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# NEGATIVE SOCIAL CAPITAL: STATE BREAKDOWN AND SOCIAL DESTITUTION IN AMERICA'S URBAN CORE<sup>1</sup>

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*ABSTRACT* Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social capital is developed and deployed to highlight the major cause of the continued degradation of social conditions and life chances in the black American ghetto: the erosion of "state social capital", that is, the formal organizations presumed to provide civic goods and services (physical safety, legal protection, welfare, education, housing, and health care). These institutions have turned into instruments of surveillance, suspicion, and exclusion rather than vehicles of social integration and trust-building. Together with the withdrawal of the wage-labor economy in the context of extreme racial segregation, their debilitation has accelerated the shrinking of the ghetto's indigenous organizational basis and helped concentrate in it the most dispossessed segments of the urban (sub)proletariat. This suggests that state structures and policies play a decisive role in the formation and distribution of both formal and informal social capital.

## 1 Introduction

Over the past several years, a new line of inquiry into social inequality in the American city has developed by drawing on the notion of "social capital" (e.g., Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993; Fernandez-Kelly, 1994; Putnam, 1994). These analyses typically focus on the collective properties of the *population* trapped in the deteriorating racial enclaves of the urban core, notably the characteristics of their interpersonal networks, informal associations, and loosely arrayed cultural resources such as norms of reciprocity, altruistic values, and sentiment of trust (e.g., Portes, 1995: 12-16).

This is an extremely valuable corrective to the narrow individualistic and behavioristic approach that has dominated recent research on urban poverty, as framed for instance by the academic myth of the "underclass" (Wacquant, 1996a). But it too often leaves out of the picture the social capital represented by attachments to, and effects of, the formal *organizations* present in (or absent from) the ghetto and their properties, and particularly those *public* institutions that most urban dwellers take for granted but that ghetto residents cannot so readily rely on in the elaboration of their life strategies.

In this article, I draw on the concept of social capital developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1980, 1986) to highlight what I consider to be the major social-organizational cause of the continued degradation of social conditions and life chances in the black American ghetto: the *erosion of "state social capital"*, that is, organizations presumed to provide civic goods and services--physical safety, legal protection, welfare, education, housing, and health care--which have turned into instruments of surveillance, suspicion, and exclusion rather than vehicles of social integration and trust-building. The near-total breakdown of public institutions, combined with and abetting the withdrawal of the wage-labor economy in the context of extreme and unyielding racial segregation (Massey and Denton 1993), has accelerated the shrinking of the ghetto's indigenous organizational basis and helped concentrate in it the most dispossessed segments of the urban (sub)proletariat, thereby further depreciating the informal social capital available within it.

## 2 Conceptual precis: differentiating social capital

### *Species of capital as forms of power*

Various approaches to social capital have recently been proposed (e.g., Coleman, 1988; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993; Putnam, 1995). Though they are broadly convergent in that they all seek to spotlight properties of the social structure that facilitate (or hinder) social action, these diverse conceptions are not equivalent and they do not raise the same issues<sup>2</sup>. For this reason, I begin by clarifying the conceptual parameters used in this paper.

Bourdieu's notion of social capital is part of a *generalized theory of capital* and belongs to a small set of tightly related concepts (the main others being habitus and field) through which the French sociologist has sought to rethink the constitution of social space and the dynamic articulation of practice, structure, and history (for elaborations, see Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu (1986: 241) defines capital as

"accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated', embodied, form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor".

A capital is any resource effective in a structured arena of social action (or field) that allows one to obtain the specific profits that arise out of activity and contest within that arena. The overall volume and structure of capital(s) detained by an individual, group, or institution defines their position in social space; changes in the volume and structure of one's endowment chart one's trajectory through it (Bourdieu, 1985).

Three main species of capital may be distinguished: economic capital, consisting of financial and material assets and flows; cultural (or informational) capital, that is, instruments of appropriation of valued cultural products, which exist in the embodied, objectified, and institutionalized form; and social capital. A fourth species, symbolic

capital, derives from the *misrecognition* of the efficacy of these three fundamental kinds of capital. Forms of capital may be converted into one another through a variety of institutional mechanisms. Strategies of reconversion are one of the means through which individuals, families, or groups attempt to maintain or improve their social position. The conversion rate between various species of capital, in turn, is one of the central stakes of struggles between groups, each seeking to impose the hierarchy of capitals most favorable to its own endowment or profile (Bourdieu, 1985).

