



If you notice, it's real racial. Whites in one camp, blacks in another camp. And I live right in the middle, by myself. They're all a bunch of racist motherfuckers—both the niggers and the whites.

The whites ain't no better than the blacks. They will rip you off too. I don't trust either group. So I'm alone. The only Latino . . . I don't have nothin' here. —*Felix*

Toward the middle of the first year of our fieldwork, a lull in law enforcement allowed a central camp to emerge that was larger and somewhat drier than the other, more precarious encampments we had been visiting in the alleys behind Edgewater Boulevard. This new camp was protected from the rain by a supersize I-beam retrofitted in the decade following the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake to support a double-decker, eight-lane freeway. The site was also camouflaged by garbage and a canopy of scrub oaks and eucalyptus branches. A tangle of access and exit ramps further isolated the spot, which became its own mini-universe, despite the thousands of commuters speeding by on the freeway above and the steady flow of pedestrians on the boulevard a half dozen yards away. At rush hour, the dull white noise of traffic made the camp feel almost safe, although it reeked of urine and rotting detritus and was wet and cold. One of the freeway's cement panels also thumped unnervingly when SUVs or trucks passed overhead.

Max was the first to settle the spot, followed by running partners Felix and Frank, who moved there after they were evicted from a more exposed site at the foot of the freeway embankment. Petey and Scotty, two inseparable running partners newly arrived from Southern California, were the next to move in. They slept together on a twin-size mattress laid out on the bare ground. At night they spooned for warmth under a thin blanket given to them by a church soup kitchen in the residential neighborhood up the hill from the boulevard. Felix nicknamed Scotty and Petey “the Island Boys” because they spent most of their daylight hours panhandling and selling heroin on the surrounding traffic islands. Felix maintained the more profitable and safer sales spot in front of the A&C corner store. The heavy flow of anonymous pedestrian traffic heading to the three catty-corner bus stops surrounding the corner store allowed Felix to camouflage his dealing as panhandling.

Al, a toothless, forty-year-old man, moved into the encampment soon after the Island Boys. He built a shack out of loading pallets that was just wide enough to fit a full-size double bed, which he shared with his “girlfriend,” Rosie. She visited once a month, on the day he received his Social Security Insurance (SSI) disability payments for alcoholism, and stayed

only long enough to help him spend his entire check on crack, leaving him, dopesick, within forty-eight hours. Felix and Frank resented Rosie's exclusive access to Al's crack and eventually persuaded him to kick her out. Al's only comment was, “She never even let me fuck her! She's got something against sex. Seems like her stepfather raped her when she was a kid.” Al was exceptionally easy-going, and after Rosie left, he allowed “no-hustle” Hogan to sleep at the entrance to his shack under a makeshift tarp.

Hank, an old-timer in his mid-fifties, was the last to establish himself as a regular inhabitant of the camp. He slept in a bright red pup tent, having just been thrown out of a housing project apartment in the residential neighborhood up the hill, where he had been living for the past year. According to Felix, the apartment belonged to “an old dopefiend lesbian bitch” whom they had all known since adolescence. The night he first arrived, Hank had a fresh “stab wound” under his right armpit, but Felix dismissed it: “Probably just an abscess they cut out of him at the county hospital. Don't ever believe a word Hank says.” Nevertheless, Felix and everyone else treated Hank well because he was exceptionally generous, sharing heroin and fortified wine. Like Al, Hank was also energetic, constantly building and cleaning when high. On weekends, he would scavenge overripe vegetables from the dumpsters at the farmers market half a mile down the boulevard and cook stew for everyone in the camp.

Hank was the first person we actually saw “become homeless.” Transitions to homelessness are often ambiguous, as individuals bounce in and out of single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels and the homes of ever-dwindling networks of family, friends, and acquaintances (Hopper 2003:77–85). Hank, for example, cycled through precarious housing arrangements for twenty-five years before he became homeless full time. Initially, he thought of it as “a temporary arrangement” on his way to “something better.” When we asked Hank why he did not go to a public shelter instead of sleeping under the freeway in the cold, he replied without hesitating: “Shelters aren't safe. They got like gangs, like cliques, you know, running the show, and the staff doesn't know what's going on. Would you go to a shelter?” All of the Edgewater homeless referred to shelters with a similar disdain, if not with fear (see Marcus 2005:68–77 for a critique of a New York City shelter).

