

## Notes on Discussion of Elijah Anderson's *Code of the Streets*

### A. Wacquant's Indictment

- a. Reification of cultural orientations into groups
  - i. Folk notions become mutually exclusive populations
  - ii. Assumes morality and not structure is basis of difference (Are they *destitute* because they're morally *dissolute*, or other way around?)
  - iii. EA takes sides rather than analyzes interplay between decent/street.
- b. Conceptual equivocation about the notion of "code"
  - i. What is a code? Where does it come from? How does it work?
  - ii. Informal rules? Etiquette? Value orientation? Which is it?
  - iii. What about intervening factors: easy guns; prison/street nexus?
  - iv. Public policies – managing poverty with prisons – are implicated.
  - v. Code useful as *depictive device*, but not as *analytical tool*
- c. Persistent disconnect between data and theory – unfinished work.
- d. Faulty model of mentorship (decent daddy/grandmother)
  - i. "Decent" dads celebrate retrograde gender relations; EA papers over longstanding rift between the sexes among blacks
  - ii. EA attacks "bad heads" (rappers) and longs for bygone era when men were men. But those days are long gone.
  - iii. If grandmothers so "decent" why weren't they better mothers!
  - iv. Bankruptcy of public institutions in inner city the real culprit here.
  - v. There is nothing noble about *kinship servitude*.
- e. Why is it so hard to get out? (John Turner's sad end, despite EA's best try)
  - i. Neither lack of jobs or racism can explain JT's backsliding.
  - ii. Need to link those macrostructures to a person's micro-setting.
  - iii. Key: the discord between social position (external structures) and mental disposition (internal structures of perception/evaluation.)
  - iv. An evolving dialectic between social position and disposition governs the *double-sided production of urban marginality*.
  - v. Decency vs. street reflect two relations to the future anchored in adjacent but distinct social trajectories.
- f. EA moves between normative theory of social action and moral theory of social order vs. rational choice model of conduct and materialist conception of social structure.
  - i. Are they agents of own moral dereliction clinging to a "bad" code.
  - ii. Or, are they hapless victims of structural change. Which one?

### B. Anderson's Rebuttal

- a. LW's ideologically driven critique distorts and misunderstands EA's work.
- b. LW fails to engage main point: If no civil order get wild west solutions.
- c. LW has a wrong view of role of theory in ethnographic work. (Marxian). Ethnographer should be "vessel" conveying authentic views of subjects.
- d. Endorses "street" as political position; thinks "decent" deserve their fate.
- e. EA just telling it like he heard it, unvarnished; not *his* views, but *theirs*.
- f. "Code" emerges from particular conditions – lack of civil law.
- g. LW blind to what people are living with day to day in inner city (!)
- h. Code not only *instrumental*; also *expressive*; gives meaning/honor..