The advantages of this conceptualization are twofold. First, it portrays capital as both a *relational* (as opposed to substantialist) and an *indexical* notion: capital exists as such, and its value is defined only *in relation* to a specific social space or arena of action.

"A species of capital is what is efficacious in a given field, both as a weapon and as a stake of struggle, what allows its possessors to wield a power, an influence, and thus to exist, in the field under consideration, instead of being considered a negligible quantity. In empirical work, it is one and the same thing to determine what the field is, where its limits lie, etc., and to determine what species of capital are active in it, within what limits, etc." (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 114).

This means that the same property may take on a different value and have divergent effects, depending on the arena of action in which it is invested. One example: mastery of the Black English Vernacular and of the linguistic games it permits is highly valued on the streets and in the ghetto peer-group but its use is ferociously sanctioned in school (Kochman, 1973; Gilmore, 1985; Solomon, 1992). It functions as positive cultural capital in the first context, negative in the second. Likewise, affiliative ties and bonds of obligation with friends and associates in the ghetto constitute a resource for survival and success in the informal economy, but they create impediments and obstacles when attempting to move up and into the official labor market--"ties that bind" and keep you down (Monroe and Goldman, 1988; Anderson, 1992; McLeod, 1994)<sup>3</sup>.

Second, Bourdieu's approach draws attention to the entire "portfolio" of capitals detained by individuals or groups and tightly correlates the efficacy of social to other forms of capital. It directs attention to changes in the overall structure of distribution of types and subtypes of capital and to the mechanisms whereby one species may be converted into another as well as to the relative costs of such reconversion over time and across social positions. It thus firmly links the analysis of "social networks" and other organizational attachments to that of schools and labor markets as the main institutional sites in which the other two core species of capital, cultural and economic, are formed, traded, and vied for (Bourdieu, 1996).

#### *Social capital, informal and formal*

In this schema, social capital consists of the sum total of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual (or a group) by virtue of being enmeshed in "a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition--or, in other words, to membership in a group" (Bourdieu, 1986: 248). The more powerful or resourceful this group, the greater the value of the "connections"

and obligations that link one with it. Conversely, the more dispossessed, the lower the value of that particular social capital. Except for totally isolated, nomadic individuals resembling Leibnizian monads, everyone possesses forms of capital, be it negative, if only by virtue of inheritance<sup>4</sup>.

This notion may be extended to encompass an individual or a group's attachment to, or dependence upon, enviroing formal organizations. One may then distinguish between *informal social capital*, consisting of resourceful social ties based on interpersonal networks of exchange, trust, and obligations, from *formal social capital*, made up of ties (positive or negative, desired or not) anchored in formal organizations to which one participates as member, client, or ward. Both types of social capital clearly impact on a person's capacities, opportunities, and strategies. Now, we have a fairly good idea of how interpersonal ties affect life chances in some areas such as finding a job, raising capital to start a small business, hiring and retaining workers, migrating or gaining basic subsistence (Granovetter, 1974; Light, 1974; Marks, 1989; Portes and Stepick, 1993), and how the structure of interorganizational ties affects processes of allocation and competition (White, 1981; Burt, 1992). We know much less about how the *organizational ecology of a neighborhood* -- that is, the demography, density, type, goals, and routine practices of the organizations that reside within a given locale -- affects the lives of the residents and the struggle among them for various social goods and positions.

Formal social capital is the set of resources and values that individuals may draw upon by virtue of membership in, or connection to, formal organizations (that are themselves resourceful and efficient or not). It may be crudely subdivided, in turn, into *public* and *private* subtypes, depending on the reliance of that organization on market-like or state-like mechanisms, privately effectuated transactions or publicly funded/managed operations. We know that the private institutions that service the ghetto are separate and massively inferior to those that provide goods and services to the rest of the metropolitan system (Skogan, 1990; Massey and Denton, 1993; Caskey, 1994). For instance, ghetto residents do not have ready access to basic financial services (personal and business) or to insurance; retail commercial services and goods are typically more expensive and of lesser quality while some are simply unavailable.

The lower quality and truncated span of private provisioning in the ghetto are aggravated, and in part caused, by the marked inferiority and continual deterioration of public services in the inner city. The remainder of this paper offers a snapshot of the erosion of formal social capital in America's urban core aimed at highlighting its deleterious impact on ghetto residents.