Besides Al's crack-smoking ex-girlfriend, Rosie, only two other women occasionally stayed overnight in the camp during our first year on Edgewater Boulevard. One, an acquaintance of Felix, worked at San Francisco's lowest-budget, sex-for-crack prostitute stroll on Capp Street, some twenty blocks away. The other woman was Nickie, who lived with her eight-year-old son in a project apartment a half mile down the boulevard, near the farmers market. Welfare paid her rent directly to the Housing Authority through the Aid to Women with Dependent Children program. Nickie supported her heroin habit by combining odd jobs cleaning houses with panhandling and shoplifting from liquor stores. She also let some of the Edgewater homeless use her apartment to shower, wash their laundry, and inject in return for shares of their heroin and alcohol. Life on the street was more dangerous for

women than for men (Bourgeois, Prince, and Moss 2004). Our fieldwork notes, for example, contain several references to the rape and murder of two women on the periphery of our social network as well as to a serial killer's rampage against Capp Street sex workers (*San Francisco Chronicle* 2004, March 21).

Ethnic Hierarchies on the Street

During our first year, all the homeless in the central encampment were white, except Felix, whose parents were from Central America. We rarely saw African-Americans, Asians, or Latinos visit the encampments. In the immediate neighborhood, however, the daytime and early evening population was a kaleidoscope of San Francisco's ethnic diversity. The bus stops abutting the A&C corner store served five major bus lines linking three adjoining neighborhoods with distinct ethnic compositions. One route led to unlicensed garment and light manufacturing sweatshops in the warehouse district, where the labor force consisted primarily of Pacific Islanders, Southeast Asians, Chinese, Latinos, and a dwindling number of African-Americans. This same bus line continued on to Third Street, through Hunters Point–Bayview, the city's poorest African-American neighborhood. This area, surrounding defunct navy shipyards, had San Francisco's highest gang murder rates throughout most of the 1990s and 2000s (*San Francisco Chronicle* 2008, January 15; see also Kevin Epps's 2003 documentary *Straight Outta Hunters Point*).

During World War II, an unprecedented employment boom in the San Francisco shipyards spawned the large-scale migration of rural African-Americans from Louisiana and East Texas. The majority of these immigrants settled in the swampy flatland immediately surrounding their workplaces, and Hunters Point became San Francisco's largest segregated black community. Some of the newcomers managed to buy single-family homes on the steep hill overlooking Edgewater Boulevard, and that neighborhood became the city's most ethnically diverse census tract (Latino, white, African-American, Filipino, and Pacific Islander). This was the residential neighborhood where most of the Edgewater homeless had grown up, and it was where Philippe lived (a few blocks up from the A&C corner store). Like most of San Francisco, the neighborhood gentrified rapidly during our fieldwork years and began losing many of its working-class Latino and African-American residents (Thorne-Lyman and Treuhaft 2003). According to census data, between 1990 and 2000, the city of San Francisco as a whole lost almost a quarter (23.4 percent) of its African-American population (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1991, 2002).

A second bus line headed north to the county hospital and continued through the heart of the poorer, but also gentrifying, predominantly Latino neighborhood known as the Mission District. A third bus line led to an underfunded local high school, home to several competing Latino gangs. Finally, three additional bus lines served San Francisco's southern suburbs, which were whiter and wealthier but retained scattered dwindling pockets of working-class communities.

On a typical warm summer evening, the main corner where the homeless spent a great deal of their time, in front of the A&C convenience store, attracted a half dozen very distinct groups of people. Most visible were the middle-aged African-American men who, on their way home from work, congregated and drank beer by a barbecue at the entrance to the alley behind the store. By nightfall, younger African-American crack dealers arrived. They camouflaged their sales by mingling with the barbecue crowd and by circulating among the Latino and Asian commuters around the corner who were waiting at the bus stops. Cars pulled up to the sidewalk, pausing just long enough for a subtle exchange of dollar bills through the passenger-side window. In the doorway of the A&C, two or three Yemeni men chatted in Arabic with the cashiers. Sometimes they chewed qat, a psychoactive stimulant imported from Eritrea. On rare occasions, the wife of the store's owner, fully veiled in a black chador that revealed only her eyes, walked out from the back of the premises carrying a shopping bag and a baby. Young, new-immigrant Latino men crisscrossed the sidewalk running late errands for the primarily white- and Arab-owned construction-related businesses along the boulevard.

