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*Review Essay*

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**Race, Class, and Eyes Upon the Street: Public Space, Social Control, and the Economies of Three Urban Communities**

Dalton Conley<sup>1,2</sup> and Miriam Ryvicker<sup>1</sup>

**Code of the Street.** *Elijah Anderson.* New York: Norton, 1999.

**Sidewalk.** *Mitchell Duneier.* New York: Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 1999.

**Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class.**  
*Mary Pattillo-McCoy.* Chicago: University of Chicago, 1999.

**INTRODUCTION**

Jane Jacobs has recently become the most popular, pop sociologist around. There has been a spiked resurgence of media interest in her 1961 urban studies classic, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. This may be due partly to the recent release of her new book, *The Nature of Economies*. But there is probably something more to it. For journalists, Jacobs' account of the neighborhood life of New York City's Greenwich Village of the 1950s seems to induce nostalgic longings for a greater sense of community. The bustling, narrow streets Jacobs describes were filled with both small shops and tenement residences, with hoards of pedestrians engaged in both business and sociability, and with strangers and lifelong inhabitants alike. This apparent chaos was actually a ballet of multitudes and Jacobs uncovered the latent order that undergirded the community.

It is not just the mainstream media that have rediscovered Jacobs, however. Her arguments have surfaced in several recent ethnographies of city life in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. In Mitchell Duneier's *Sidewalk*

<sup>1</sup>New York University, 269 Mercer Street #445, New York, New York 10003.

<sup>2</sup>To whom correspondence should be addressed; e-mail: dalton.conley@nyu.edu.

the connection is made explicit; in the others it is implicit. However, urban America has changed dramatically since the time Jacobs penned *Death and Life*; for example, today substantial homeless populations play a major role in the street life of major American cities. Perhaps more important, forty years ago Jacobs hardly mentioned race. Today, it is arguable that race is the master status that colors—so to speak—street life in a way that was unimaginable then. Whatever the civil rights movement did or did not do to advance the cause of racial equality, it almost certainly has changed the way that blacks and whites interact in the public spaces that make up American cities. Even though urban neighborhoods are only marginally less residentially segregated than they were in 1961, the echoes of integration in other spheres can be heard in the public spaces of white and black urban neighborhoods.

In fact, Duneier studies the very same streets that Jacobs wrote about four decades earlier. Although the Greenwich Village of her day was a mosaic of ethnic populations, it was largely white and middle-class. Today the vast majority of residents are still white, but they are now quite wealthy by American standards. At the same time the pedestrian population is markedly more integrated by race and more stratified by class. From this new reality, new forms of social control emerge. Given that Jacobs' "eyes upon the street" now come in many shapes and colors (and some even live on the streets), the relationships between formal and informal mechanisms of social control are different than they were in her days. For Duneier's Greenwich Village, the changes are quite dramatic—as evidenced by the conflicts between homeless, black sidewalk vendors and a local police force that, ironically, tends to demographically resemble the population of the 1961 Village about which Jacobs wrote. At the same time public space has diversified, and opportunities available to African Americans in the mainstream economy that were not present in 1961 have apparently created new tensions within black communities. Divisions have formed between those who attempt to overcome the still formidable obstacles to traditionally defined socioeconomic success and those who, in the face of continued racial oppression, reject that quest in favor of other paths to self-sufficiency and security. Two recent ethnographies of very different communities—*Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class*, by Mary Pattillo-McCoy, and *Code of the Street*, by Elijah Anderson—address this tension as it spills onto public space. Pattillo-McCoy's "Groveland" is a middle-class Chicago neighborhood; *Code of the Street* is based on fieldwork in high-poverty areas of Philadelphia. Together, they—like *Sidewalk*—speak to the ways that macrostructural forces work themselves out in local public spaces. When viewed comparatively and through the lens of Jane Jacobs, these three works provide a useful understanding of social control mechanisms and how

they vary by race and class predicaments. We turn to Anderson's "ground zero" first.