### **3 Formal social capital: public institutions as shackles and snares**

An important characteristic of isolated enclaves of persistent poverty is the extent to which they harbor the institutions designed to meet the basic needs of their residents and incorporate them into the surrounding society. A distinctive feature of America's racialized urban core today is the dearth of core organizations necessary to contribute to the community's functioning and well-being. For the ghetto has experienced an

accelerating process of organizational decline and involution caused not (only) by economic restructuring but (also) by state abandonment (Wacquant, 1992a: 109-111)<sup>5</sup>. So much so that it can be argued that public institutions operate as *negative social capital* that maintain ghetto residents in a marginal and dependent position.

Since the early seventies, the ghetto neighborhoods of Chicago and of other major cities across the United States have weathered not only a sharp rise in joblessness and poverty due to the restructuring of central-city economies (Wilson, 1987) but also a deep and wide retrenchment of the public sector. Brutal cuts in federal funds for urban and community development (Joseph, 1992), the reduction of welfare programs, the shrinking of unemployment coverage, increasingly regressive taxation schemes, and state and city policies of "planned shrinkage" have combined to unravel the web of programs that had helped sustain inner-city (i.e., poor minority) residents since the days of the Great Society. The result has been a drastic degradation of remaining public facilities and the rapid decomposition of the organizational fabric of the ghetto (Wacquant, 1994; also Squires et al., 1987; Axinn and Stern, 1988; Lipsitz, 1989; Orfield and Askinaze, 1992). This is readily visible in the massive, systemic, failings of police and criminal protection, welfare support, health care provision, and education.

#### *Police protection and the criminal justice system*

In the mid-sixties, on the eve of the greatest wave of riots in American history, Kenneth Clark (1965: 86) remarked: "The unstated and sometimes stated acceptance of crime and violence as normal for a ghetto community is associated with a lowering of police vigilance and efficiency when the victims are also lower-status people. This is another example of the denial of a governmental service--the right of adequate protection--which is endured by the powerless ghetto." This observation continues to apply to the Black Belts of urban America 30 years later.

Due to a combination of shortages of finances and personnel, political indifference, and organizational ineptness, public authority provides neither minimal physical security, nor effective legal protection, nor the routine municipal services associated with safety that city residents outside the ghetto take for granted (Kotlowitz, 1991). On Chicago's South Side, the police comes woefully short of fulfilling its mission for want of the manpower and material means needed to heed all requests for intervention. Patrol officers in the Wentworth district (which sports a homicide rate exceeding 100 per 100,000 residents, 15 times the city average) answer emergency calls without interruption from the moment they begin to work to the end of their shift. Yet the district frequently runs out of cars and has to "simulcast" incoming calls in the hope that, somewhere in the city, a detective will be available to respond. No wonder: the number of officers per violent crime is one-seventh that assigned to the "Gold Coast," the white upper-class section on the city's Near North Side.

Working-class Americans in general have a very diffident and (at best) strained relation with the court system. When they resort to it, they typically experience rapid loss of personal control, humiliation, and a sense of betrayal (Merry, 1990). This is even truer in the ghetto where the criminal justice system is wholly ineffective and grossly biased against both blacks and the poor. This is due to a combination of bureaucratic overload and infrastructural deficiency. Chicago's criminal courts have

been overwhelmed by the staggering growth of cases prosecuted: these have shot up from 13,000 in 1982 to some 20,000 in 1990, forcing an overflow of cases into four suburban jurisdictions. The Cook County jail, which handles the initial intake of persons arrested and convicts sentenced to a year of detention and less, is so overcrowded that in 1988 alone over 25,000 criminals had to be released on their own recognizance for lack of space.

Organizational changes in policing techniques and procedures tied to professionalization and bureaucratization have further removed the police from the local population and led to an emphasis on (quantifiable) repression of "high-visibility crime" rather than on prevention of common disorder (Skogan, 1990). There is more: in the vacuum created by the lack of meaningful political linkages and the absence of legitimate mediations between poor urban populations and dominant institutions from which they feel rejected, relations with the police have become extremely salient, bellicose, and diffident. Ghetto residents thus complain that the police are *both* insufficiently present and an intolerable imposition of a foreign and arbitrary authority. Under such conditions, police intervention tends to increase rather than decrease levels of violence (Cashmore and McLaughlin, 1992)<sup>6</sup>. It is no wonder that incidents with the "forces of order" are the detonator of periodic explosions of popular violence in the urban core and that so many ghetto dwellers think twice about relying on the state, choosing instead to take justice into their own hands (Kotlowitz, 1991: 47, 225, 233).