In this mix, two or three of the white homeless leaned against a wall at the edge of the African-American barbecue scene or inside one of the bus shelters nodding in deep heroin sedation. Latino and Filipino youths, mostly high school age, in the latest hip-hop outfits, passed by to ask the Edgewater homeless to buy beer, cigarettes, and cigars for them. They would hollow out the cigars to prepare "blunts" of marijuana, but they rarely stopped to smoke on the corner.

The homeless, middle-aged, white heroin injectors we befriended were at the bottom of the corner's social hierarchy and often displayed their low status by begging in tattered clothing. An early set of fieldnotes reveals how rapidly we had to learn the meaning of our skin color in this scene. Even though we looked healthy and dressed in clean clothes, we were lumped by default with the low-status "stanky white dopefiends."

Philippe's Fieldnotes

While accompanying Al and Hogan back to the main encampment, I slow down as we pass the barbecue scene in the alley, hoping to initiate a passing conversation with one of the younger African-American crack dealers. My attempt at friendly eye contact is dismissed with a wave of the arm and a gruff "Keep moving, keep moving." When I smile and nod hello, the young man shouts, "I said keep moving!" I overhear him telling his partner in a lower voice, "Damn! Do those motherfuckers smell bad!" Embarrassed, I hurry to catch up with Al and Hogan, noticing that Hogan has brown stains in the rear of his pants, presumably from having lost control of his bowels this morning as a result of dopesickness.

The ethnic hierarchies of street culture in San Francisco are not exclusive to drug culture and homelessness. The hegemony of African-American style extends throughout the United States and through much of global popular culture. It is historically inscribed in slang (from jive to hip-hop), in music (from blues and jazz to rap), in clothing (from zoot suits to sagging jeans), and in body posture (from handshakes to gait and facial expressions).

But the “coolness” of African-American street culture does not translate into economic and political power in the United States. On the contrary, blackness and expressions of hip-hop or working-class street culture exclude individuals from access to upward mobility in the corporate economy. Despite their clear subordination within the local street-hustler hierarchy and their exclusion from mainstream white society, the durability of racism in the United States allowed the homeless whites on Edgewater Boulevard to hold on to an ideology of white supremacy. Among themselves, for example, they used the word *nigger* routinely. When African-Americans were in earshot, however, they practiced deference, fearing violence or humiliation. At first, it did not occur to the whites that we might not share their racism. They treated racialized distinctions as self-evident common sense and often used the clichés of middle-class society when we asked them about race relations.

Philippe: Why is this scene so white?

Hank: I've never really thought about it. We keep amongst ourselves. The black with the black and the white with the white. That's about it, you know. Basically, blacks stay to themselves.

Philippe: But where are the black dopefiends? I never see any here.

Hank: Well, they're around, but they don't hang out. Everybody buys from everybody, but for actually sitting there and actually using together? They don't do that. I've got a lot of black connections, but if I was to sit there and use with them. . . . I won't use with them.

Matter of fact, you'll see very few black people homeless . . . because they're knocking out kids on welfare.

Philippe: [surprised] 'Cause what?

Hank: You know, having kids. Every one of those black guys over there [pointing toward the barbecue grill in the alley] has three or four kids, and an old lady at home. They're all collecting welfare.

Have you ever seen a black guy really walk?

Philippe: [confused] Really what?

Hank: Walk. Just about every black guy I know owns a car, either a Cadillac or something new.

Yeah, they pretty much stay to themselves. I've never really got in to find out where they go or what they do, you know. Hell, they don't bother me, I don't bother them, you know. Keep the peace that way.

But when you start mixing the races, especially the blacks down there [pointing to the alley and rolling his eyes], everybody's kind of semi-prejudiced. So we don't really exchange information. We say hello—just general things.

Felix: [interrupting] Blacks are into crack . . . scandalous crack monsters. You can't trust niggers.

Hank: Yeah.

Felix: They'll rob you. They'll steal from their own mother. None of the blacks want to work. All they want to do is smoke crack all night.

