, culminated in a grand opening during the summer of 2000.

Stories of an economic upsurge in Harlem reach beyond New York City and the tri-state area. An article in *The Washington Post*, referred to the community as "America's best-known ghetto," and reported that Harlem has become New York City's top tourist destination, surpassing the Empire State Building (Grunwald 1999). In line with recent depictions of New York City now as a pleasant and safe place to visit or live, this story linked the falling crime rate to the arriving "retail boom" in Harlem. Published and broadcasted nationally, these stories assign credibility to policies of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani by linking the work of his administration to alleged improvements. They also imply that conditions have improved in New York since the ousting of its first African American mayor, David Dinkins.

These business deals are, in part, due to a series of initiatives which involve the use of tax incentives to

promote private investment in Harlem and other communities. The Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone, as this program is known, entails the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's provision of a grant for 100 million dollars, to be matched by equal donations from New York City and the State for a total of 300 million dollars. According to its website, the money has been allotted to "revitalize distressed communities" in East, West and Central Harlem, Inwood, Washington Heights and parts of the South Bronx with the funding of 29 projects and the creation and retention of 2,400 jobs (www.UMEZ.org).

This initiative is viewed by proponents as a central force behind Harlem's resurgence because, like enterprise zones of the past, it will provide businesses millions of dollars in tax breaks as a strategy for attracting capital to this area. Supporters such as Congressmen Charles Rangel and others maintain the money will help these impoverished neighborhoods lure private-sector investment with job training, low-interest loans, and tax incentives for small businesses (Ards 1995)

At the time this research began, these changes were in the initial stages. It remains to be seen what growth retailers see in their profits over the next few years as a result of opening businesses in Harlem. The availability of a wider selection of goods will certainly be a welcome

change, especially if they are made available at reasonable cost. The dearth of grocery stores, in particular, has been a concern for community members. How will Harlemites benefit from these development schemes in any broad sense? An increased number of businesses selling food, for example, will not necessarily correlate with other quality of life improvements. The concerns of Harlemites living in substandard housing, grappling with underemployment, and dealing with poorly resourced schools should be taken into account.

The proposed job growth associated with this retail boom is enticing to many, although issues like work safety, job security and the provision of living wages will need to be evaluated critically before the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone can be celebrated as an economic victory for the grassroots. These considerations make it apparent that the unemployed and working poor of Harlem will not automatically see marked improvements in their lives based simply upon the achievements of business owners and PMW. Moreover, the fact that only a small number of Harlem business owners are African American or of African descent, has not gone unnoticed by members of the community.

This study is a preliminary examination of a particular segment of urban, African Americans. My areas of inquiry are broad and this ethnography presents data which was gathered

in the early 1990s, before this influx of PMW was statistically verified. To further our understanding of events and changes in Harlem, additional comparative data is needed from other cities across the U.S., as well as information on suburban, African American life. Even in the case of Harlem, more specifics are needed on the role of both churches and political action in class formation and action. Answers to questions about the involvement of PMW in grassroots, community development is also necessary. A narrower focus will generate more details and allow us to critically evaluate the findings presented here. It is my hope that increasing numbers of anthropologists will study the contours of this, and other, neglected populations in cities. Being mindful of group fragmentation and the role of capitalist power relations will enhance our endeavors to document social processes which shape experience and foster ideology.

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