Owing in good part to the failings of police and the courts, physical violence is endemic in the ghetto, where it has forced a wholesale restructuring of the social, temporal, and spatial organization of everyday life. Insecurity is so deep that simply maneuvering one's way through the streets has become a major dilemma in the daily life of inner-city residents (Dubrow and Garbarino, 1989; Bourgois, 1989). This fosters a climate of suspicion, distrust, and incivility that cannot but affect all aspects of neighborhood life.

#### *Turning "welfare" into an apparatus of surveillance*

The contraction and deterioration of welfare services in the 1970s and 80s is another political cause of the severe deterioration of life chances in the ghetto, as it sapped a major source of formal social support among the dispossessed. Contrary to popular neo-conservative rhetoric, the past two decades have not been a period of expansion and generosity for public assistance but one of blanket retraction.

Aid to Families with Dependent Children has grown steadily less helpful to poor families for failure to index grants on inflation and insufficient funding: program outlays peaked at 1.6 percent of the federal budget in 1973 and have declined steadily ever since. The "welfare reform" signed by Clinton as ammunition for his reelection campaign guarantees that these budgets will further decrease in years to come, irrespective of need. Government cash transfers have thus ceased to play the compensating role they fulfilled in the sixties, when poverty among ghetto blacks was slowly decreasing. Based on a detailed analysis of the rates of "effectiveness" of government welfare programs measuring their ability to lift recipients above the poverty line, Axinn and Stern (1988: 102) contend that "the explosion of central city poverty was much more the result of declining program effectiveness than economic breakdown."

The effectiveness of welfare programs must be assessed not only in dollar amounts but also in terms of the organizational capacity of the state to deliver services and to support the effort of "clients" to construct stable, self-supportive life strategies. Welfare agencies impact the inner city not only through the income they (do not) provide but also via the manner in which they process "cases" and handle recipients. The punitive nature of street-level welfare bureaucracies ensures that their effect is more often disruptive than stabilizing. The erratic and arbitrary nature of procedures and decisions, the organizational culture of contempt for "clients" (who are routinely made to feel that they are expendable, interchangeable, and a burden to all; that their time, knowledge, and efforts at survival are worthless), the lack of coordination between agencies, the inconsistencies and conflicts between the bureaucratic requirements of various branches and programs which often work at cross-purposes, all lead to tense and adversarial relations between social service personnel and recipients (Susser and Kreniske, 1987; Sheehan, 1993)<sup>7</sup>.

The organization of the delivery of welfare services seems aimed less at providing regular assistance to needy families than at minimizing the number of recipients and at subjecting the latter to an intricate web of surveillance devices: the routine practice of "churning" the rolls, the intensification of bureaucratic controls (including random checks on aid recipients at home), the payment of "spies" and the establishment of toll-free numbers for anonymous denunciation of "welfare cheats" contribute to solidifying distrust in state bureaucracies and to intensifying the stigma of welfare receipt.

In addition, although the basic aid package falls far short of bringing recipients anywhere close to the poverty line, getting public aid forbids them to pursue "normal" channels of income generation such as wage work. This forces ghetto residents to engage in a range of irregular and illegal activities in order to survive (Valentine, 1978; Edin, 1991). *State-sponsored poverty thus results in state-induced illegality* that in turn diverts more scarce public resources into further surveillance and repression of "abuses" built into the logic of the system.

#### *Permanently failing public health*

Poor residents of America's urban core are serviced by grossly inadequate public health organizations that compound the insecurity and irregularity of ghetto life. Facilities are aging, understaffed, technologically inadequate or obsolete, massively overburdened--barely on par with Third World facilities (Abraham, 1993). In 1990 the Acting Health Commissioner of Chicago openly acknowledged that the city's public health system "is a nonsystem that is falling short and close to falling apart" (*Chicago Tribune*, 16 January 1990).