Hank: Can't trust niggers.

Felix: I hate selling to them. They'll come back and mug you.

The irony of the assertion by the whites that they were the victims of black violence and theft emerged years later when we coded our fieldnotes and transcripts. We discovered that during our first year none of the whites in our Edgewater homeless scene had been robbed by an African-American. In fact, their most generous patron was an elderly African-American man who was an evangelical Christian. When it rained heavily, he allowed several of them to sleep under an old camper shell in a storage lot he owned on the boulevard. Furthermore, the only case of black-on-white violence we recorded that first year occurred when one of the whites peripheral to our social network stole thirty dollars' worth of crack from an African-American dealer for whom he was supposed to be selling on consignment. He was beaten “as a warning” for “smoking up the product,” and when he “came up short” again the next week, he fled from the boulevard and never returned.

Irrespective of ethnicity, the United States has consistently had the highest levels of interpersonal violence of all industrialized nations, and that violence is disproportionately concentrated in poor urban communities. Handguns were cheap and easily available on Edgewater Boulevard. No one who spends long hours on streets where drug sellers congregate can escape the background threat of violence. Early in our fieldwork, one of the young crack sellers in the alley was stabbed in the neck while Jeff was photographing a couple of yards away. On one of Jeff's first visits to the corner, a crack seller, seeing Jeff with his camera for the first time, threatened him in a low voice, “You are not getting out of here alive.” Overhearing the interaction, Hank confirmed, “He isn't joking. We have to go,” and they hurried away. That particular crack seller, who flew into unpredictable rages when he drank too much, never came to like us, but on one occasion he shared a bologna sandwich, prepared by his wife, with a member of the ethnographic team.

The tendency to sensationalize the imminence of violence against outsiders by inner-city residents further isolates microneighborhoods (Bourgois 2003b:32–33). After dark, residents from the neighborhood up the hill avoided the corner where we spent most of our time. At night, bus drivers warned Philippe not to get off when he requested the local stop. Some drivers routinely refused to continue their official route through the nearby housing projects. Despite our early impressions of potential risk, and the occasional spectacular incidents of aggression we did witness in our periphery, violence was never, in fact, a significant problem for us. The men in our homeless network were middle-aged survivors who were physically weakened by long-term daily drug and alcohol consumption. Most of them, consequently, purposefully avoided engaging in physical aggression, and we felt safe among them.

The Arrival of African-Americans

During the second year of our fieldwork, an African-American heroin injector named Carter James became a regular in our homeless scene. He had grown up on the same block as Felix, in the neighborhood up the hill, and Hank also knew him, having used heroin with Carter's older brother during his adolescence. Directly contradicting everything Hank had previously told us about "never mingling with blacks," all the white heroin injectors welcomed Carter onto Edgewater Boulevard, referring to him by his nickname, C. J. He worked as a parking attendant for a Jaguar auto dealership and contributed generously in the moral economy of sharing. Every day, he came directly from work to the A&C corner store to buy heroin from Felix with the money he earned from tips.

As Carter spent more and more of his free time on the corner after work, his heroin habit and alcohol consumption escalated. At the time, he was living with his eldest sister, Beverly, in Hunters Point, sleeping on her living room couch. His trajectory into full-time homelessness took only six weeks. It began when he stopped contributing his share of rent and food to his sister's household. He would come to Edgewater Boulevard to inject early in the morning, complaining that everyone was "against" him. His sister, he said, was "always on my case" over "trivial" matters, and his boss was "riding me" for arriving late to work.

When Carter was finally thrown out of his sister's home, he presented it as a voluntary decision on his part, made to protect his patriarchal self-respect from a family that no longer acknowledged the authority of the older male:

I came this close to strangling my niece. I'll never forget what she said to me. "I'm not going to let you kill my mother like you did your mother." That disrespectful bitch! I couldn't allow her to keep talking to me that way. But she can call the cops and say I hit her, and I'd go to jail. So I walked. I left, with Beverly, my oldest sister, standing there crying.

Carter was more afraid of losing his job than of becoming homeless: "I'll keep my job even if I have to sleep out here." For about a week, he managed to make daily payments for a single-room occupancy hotel room in the nearby Mission District. Finally, early one morning, Carter arrived with his army duffle bag full of clothes. He was not on his way to work, and he no longer had money to rent a room. Felix and his running partner, Frank, the sign painter, made room for Carter next to them under the I-beam, and he laid out a mattress of scavenged carpet remnants.