### CODE(S) OF THE STREET

Put simply, the "code of the street," which according to Anderson is prevalent in the inner city ghetto, functions as a way for African American youth to maintain social order in neighborhoods that have been abandoned by formal institutions such as the police. Unlike other social codes that informally regulate public space in mainstream American culture (in Jacobs' era or our own), a violation of the code of the street can put an individual at potentially life-threatening risk. According to Anderson, these norms of the street grow out of an opposition to mainstream culture, which itself is a response to the alienation of black inner-city residents from the economic and social institutions of a predominantly white society (p. 323). The code ensures some amount of physical protection in an environment where a violent drug economy poses a sense of danger in everyday public life. Ambient threats to personal security, combined with a distrust of the police, lead youth to develop their own policing mechanisms through which respect must be demonstrated toward those who have built reputations based on their toughness. These informal rules "prescribe both proper comportment and the proper way to respond if challenged. They regulate the use of violence and so supply a rationale allowing those who are inclined to aggression to precipitate violent encounters in an approved way" (p. 33). Thus, the code organizes public life in the community by both limiting violence and condoning it under certain circumstances. While most of the children come from families of a "decent" (that is, conformist) orientation toward mainstream values, their families often encourage them to be knowledgeable of the street code as a means of self-protection. This leads to a conflict between conformist and street orientations and requires many young people to engage in a process of "code switching" when moving across different environments.

This is an old story, dating back in sociology to William H. Whyte's *Street Corner Society* and even deeper in the history of literature. And that story reads like this: In order to avoid danger, one needs to belong to a tightly knit group where there is an understanding that each member will have someone to "watch his back." Entry into the group is granted only when youths, particularly teenage boys, prove their toughness through fighting. These groups function like kinship networks, without which an individual does not have a main source of protection. When an individual proves himself in a fight, he gains the respect of group members and may be accepted as a member himself. Someone who backs down from a fight gains a reputation as

weak and as having sold out to the white society, making him an easy target of further violence. Therefore, the threat of violence functions as a mechanism of boundary maintenance—same old story—but with a new racial twist in the post-Civil Rights era.

There is also a paradox here: The code is both cause and effect of the drug economy. The code is necessary because of drug-related violence. But it is also the sustaining ideology of that very same economy. Adding to the vicious circle is the fact that the very same peer groups that provide physical protection from violence through numbers often also provide a point of entry into the drug economy. An outside dealer may approach a primary group and arrange for the group's leader to distribute dealing responsibilities to his friends, through which a hierarchical pyramid of authority develops within the group. "In time the small neighborhood group becomes a force to be reckoned with in the community, while taking an ever sharper interest in issues of turf and territory" (p. 115). Thus, the networks of the drug trade often intertwine with the same peer networks that function as a policing mechanism, and the street code itself overlaps with the behavioral norms of the drug economy.

The respondents in Mitchell Duneier's *Sidewalk* maintain a different type of relationship with the conventional world. *Sidewalk* describes the lives of many individuals who fall under the stigmatized category of poor, urban, black men. The everyday lives of Duneier's respondents revolve around the informal economy of book and magazine vending on the sidewalk of Sixth Avenue in Greenwich Village, New York City. Most of the men are homeless, and some of them are ex-convicts. A substantial number have endured persistent alcohol and drug addictions, while others have been sober for some years. Duneier argues that his subjects engage in a struggle to live "decent" lives through honest entrepreneurial activity (p. 171). Duneier provides an intricate depiction of the mutual understandings and everyday practices that the men develop in order to ensure that they have a cohesive social network and a sustainable habitat on the sidewalk. The group maintains informal social controls in order to minimize potential harm to their work environment.