Because of lagging and insufficient Medicaid reimbursements from the federal state and the faulty (or inexistent) health care coverage of their users, over a dozen inner-city community clinics and hospitals have gone bankrupt in Chicago in the past two decades. In 1987 Provident Hospital, the nation's oldest black hospital, closed its doors, leaving the South Side without a hospital facility readily accessible to the poor. Since the University of Chicago Hospitals pulled out of the city's "emergency care network" in 1990 to safeguard its profitability, victims of serious injury and trauma who cannot supply proof of enrollment in a private health insurance plan must be ambulated nearly

ten miles away to the decrepit Cook County Hospital. For nearly a decade, the South Side has not had a single health facility providing prenatal health services to uninsured mothers-to-be. Similarly there exists no drug rehabilitation program accessible to those who cannot pay for a cure, even though drug abuse is rampant and rising. The bureaucratic tangle of regulations and conditions to meet further constricts the provision of services even to those entitled to it. A medical expert asked about the state of health services for the city's dispossessed quips: "Show me the poor woman who finds a way to get everything she's entitled to in the system, and I'll show you a woman who could run General Motors."<sup>8</sup>

Systemic failure to deliver even the most basic health care (immunizations for children, pap tests, blood pressure and cholesterol screening, and nurses to visit homebound patients) ensures high morbidity rates and explains the *rise* of infant mortality observed in several ghetto neighborhoods in the past decade. Epidemiological research conducted by Rodrick and Deborah Wallace (1990) in the poor districts of New York City turned up a close and systematic association between neighborhood "deurbanization" as evidenced by the loss of basic city services such as fire protection, police, and sanitation, on the one hand, and the rise of violent death, AIDS infection, and substance abuse to levels far exceeding those of other areas.

#### *Public schools as educational reservations*

No organization better exemplifies the institutional debilitation and political abandonment suffered by the ghetto than public schools (Chicago Tribune, 1992; Kantor and Brenzel, 1992). In Chicago, as in most other large Rustbelt cities, the public education system has become a veritable *academic reservation* for poor minorities, as whites and middle-class families fled into the private school system or outside the city altogether (or into the separate public preserve of "magnet schools").

Today, over seven of every ten public school students in the Windy City come from families living under the federal poverty line and nearly nine in ten are black and Latino. Ghetto schools are plagued by overcrowded facilities, undertrained and underpaid teachers, and outdated and grossly insufficient supplies. Most establishments lack staff, desks, space, and even adequate bathrooms; they often function without a library, working photocopying machine, science lab and chemical supplies; the textbooks they use, if they are lucky to have enough of them, are outdated rejects from suburban schools--recently students in a history course were found to use a book in which Richard Nixon was still the country's President (Kozol, 1991).

There is virtually no counseling and no programs to ease the transition from school to work: the DuSable high school at the heart of the city's South Side has one counselor for 420 students, compared to one for 20 to 30 pupils in affluent suburban public schools. Worse yet, routine practices of institutional silencing and censorship ensure student misinformation about job options and search while financing and administrative procedures reward the exclusion of "problem students," thereby directly contributing to the "drop-out rate"--which is more accurately described as a "push-out" rate (Fine, 1991). For the large majority, college is out of the question since most establishments do not offer college preparatory classes and students are massed in vocational tracks anyway. Most of those who enter college are funneled into municipal junior colleges



that are equally segregated by race and class and provide at best a remedial secondary education<sup>9</sup>.

The degradation of public education is best seen in the actual problems schools encounter in their day-to-day operation. A good part of their meager resources must be devoted to tasks that have nothing to do with teaching and learning. At an elementary school I observed in Woodlawn, only two blocks from the University of Chicago's business school, the priorities of the daily round are, first, to feed children so that they do not fall asleep or behave aggressively during classes because they are hungry and, second, to ensure the physical security of the pupils and staff by means of a militia of parent volunteers who patrol the school grounds with baseball bats. To complete this picture, Woodlawn has no high school, no museum, no movie theater or other cultural facilities, and the only library of the neighborhood is both grossly under-equipped and under-utilized, limping along with a miserly budget that does not allow it to reach out into the community. Lack of formal social capital in the ghetto thus prevents the transmission and accumulation of the forms of cultural capital valued in the broader society and economy.

*The political devaluation of the ghetto's public social capital*

The devaluation of the ghetto's "state social capital" is not solely a product of the general "hollowing out" of cities correlative with the onset of postfordist economic restructuring (Zukin, 1991; Sassen, 1990). It is also due to its electoral marginalization and to the growing administrative fragmentation of the metropolis that has allowed whites and the rich to escape the burdens of financing public institutions by moving to secluded suburbs (Edsall and Edsall, 1992; Weir, 1993). The drive to push political responsibility down from the federal to the state level, and thence to the county and municipality, has stripped poor urban populations of all levers of influence while the delivery system of key social goods and services was being "downsized" and often privatized. It is as if *state policies were designed to further debase public institutions and to encourage exit into the private sector* by all those who can leave the sinking ship of the ghetto and its separate and unequal facilities.

