

WINTER 2019

# Hourglass Quarterly



**JOBS, EDUCATION & POVERTY**

**VANISHING MIDDLE CLASS**

**NEW URBANISTS' EXCEPTION**

**FARM PRESERVATION**

# JOBS, EDUCATION, AND POVERTY

## Concentrated poverty is a serious problem

Concentrated, persistent, intergenerational poverty in the poorest neighborhoods of American cities means unemployment, drugs, crime, gun violence, boarded-up storefronts, empty houses, broken families, health struggles, and rampant despair.

There was a time when cities were places of opportunity, attracting poor people with the prospect of improving their lot in life. And for many people, they were able to move upward. Today, poor people find themselves trapped by high housing costs, poor education, the lack of jobs along with any real hope for a path out of poverty. People who live in areas of concentrated poverty are typically trapped to live there from generation to generation.

**"The parent was unable to attain a quality education, and thus was unable to find a well-paying job and wound up in poverty. The child, still living in that same area, is also suffering from not having a quality education and the results are the same: re poverty."**

*Global Research*

Living in a depressed community makes it difficult for adults to find employment and harder for children to develop the skills necessary for success. The notion that forcing work requirements on Medicaid recipients appears flawed because most poor people work – nearly two out of three families living in poverty include at least one worker.



For low-skill workers from the inner city, jobs are not a solution. They are part of the trap. The well-paying factory jobs of fifty years ago, which offered people with little education a step up into the middle class, have long since disappeared.

Today, there are very few well-paying jobs for people without much formal education or specialized skills. And, good jobs are usually far from people's homes, and public transportation is inadequate. In Newark, New Jersey, three out of four residents work outside the city, nearly half of all poor workers rely on public transportation to get to work. For many inner-city residents, getting to work in the suburbs may involve a fifteen-minute walk to the nearest bus stop, two different bus rides, and another ten-minute walk to the worksite -- taking from one to two hours each way. The inner city alternative is a minimum wage job, unpredictable hours, no job security, and little hope of covering family expenses.



Children are often moving from place to place and from school to school, going to inadequate schools, and subject to the constant peer pressure of the street. They are continually exposed to drugs, guns, violence, and death, resulting in self-hatred, loss of trust in the community, feelings of insecurity, and tattered moral values. If they are among the lucky few that survive the violence and escape incarceration, they rarely end up with either a formal education or the soft skills needed to continue to higher education or to get and hold a stable well-paying job.

Surprisingly, there are more jobs available in large cities than workers who live there. Most of the people who work in large cities don't live there. In Newark, New Jersey, 106,000 people come into the city to work every day, and every day 63,000 workers leave the city for jobs in the suburbs or other nearby cities. As low-income families remain stuck in cities due to housing costs, inadequate public transportation, and discrimination, the jobs have been moving to the suburbs.

There is a jobs/education mismatch, where more and more jobs require higher education or other specialized skills, which most city residents lack. Over one-third of all jobs in Cleveland are held by college graduates, but fewer than one out of six adults living there have a college degree. There are other problems faced by inner-city job seekers – they often lack sufficient skills that even low

-skill jobs require – reading, writing, math, and communications skills, as well as soft skills such as work ethic, attitude, ability to relate to co-workers and customers. These soft skills are typically not part of the street culture in high poverty communities. Other hurdles are the fact that many companies don't hire people with criminal records, and want employees with cultural compatibility – someone who will fit in.



The heart of the challenge for American cities is sustained, concentrated multigenerational poverty, which is feeding growing polarization between rich and poor, and between black and white residents. The poor are stuck in the poverty trap, not benefiting from their cities' revival, and need help in breaking out of the trap for themselves and their children. Solutions will require ongoing political will. **H**

*Edited from the book The Divided City  
by Alan Mallach*