If they were doing drugs, could not work for other people in a tolerable manner, had no marketable skills, and then robbed to support their habit, we might reasonably conclude that they had given up on the struggle to live in accordance with society's standards. In this case, the men have made clever use of a local accordsance [that regulates the use of sidewalk space for vending] to appropriate public space and avoid engaging in criminal activity that hurts others. (p. 171)

The informal controls among the sidewalk vendors and panhandlers develop out of an attempt to conform to mainstream norms of decency and entrepreneurship, partly as a way of maintaining self-esteem, but also so that they do not draw the attention and sanctions of the police. Since the

vendors sleep and work on the sidewalk of a white upper-class neighborhood, the police are more attentive to signs of neighborhood disturbance than they are in the neighborhood described by Anderson. The self-regulating mechanisms among Duneier's respondents grow partly out of a need to keep the police at bay. For example, one of the vendors may ask that his friend hold onto his cash overnight so that he would not be tempted to spend the money on crack or alcohol during the evening. This would ensure that he would be sober enough to work the next day without causing any potentially violent encounters that would draw the attention of neighbors or the police.

In *Black Picket Fences*, Mary Pattillo-McCoy illustrates how informal and formal mechanisms of control work together in the middle-class neighborhood of Groveland. This community maintains social control through kin and neighborly networks, conventional institutional mechanisms, and also through the local gang network, whose leaders come from middle-class backgrounds. When informal mechanisms of social control, particularly supervising neighbors' children, fail to restrain gang and drug activity, residents turn to formal social controls such as neighborhood associations and other local institutions. However, the irony lies in the fact that these neighborhood institutional networks interact closely with the local gang networks that they attempt to rein in. By setting up formal structures in the neighborhood, residents have an institutional framework within which to incorporate the gangs. In other words, their dealings with the gangs are not simply conflictual as one might expect; rather, they are more accurately characterized as cooperative, incorporating, or co-opting. At the same time, the interconnection of the conventional and gang networks requires law-abiding residents to compromise some of their attitudes toward the illicit activities of the gangs.

The key to promoting comfort and feelings of safety is to lessen anonymity. Yet the more familiar people are with one another, the more illicit networks are absorbed into and normalized by mainstream connections. This is the conundrum that plagues social control efforts in Groveland. (p. 80)

The gang leaders were raised in Groveland and, like the law-abiding community leaders, express a special interest in keeping the neighborhood peaceful.

They often concur with the norms of the church and block-club members, and hold their youthful charges to similar standards. Both factions spurn disorder, actively combat graffiti, and show disdain for activities that may invite negative attention, such as loitering or public fighting. (p. 71)

Pattillo-McCoy explains how both groups aim for economic prosperity, arguing that the status of the local gang leaders in the drug economy mirrors the occupational status of the residents who work in the licit sector of the labor market. "For the most part, the two groups agree on goals, but disagree

on strategies” (p. 71). For example, a former supervisor of Groveland Park describes how the Black Mobsters protect the park from graffiti, fighting and break-ins in the park’s main building. The respondent relates how the gang provided the security for a weekend event:

The gym show this weekend. . . . They [the Black Mobsters] bought blue security T-shirts to match the kids’ and they were all over the building. They had walkie-talkies and everything. . . . There were about thirty of ‘em and we didn’t even have to use the police. ‘Cause, you know, I had called the police to provide security’ cause we must have had about two thousand people in here over the weekend. But they were better than the police. (Quotation of respondent, Pattillo-McCoy, p. 72)

This example illustrates how the Black Mobsters fill in for other forms of institutional control and, thus, provide a necessary service for the neighborhood. Respondents tell of other stories about how the gang provided the food for block-club parties and at one point coordinated with church leaders in an effort to get a local liquor store to close down. The residents allowed for the gang to participate in these efforts because they had the function of keeping the neighborhood relatively safe and quiet. Yet, the respondents express a general sense that, while the Black Mobsters were doing some “good things” for the community, they were doing them for the “wrong reasons.” While the gang leaders may have different motivations from the conventional community leaders, the two groups have overlapping interests in the neighborhood’s stability.