Thus city and state leaders as well as business associations have consistently resisted, or even lobbied against, tax increments needed to improve education for children of color and the poor. Reagan's Secretary of Education labelled Chicago's public school system "the worst in America" (Chicago Tribune, 1992) but dismissed demands for more funding and social services from the federal government even though dwindling federal funds and the glaring inequities of local financing of public schools are a major cause of the deterioration of inner-city schools (Kantor and Brenzel, 1992). As a result of the erosion of its tax base, the city's public school system receives 90,000 dollars less per pupil over his or her academic career than the (equally public) school system of the rich northern suburbs of Chicago. "We can't keep throwing money into a black hole" declared Governor Thompson in 1988, in an expression with telling racial overtones, when called upon to justify the refusal of his administration to funnel additional monies to Chicago's public schools to correct such egregious imbalance.

#### 4 Effects of state retrenchment upon the local organizational fabric

The retrenchment of public authority from the ghetto is at once a component and a major determinant of a wider process of *organizational desertification* that has virtually emptied the historic Black Belt of its formal institutions. Thus the number of businesses operating in Woodlawn dropped from 700 in 1950 to about 100 in 1990. Whereas in the postwar decade the neighborhood featured banks, hotels, department stores, movie theaters, and light manufacturing, today the remaining commercial establishments are comprised mainly of liquor stores and small lounges, laundromats and beauty parlors, fast food outlets and family-owned eateries, a smattering of "currency exchanges," an assortment of thrift stores, and cheap clothing and furniture outlets--many of which are operated by Asian or Middle-Eastern entrepreneurs and their kin. Intermittent employment in such small, marginal firms does not allow ghetto residents to build up the "reservoir of contacts" (Granovetter, 1974) liable to draw and anchor them into the core segments of the official labor market.

Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that, in much of the contemporary Black Belt, the regular, wage-labor economy has been superseded by the irregular--and often illegal--street economy. This twofold withdrawal of state and market accounts for the extreme social destitution and the war-like atmosphere that pervade the ghetto (Wacquant, 1992a, 1996b). For they have debilitated the proximate means of formal and informal social control through which most illegal and criminal behavior is ordinarily checked and "urban disorder" held in abeyance (Sullivan, 1991).

Most of the churches that used to form the organizational backbone of Chicago's "Bronzeville" in its heyday have also closed down. Those that remain are small and fragile organizations with only a handful of members and cramped facilities, if not "storefront" operations whose existence hinges on the tireless activity of their individual founders. They still attempt to make up for the glaring lack of governmental services by organizing pantries to feed the hungry, shelters for the growing ranks of the homeless, and drug counseling programs, job banks, literacy campaigns, and community clean-ups or social gatherings. But their most pressing problem today is survival in the face of dwindling attendance and sagging resources.

The vacuum created by the depreciation of formal social capital attendant upon the concurrent withering away of the wage-labor market, the demise of indigenous organizations, and the crumbling of public institutions has supplied the room and impetus for the blossoming of an underground economy dominated by the only expanding employment sector to which poor minority youths miseducated by public schools can readily accede: the retail trade of drugs. This, in turns, fuels the depacification of everyday life which further feeds the organizational decline of the ghetto. Much of the crime that has turned inner-city streets into theaters of dread and death is linked to the growth of a form of "booty capitalism" in which each can attempt to become an individual *entrepreneur in violent predation* so as to generate an economy where there is none with the only asset left at his disposal, namely, physical force. These three processes, organizational desertification, the depacification of everyday life, economic informalization, become locked in an apparently self-sustaining cycle that gives all appearances of being internally determined and takes on the appearance of "collective

pathology," all the better to make outsiders (and even insiders) forget about the causal role of the breakdown of public institutions in triggering and sustaining them.

## 5 Coda: the political sources of social capital

Over the past three decades, the urban core of the American metropolis has undergone not only "cultural and structural disinvestment" (Hagan, 1993) but also massive "social disinvestment" as the presence, reach, and capacity of public organizations was sharply curtailed by converging economic and public policy changes. The shrinking of an already narrow public sphere in the ghetto has depressed the value of the social capital in circulation there by lowering its aggregate volume, increasing the concentration of the dispossessed, heightening stigmatization, insecurity and crime, and thereby exacerbating interpersonal distrust and feelings of individual and collective alienation.