It rained the first night Carter slept on Edgewater Boulevard. Everyone had already settled to sleep as the drizzle began. Philippe was hurrying home when he heard Carter calling after him. He was dragging his bulging duffle bag, looking confused. He was scared to leave his possessions unattended in the camp, but he desperately wanted to talk. He had been injecting speedballs, a heroin/cocaine mixture, all evening and was shivering from the cold as well as from his overstimulated emotions. He spoke with the friendly intensity that coke rushes sometimes trigger. Philippe was eager to head home up the hill before the drizzle became a drenching rain. He also anticipated that Carter was going to make a pitch for

a loan of money, so he tried to shake Carter's hand goodbye and politely cut the conversation short. Instead, Carter burst into tears, hugging Philippe repeatedly. "I'm to'e [torn] up, Philippe. Don't forget me. I lost my job . . . my home . . . everything. I'm to'e up."

Racial Disequilibrium

Within a week, Carter went from being an employed, housed, and high-status giver in the moral economy to a quarrelsome taker. Having suddenly lost his steady source of legal income, he had not yet established an effective street hustle. He considered begging from strangers demeaning. Instead, he coerced money out of friends and acquaintances and intimidated campmates to give him the leftover cottons from their injections. He gave up buying vodka and began bumming slugs of Cisco Berry. The whites now dismissed him as "nothin' but a fuckin' nigger peon."

Carter's full-time presence in the main encampment and in front of the corner store attracted three additional African-Americans into the core group of regulars on Edgewater Boulevard: Stretch, Sonny, and Tina. Stretch, in his mid-thirties, was the youngest, and he was only beginning to use heroin. He had recently left an aunt's house, evicted by the renovation and retrenchment of the housing project where she lived, in the gentrifying Fillmore neighborhood bordering Haight-Ashbury, a wealthy district and a magnet for tourists. Stretch still did not know how to inject himself, and he exchanged puffs from his glass crack pipe with Felix and Carter in return for assistance with administering shots of heroin. They were happy to help him, since his physical tolerance for opiates was still low, and they did not have to give him much heroin in exchange for his shares of crack. Tina, a woman in her early forties, never injected heroin. She drank large quantities of whatever sixteen-ounce can of malt liquor was on sale at the corner store and smoked crack. Sonny, in his late forties, had just "left" his girlfriend's apartment in the housing project on the far side of the residential neighborhood up the hill, following a stint in county jail for selling crack.

Stretch and Sonny placed their mattresses next to Carter's in the dry corner of the camp where Felix and Frank slept. Tina did not sleep in the camp because she still had access to a couch in a cousin's project apartment down the boulevard. Sometimes, however, she stayed up all night in the main encampment binging on crack with Carter, Sonny, and Stretch. Several additional African-American men, who had more stable housing, began visiting the encampment regularly to inject heroin, smoke crack, and hang out. They included A. J., Carter's older brother, who lived with his wife and children in Oakland; Vernon, who lived in a housing project apartment with his wife, a nurse; and Reggie, a fifty-year-old man, buff from lifting weights in the San Quentin prison yard. Reggie stayed at his sister's apartment in the same housing project where Tina lived. He drank and smoked crack avidly but dismissed heroin as a "loser drug."

The ethnic transformation of the main hang-out scene in front of the A&C corner store was most dramatic. Reggie, dressed in a black leather suit, would call out loudly to passersby,

"I need ya!" His smile would turn into a curse if no money was forthcoming. When white pedestrians failed to acknowledge eye contact, he accused them of racism. No one dared to cross Reggie except for Felix, who resented losing control of this optimal panhandling and heroin selling spot.

Philippe's Fieldnotes

Felix accuses Reggie of being "a racist motherfucker" and "bad for business" because of his intimidating panhandling style. Reggie responds with a howl of mirth and urinates into the gutter, facing out toward the passing traffic. While relieving himself, he pounds on the metal top of the trashcan on the corner, chanting, "Fuck you, Felix!" Reggie shakes his fist at a white driver who slows down to stare in disapproval. He blows a kiss at an African-American woman in a Volvo who has stopped at the red light and is frowning at his display. He makes a squishy baby face at her young child in the back seat, prompting the toddler to drop her imitation of her mother's frown and instead giggle and wave back at him, playing peek-a-boo.