### ECONOMIES OF MEANING

In addition to the social processes described above, the ways in which the authors’ subjects make meaning out of their everyday lives also function as mechanisms of social control. For the youth in Anderson’s book, meaning revolves around the need to gain the respect, as well as fear, of one’s peers. While the code of the street has developed largely out of a sense of alienation from mainstream society, an individual’s participation in the street code represents a strong oppositional stance toward mainstream culture. Adoption of the code means that one could distinguish one’s self from those who have presumably sold out, thereby bolstering the participant’s self-esteem. He can continue to increase his sense of power by proving himself in fights and stickups. He can also reinforce his self-esteem by acquiring expensive fashion items that serve as status symbols and that allow him to emulate the image of the drug dealer, and possibly by moving his way up in the drug economy.<sup>3</sup> These mechanisms for gaining respect and self-esteem are crucial

<sup>3</sup>The current emphasis on young men reflects Anderson’s implicit characterization of teenage boys as the primary actors in drug-dealing activities and gang violence. Although the street code

because the youth Anderson studies are isolated from the economic institutions and opportunity structures that would otherwise reward them for academic achievement. While there are not adequate rewards for working hard in school, there *are* penalties for showing interest in school. In this sense, the street code takes the hopelessness typically associated with the isolation of the ghetto and turns it upside down. The oppositional culture means that the youth do not need to perceive the drug economy in their neighborhood as a sign of defeat by white society. Rather, it allows them to rationalize their social position as a chosen opposition to the mainstream. Anyone who demonstrates a desire to be part of mainstream society is branded a wimp or a sellout. While it is clear that the drug economy serves an economic function, Anderson emphasizes the drug trade as a way for individuals to gain social capital within the street culture. Therefore, the drug culture and all of the elements that surround it—material acquisition, the reputation of being feared—are ways for youth to create identities of importance and distinction from one's peers.

The conflict between street and conventional norms makes academic and occupational advancement especially difficult for young people because they may be perceived by street-oriented peers and relatives as “disrespecting” their community. Anderson tells the story of a young woman named Yvette, whose pursuit of a college education leads her friends and extended relatives to resent her and to believe that she is trying to prove herself superior to them. While her mother encourages her to excel and is her primary source of support, Yvette explains why she and her mother, who holds a white-collar job and owns her own home, had to cut off ties with their extended family:

Whatever she [Yvette's mother] hears about her other brothers and sisters, it's through her aunt. We really don't get together that much because of the situation . . . She's not gonna let them bring her down. So the best way to get away from it is just to cut them off. So that's exactly what she did. And I'm really kind of hurt because I want to have a family like everyone else, an extended family. But I can't, because there's just so much jealousy and animosity . . . We [Yvette and her mother] don't have too many supports. We just don't. They're not there. (Quotation of respondent, Anderson, p. 60)

Yvette's story demonstrates how the meaning that her street-oriented relatives have attributed to her upward mobility makes it difficult to maintain a secure network of social support within the family. While her support from her mother is ultimately enough to foster her academic achievement,

is relevant to both sexes, Anderson's discussion of teenage girls revolves mostly around teenage pregnancy and childrearing. While proving one's toughness is the main avenue for gaining status among teenage boys, Anderson suggests that having a baby is a status symbol among teenage girls. However, it remains somewhat ambiguous whether and how young women play a more direct role in fighting and drug dealing as part of the “campaign for respect.”