Instead of forming a protective buffer and a panoply of mechanisms liable to prop up its most vulnerable members and tie them into the national collectivity, the public institutions of today's ghetto, from schools, housing, and health care to the police, courts, and welfare, serve to further isolate, stigmatize, and exclude them. Not because they have expanded and blocked the workings of the "market" but, on the contrary, because they have been so weakened that they can no longer protect the poor from its sanctions or even link them meaningfully to it. The derelict public sector of America's urban core is patently unfit to fulfill the integrative mission bestowed upon it in other advanced societies, as it cannot provide the basic organizational infrastructure required for the functioning of any complex urban social formation.

This suggests that the analysis of social capital in the inner city, and of its impact on national urban issues, should focus not only on direct, interpersonal relations among ghetto residents and their indigenous institutions, but also upon the "indirect social relations" (Calhoun, 1991) mediated by public organizations and by the private institutions that these in turn support. *For state structures and policies play a decisive role in the formation and distribution of both formal and informal social capital.* In the case of America's "hyperghetto," they are directly responsible for the sharp devaluing of the resources collectively held by its residents and for the resulting intensification of destitution and despair among them.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This article draws on a memo prepared for the Workshop on "Social Capital and National Urban Issues" convened by Robert Putnam at the American Academy of the Arts and Sciences in the Fall of 1994.
- <sup>2</sup> Without entering into vain "priority disputes," it should be pointed out that Bourdieu's notion predates its main U.S. counterparts by a decade. James Coleman (1988), who thrust the concept to the forefront of American sociology, elaborated his analysis of "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital" after coming into direct contact with Bourdieu's work (he cites Bourdieu's 1980 "Notes on Social

- Capital" but the latter curiously disappear from subsequent discussions on the topic).
- <sup>3</sup> Types of capital also vary greatly in their degree of "embeddedness" and thus in the generality and scope of their effects. Think of skills that are firm-specific versus universally transferable: the same applies to ghetto-specific versus generalizable skills (e.g., the ability to "manipulate" others or to use physical force as opposed to mastery of the middle-class codes of face-to-face negotiation anatomized by Erving Goffman).
  - <sup>4</sup> Gérard Mauger (1989) has shown that there is no such thing as inheriting nothing: even the most destitute groups pass on certain skills and properties to their offsprings--such as the stigma of being outcasts.
  - <sup>5</sup> The analysis that follows, based on field, survey, and administrative data collected in Chicago by myself and others, is informed by a contrastive study of the sociopolitical dynamics of urban relegation in France's "Red Belt" banlieues, the declining working-class boroughs of the French urban periphery where similar issues of impoverishment, isolation, and segregation emerged in the 1980s, albeit on a more modest scale and with different emphases (Wacquant, 1996b).
  - <sup>6</sup> There now exists a large amount of evidence of systemic police brutality. A recent FBI report turned up evidence of routine torture at several police stations on the South Side of Chicago. An ongoing municipal investigation into police graft in New York City has uncovered a pervasive pattern of unlawful, violent harassment of minority residents "suspected" of association with the drug trade and of the use of massively excessive physical force as a rite of occupational incorporation. In Los Angeles, the police act as if they were waging a trench war with the inhabitants of minority areas: they treat the latter as an army of occupation would its enemies (Davis, 1990). In June of 1992, Amnesty International released a report compiling evidence of a deep-seated pattern of routine police brutality against poor African-Americans and Hispanics in Los Angeles going on unchecked for years in near-complete impunity from local and federal authorities.
  - <sup>7</sup> One example among many: Bourgois (1992) recounts how a Puerto Rican family of East Harlem sees its public aid cut off after it becomes homeless on grounds that it no longer needs rent subsidy, thereby plunging it into further hardship. The father, who works as a low-level employee of the New York Stock Exchange, is forced to go into the night drug trade and is separated from his family because shelters are gender-segregated.
  - <sup>8</sup> Read the first-hand accounts of the nightmarish experiences of users of public health facilities on Chicago's West Side in *Might Be Better Off Dead* (Abraham, 1993).
  - <sup>9</sup> Indeed, Jerry Karabel (1986) has shown that attending an urban community college results in a *lowering* of one's occupational and income level, ensuring that even those who attend "college" in the inner city have few chances of developing social ties outside of their own milieu.

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