Outraged, Felix slams his open hands onto Reggie's chest and shouts, "Pig!" Reggie shoves him back even harder, and their roughhousing escalates into solid punches aimed at the chest and the shoulders. Their blows to the face, however, are noticeably softer. Twice, Reggie loses his balance on his patent leather shoes, sliding off the curb into honking traffic. After one particularly energetic round, they de-escalate by hugging and take turns kissing one another on both cheeks, laughing.

There are a half dozen of us watching this choreographed fighting, including one of the "youngster rock stars [teenage crack sellers]" from around the corner. The youngster walks slowly over to the garbage can and urinates in the same spot as Reggie did, daring anyone to call him a pig, too.

Sonny notices that the roughhousing has unnerved me, and he gently steers me a few yards down the sidewalk with his arm around my shoulder. He whispers in a tone that is meant to reassure, "Reggie thinks I'll be on his side. Like, he thinks I don't love Felix—but I'm not about skin color."

From thirty feet away, Reggie notices Sonny by my side and yells, "You sucking up to the white boy!" Sneering, Reggie slaps hands in a high-five with two additional young African-American crack sellers who have run over from the barbecue and crack alley to check out the commotion.

Sonny immediately breaks away from me, mumbling, "See how they're talking shit about me for talking to you?"

To my relief, Felix refocuses the spotlight on his fight with Reggie and it becomes a racialized contest of masculinity:

Felix: "Pig!"

Reggie: "Miserable dopefiend! You sit in your shit and vomit! [imitating the heroin nod] You sleep in dirt. No one needs to live in the dirt."

Felix: "The pioneers lived in the dirt. At least I'm decent enough to go around the corner when I shit."

Reggie: [doubling over with laughter] "You have to take your panties off to shit, you modern-day pioneer. [grabbing his crotch] You wanna play with it? Suck my black dick."

Felix: [screaming in a falsetto voice and slapping Reggie's left cheek with an open hand] "Bitch!" Once again, this successfully defuses the escalating tension, causing everyone, including Reggie, to laugh. Reggie ends the confrontation by hugging Felix. "Okay, man, I'm enjoying my high. You're enjoying your high. Leave me alone. Let's enjoy our highs."

Immediately after hugging Felix, however, Reggie walks over to me, grabs me by the shoulder, and drags me to the entrance of the store: "White boy! How about a bottle?" When I shrug my shoulders and try to change the topic, Reggie shouts, "What's the matter? You never look out for us brothers! You only throw shit down to the whites!" The Yemeni cashier walks out of the store to berate Reggie for the commotion. Reggie responds with a big smile, "What's the matter, cousin? I'm only hassling a white boy!" This elicits a laugh from the cashier and they exchange a high-five of solidarity over their heads.

Successfully intimidating a dollar out of me, Reggie follows the cashier into the store and buys a pint of vodka. Perhaps energized by his sexualized display of masculine domination over Felix, Reggie accuses the cashier of "never having touched any pussy." This prompts the young Yemeni to call out angrily in Arabic. A little boy about seven years old walks sheepishly out of a storage room in the back of the store that serves as living quarters. In broken English, the cashier shouts, "Who is your father?" Bewildered and embarrassed, the boy points back to the cashier and says in flawless, California-accented English, "He is my father." Laughing, Reggie reaches across the counter to give the cashier another high-five.

The cashier then calls Reggie a name, presumably an insult, but none of us can understand it because of his accent. He repeats the word several times to no avail. It sounds somewhat like the word never, but when he pronounces it more slowly, it approximates something like neh-ger. Finally, Reggie bursts out laughing, shouting for everyone out on the corner to hear, "The A-rab is calling me a nigger, and he's just an A-rab. And they all came from our nuts!"

White Flight

Ethnic tensions also mounted during these weeks in the main shooting encampment. The three new African-American residents, Carter, Sonny, and Stretch, appropriated the driest area in the camp by the central fire pit, and their spot became the center of late-night activity. Despite the early arrival of the heavy winter rains, the whites moved their mattresses away from the protection of the I-beam and slung up tarps for shelter on the edge of the camp. They expressed their racist response to losing control of the camp as moral outrage. As Hank complained, "They keep us up all night, bringing their other nigger crack friends by and making noise. Don't they realize that other people live here?"