Anderson suggests that many teenagers have more difficulty overcoming the obstacles imposed by relatives and peers. He concludes:

[S]treet-oriented people can be said at times to mount a policing effort to keep their decent counterparts from “selling out” or “acting white,” that is, from leaving the community for one of higher socioeconomic status. This retaliation, which can sometimes be violent, against the upwardly mobile points to the deep alienation present in parts of the inner-city community. Many residents therefore work to maintain the status quo, and so the individual who tries to excel usually has a great deal to overcome. (p. 65)

Given the opposing meanings of upward mobility between the street and conformist orientations, it seems plausible that these conflicts of meaning manifest themselves on the individual level, making it especially difficult for a young person to remain confident in one’s goal to get ahead. Again, this is an old story retold in a new world, but it is given new relevance by the question of race. This is best understood by contrasting Anderson’s account with that of John McWhorter.

There is some superficial similarity of Anderson’s arguments to those recently made by conservatives such as McWhorter, author *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (Free Press, 2000). McWhorter claims that an anti-intellectual culture among African Americans is primarily responsible for the gaps in measures of achievement between blacks and whites in the contemporary United States. However, while the “code” that Anderson describes may evince many of the same cultural dynamics described by McWhorter, the difference lay in the origins of those cultural norms. Put simply, there is nothing inherently “black” or “African American” about the code of the street. For Anderson, the code is a rational response to external conditions—a lucrative, illicit narcotics economy that generates turf wars over market share, combined with the abandonment of low-income communities by the police and other state agencies. As a rational, ordered response to external conditions, it is safe to say that if these conditions changed—say, through the legalization of drugs or better community policing—the code of the street should wane in salience. This is not the case for theorists such as McWhorter, who attribute causal primacy to the norms, rather than the structural conditions.

Many similar themes of “meaning” emerge in Duneier’s book, particularly around issues of self-esteem, respect, and self-distinction. Duneier’s respondents are also on a “campaign for respect,” as Anderson calls it, but they carry this out by striving to live by mainstream, conformist norms—also within the context of ambivalent orientations. The vendors distinguish themselves from other homeless people who may turn to drug dealing for a living, and they take pride in their abilities to maintain legitimate businesses. When

bartering with a customer, the vendors are often very persistent about asking for a higher price. They explain that refusing to accept a lower price is crucial for maintaining one's dignity, and that they would rather not sell an item at all than to settle for less. These transactions seem especially important when they are with customers who live in the surrounding neighborhood, because the vendors have an opportunity to demand the respect of white middle-class people, who represent the dominant segment of society. Some of the vendors indicate that they look down upon panhandlers because they feel that they do not make themselves useful. Meanwhile, some of the panhandlers assert that asking people for money is their work, and they distinguish themselves by saying that they are polite and respectful in the way they ask people as they walk by, in contrast to others, who presumably ask rudely (p. 84). The currency of respect is different than it is for Anderson's subjects, but the hierarchy is still there. Everyone constructs their own identities by viewing themselves as better than someone else—be it more dignified (Duneier) or tougher (Anderson).

Yet, while Duneier's respondents strive to conform to middle-class norms of decency and honest entrepreneurial work, they exhibit internal and extra personal tensions similar to Anderson's subjects. On the one hand, the ways that they make sense of their status as homeless people reflect a self-definition as having chosen a lifestyle that goes against mainstream norms. When asked about how they became homeless, some of the men tell of a moment in their lives in which they had chosen to give up the burden of having an apartment—a symbol, of course, of mainstream norms. Yet, they interpret this choice differently. For example, for Ron, abandoning his apartment had marked the beginning of a new phase of rehabilitation from drug addiction. Yet, while he suggests that leaving the apartment symbolized his decision to leave behind his addiction and take control of his life, it is clear through his narration that he was soon to be evicted anyway. Rather than telling a story of defeat, his narrative is about having chosen to become clean and to take charge of his life. The way that he makes sense of his situation echoes the process by which the young people in Anderson's book make meaning of their alienation from mainstream society. Instead of talking about how they have been marginalized, they talk about how they have actively separated themselves from white society so that they can stand against it, insisting that they would not want to be a part of it, even if given the opportunity.

Hakim, who has a college education and has had experience working in corporate jobs, had chosen to leave the corporate world after having been discriminated against because he is black. Although he has the skills and experience to work in the formal economy, he does not want to buy into the

“corporate-employee mind-set” (p. 24). Instead, he has decided to work on the sidewalk selling what he calls “black books,” which are geared toward

helping people of African descent understand where they fit in; codifying the achievements of people of African descent; uncovering the history of African Americans, and of white racism; or helping African Americans develop the knowledge and pride necessary to participate in the wider society. (p. 24)

Hakim finds this work to be intellectually meaningful and economically sustaining, and it gives him an opportunity to serve as a mentor for young black people who stop at his table to engage in discussion. Here, upon the tony streets of the Greenwich Village, we find the “old head” for whom Anderson waxes nostalgic. While he takes pride in having found a way to sustain himself outside of the corporate world, he does not try to convince young people to make the radical choice he has made. Rather, he views his mentoring as a way to help his mentees gain the knowledge and consciousness that they need in order to negotiate their independence within the white society and to take pride in what they do. Therefore, while he finds meaning in his life by distancing himself from mainstream society, Hakim—to some extent—holds onto the conventional values of entrepreneurialism and self-sufficiency (and also distances himself from others on the street). Again, within Hakim we find the ambivalent orientations that racial oppression induces in a stratified society that contains within it an ideology of “equal opportunity.” (As a postscript, Hakim has returned to the mainstream world and found a place that may be as intellectually rewarding as selling printed matter on the streets: academia.)

The subjects in Pattillo-McCoy’s work face different cultural conundrums as compared to those examined in the other two studies because of the middle-class status of Groveland’s residents. Pattillo-McCoy illustrates how residents claim black cultural ownership of the neighborhood through the use of symbolism in public space. One of the buildings in Groveland Park is decorated with posters and brief biographies of “Black Heroes” such as Rosa Parks, Michael Jordan, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X. The local public library has similar themes running through its decoration and book displays. The radio in the Groveland Park field house often plays rhythm and blues, rap, or gospel music, and other common business and religious spaces are decorated with African cloth and African American flags. The use of these cultural symbols fosters a sense of pride, as well as cultural ownership of these institutions. Yet, Groveland residents also utilize symbols of class, as well as of race, as a way of displaying pride in their middle-class achievements. Homeowners have yearly contests for judging yard landscaping and holiday decorations. The standards of home maintenance serve as models for middle-class behavior and, in conjunction with symbols of race,

function as a way of constructing a black middle-class identity. This identity is especially important to the residents in the context of raising children, particularly during their teenage years when they are often faced with the temptation of drug use and gang involvement.

Yet, despite the middle-class backgrounds of Groveland youth, the thrill and status that go along with the “gangsta” style of dress, behavior, and cultural representation challenge the symbolism that serves as models for middle-class behavior. In contrast to the youth in Anderson’s work, adoption of a street code is not as crucial for day-to-day survival. While their chances of maintaining middle-class status are not as solid as they would be for white middle-class youth, they still have more educational and occupational options open to them than do Anderson’s respondents, whose most available occupational option is often the drug economy. Thus, while the gangsta style has grown out of representations of the social and economic life of poverty in the ghetto, Groveland youth take on these representations primarily as a form of entertainment rather than as a necessity. For these teenagers, the image of the inner city—the baggy pants, gold jewelry, pagers, brand new Nike sneakers—symbolizes a break from the ordinariness of middle-class life. Young women and men interact with these symbols to varying degrees. There are those who are completely consumed by the gangsta lifestyle, who both emulate the style and participate in gang activities. Others emulate the image through language, dress, and admiration of gangsta figures in the media, although they do not become part of a gang. Finally, some youths are more marginal to the “ghetto” style in dress and in other forms of consumption.<sup>4</sup> The activities of those youth who emulate the style without participating in gangs resemble the practices of white middle-class teenagers, who, while situated in a relatively safe environment, often seek the thrill associated with the gangsta style. The difference that marks white teenagers who emulate hip-hop culture, however, is that they are protected from the “real” ghetto life by the combined buffers of white racial identity, residential segregation, and middle-class status. By contrast, for Groveland’s residents, the only protection is membership in the middle class, and Pattillo-McCoy demonstrates that many of these families stake rather tenuous claims to middle-class status.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>We put “ghetto” in scare quotes here since it is much too facile to call the “hip hop” style a ghetto style since it is performed in a wide range of communities and because it implies that inner city residents uniformly subscribe to a common set of cultural practices, which, in fact, is sustained by a small minority of such residents. It would be more correct to call this culture a “youth culture” since it is the teenagers and young adults of both the inner cities and suburban malls who practice it.

<sup>5</sup>Groveland’s families experience greater financial risks than their white counterparts because of lower wealth levels; they are also more vulnerable geographically, since black, middle-class neighborhoods like Groveland often border poorer minority communities.

While most Groveland youth do not become so immersed in the gangsta style that they engage in criminal activity, there is often a sense of pride that comes with a symbolic connection to the gangsta life. Pattillo-McCoy tells the story of a youth group at the local Catholic Church, in which some of the most active members are also members of the youth choir. While the choir has a rehearsal schedule every week, the rehearsal times often turn into informal rap sessions at the church. During these sessions, youth group members display their “ghetto” dress, practice the style, and tell ghetto stories. This type of performative display suggests a sense of status that goes along with the symbolic connection to the ghetto. The teenagers also express an excitement while exchanging stories, or rumors, of fights, shootings, teen pregnancies, and drug busts. The youth group members are more solidly middle-class than most of Groveland, and they describe a sense of boredom with the magnet or Catholic schools that they attend. One young woman explains, “Like the worst thing you ever hear at my school is like somebody got stabbed with a ruler or somethin’ like that. You don’t never hear of no fights or nothin’ like that” (quotation of respondent, Pattillo-McCoy, p. 134). The thrill that comes with the gangsta styles offers a break from the routine of middle-class life (p. 134).

The youth group members are experimenting with the inner-city style in a relatively protected environment, where “no one will mistake them for real gangstas and turn their play into a perilous reality” (p. 133). However, the symbolism of the gangsta style often becomes problematic because of the social cues it gives off to authority figures, as well as to gang members. Pattillo-McCoy explains how the gangsta fashion, language and mannerisms act as “symbols [that] feed back into the material world” (p. 123). She suggests that taking on such an image brands teenagers as deviant, whether or not they engage in criminal activity. This can make them subject to sanctions in schools, shopping malls, or other public spaces. These teenagers also run the risk of being misread by gang members, which can have violent repercussions.

The stylistic forays of black middle-class youth exist in an ecological milieu where others are not just dressing up. Sometimes, when you dress like a gangsta, talk like a gangsta, and rap like a gangsta, soon enough you *are* a gangsta . . . [There] can be tragic consequences when such styles are misread by gangstas for whom the identity is more than a symbolic act. (p. 123)

Pattillo-McCoy argues that in the case of the middle-class youth of Groveland, the materialist perspective does not entirely explain why some teenagers would become involved in the criminal aspect of gangs. She tells the story of a young man named Tyson Reed, who had become involved in robbery and eventually drug dealing when he joined the Black Mobsters. Tyson had not engaged in crime out of a lack of legitimate economic options. Rather, the way he narrates his gang involvement suggests that these

activities are simply seductive. Additionally, the criminal booty can be used to purchase items that have a great deal of symbolic value in the gangsta milieu, which creates a sense of exhilaration and improved status in the gang environment. However, Tyson also has a solid educational background, since his mother, an educator, has sent him to magnet schools and placed special emphasis on his education while raising him. When Tyson realized that he had other chances for upward mobility outside of gang activity, he began to change his behavior. He explains, "I got \$6,000, but what I'ma do? I can't go buy no car. I can't go buy no house. All I can do is buy all the Nikes and Guess? [brand name] I need, you know. And after a while, it ain't no purpose to that" (quotation of respondent, Pattillo-McCoy, p. 129). Yet, while Tyson eventually reasons his way out of his gang involvement, not all of Groveland youth are able to do so after joining the Black Mobsters. Some teenagers remain consumed with gang activities as they enter adulthood, sometimes at the risk of their own lives.

To Groveland youth, the gangsta style is exciting and represents a break from the ordinariness of middle-class life. Yet, the symbolic meaning of the style feeds into the material realm, potentially making them subject to the mechanisms of social control enforced by the gang networks, as well as its potentially violent outcomes. However, in many cases, the pride attached to middle-class status induces parents to place special emphasis on their children's education and occupational achievement. This often allows young people to remain at a distance from gang activity, even though they associate with it symbolically. The meaning and maintenance of mainstream middle-class norms is relatively well supported by the accessibility of college preparatory schools, church youth clubs, and other institutions that integrate Groveland youth into a conventionally oriented community. These institutions are weaker in the poorer neighborhood that Anderson describes, which means that the conventional meanings embodied by the institutions cannot compete as well with the meaning and, ultimately, the control mechanisms of the street orientation. Also, the meanings of conventional middle-class norms and the ghetto style are not as polarized as they are in Anderson's work, which allows Groveland youth to participate in the style and still be integrated into conformist social networks that rely on institutional (and/or state) mechanisms of social control.

## CONCLUSION

Each of these works illustrates how street economies both generate and respond to formal and informal mechanisms of social control. In the case of *Sidewalk*, the subjects engage in the informal, but mostly legal business of vending, while in *Black Picket Fences* and *Code of the Street* some of

**Table I.** Typology of Three Street Economies (Anderson, Pattillo-McCoy, and Duneier)

	Street economy	Race–class composition	Relationship to formal controls	Dominant informal norms	Symbolic currency
Inner city Philadelphia	Illicit (drugs)	Black, poor	None/abandoned	Physical sanctions (ordered violence)	Respect/fear
Groveland	Illicit (drugs)	Black, middle class	Cooperative	Achievement/rebellion	Black cultural pride
Greenwich Village	Legal (magazine vending)	Black, poor, & white upper class	Tense/coexistent	Reciprocity	Decency

the subjects were involved in the illicit economy of drug dealing. The social control that flows in and out of these economies is rooted in the need to create trust both among those who work in these businesses and with the residents of the neighborhoods in which the street economies are situated. Likewise, each economy is affected by its particular situation within the configuration of race and class, and each generates and is generated by its own “economy of meaning.” Yet, despite the differences in the three studies in types of relationships between formal and informal controls and in the cultures of meaning, each author demonstrates in various ways how activities that are typically perceived by white society as signs of social disorder are, in fact, methods of maintaining order in the local communities. Table I shows how these three communities differ on these various dimensions.

It is also important to note the underlying relationship between the ideal and material spheres implicit in each of these works. In none of them do we find unidirectional causality. While it is clear that each economy and social environment requires a specific form of trust and sanctions, it also appears as though the economic spheres may develop as a result of the social dynamics of meaning-making. For example, in Groveland drug dealing and gang activity may result from—rather than cause—the cultural claims made by middle-class youth who seek to balance mainstream and oppositional orientations. Likewise, participation in the street economies described by Duneier and Anderson may result from, rather than motivate, the strivings for self-respect, albeit in markedly different manifestations. These goals, in turn, may arise out of frustrated aspirations and blocked opportunities in traditional realms of upward mobility. In sum, all three authors have built upon and complicated the “eyes upon the street” model offered by Jane Jacobs forty years ago by introducing the larger, structural forces of race and class stratification. We do not think Jacobs would disapprove.