Hogan was the first to move out of the encampment “to escape from the niggers.” Carter had repeatedly threatened to beat him up unless he took a shower, changed his clothes, and cleaned out his half dozen abscesses. Hogan exemplified the low status of the whites in the scene, and everyone scorned him. Felix was especially dismissive: “Hogan’s a wannabe dopefiend. He’s only got a cotton habit. I’ve seen him bang a cotton that’s already been banged. He’s an animal! Dirty!” On several occasions, members of the ethnographic team found Hogan rummaging through other people’s paraphernalia to harvest heroin residue from the sides of their used syringes, cookers, and discarded cottons. His especially unhygienic injection practices resulted in multiple foul-smelling chronic abscesses. Furthermore, in contrast to the other homeless, who were skinny to the point of emaciation, Hogan was obese, straining from the weight of his oversized body and constantly sweating as he hobbled with an uncoordinated gait on swollen feet.

Hogan set up camp three blocks away in a gully along the freeway embankment behind an all-night diner and bar, the Dockside Bar & Grill. The bar’s flashing red neon sign, **WE NEVER CLOSE**, threw shadows over his camp twenty-four hours a day. The low-lying spot he selected in order to decrease his visibility flooded as the winter rains escalated. To stay above the rising water level, he piled three mattresses on top of one another, but this did not help him much because his only other protection was a plastic tarp that he pulled over his blankets when he was not too drunk. When the owner of the Dockside complained, the police attempted a raid. They did not want to get their feet wet, however, and they were too repulsed by the smell to enter and ticket Hogan for possession of injection paraphernalia. Homelessness was not technically illegal in San Francisco, but when an individual failed to appear in court to pay a misdemeanor ticket, a bench warrant was automatically issued, enabling the police to arrest that person.

Isolated in his new camp, Hogan tearfully told anyone who would listen that his festering multiple abscesses were the result of AIDS. His formerly scornful companions expressed sympathy and stopped by to give him wet cottons. Even the hardened storekeepers along the boulevard started giving him money and food. We too brought him clothes, food, blankets, and petty cash and began tape-recording his life story. There was not yet any effective treatment for HIV at this time, and Hogan said that he was talking to us “for posterity’s sake.”

Meanwhile, back at the main camp, ethnic tensions were deepening with complaints by the whites that the “scandalous niggers” were attracting too much attention from the police. Scotty and Petey, the Island Boys, who had emerged as the steadiest retail heroin sellers on the boulevard, moved to Hogan’s camp but placed their mattress on drier ground, slightly higher up the embankment. Hank was the next white to leave. He obtained a beat-up motor home and parked it up the hill, on the same block where he had lived as a teenager. Al also left, but not out of antipathy to the African-Americans; he was simply taking advantage of an invitation from his parents to help renovate their garage in San Francisco’s southern suburbs. Max, meanwhile, was hospitalized for several weeks for an abscess on

his upper arm that required complicated muscle transfer surgery. Upon his release, he took “one look at the nigger camp” and joined Hogan in the gully behind the Dockside Bar & Grill.

Running partners Felix and Frank were the only two remaining original members of what had been the mostly white encampment. Frank stayed in the camp but moved his possessions ten meters farther up the embankment, claiming, “Those goddamn niggers thief you blind.” He jammed his mattress right up against the bottom of the freeway overpass so that he had to bend over double to avoid scraping his head on the cement panels. The roar of traffic speeding by just inches overhead made it impossible to hold a conversation, and the entire spot shook when trucks passed. Following heavy rains, highway runoff turned the steep climb to his mattress into a waterfall.

A Latino Interlude

Felix was the only member of our original social network to maintain friendly relations with Carter and the newly arrived African-Americans, sharing crack and heroin with them regularly. Frank, who had been Felix’s running partner for years, was furious about this. He blamed Felix for having “turned our camp into a niggers’ shooting gallery.” Formerly, Felix had been the only Latino in the scene and had been treated as an “honorary white.” The arrival of the African-Americans allowed him to establish a new ethnic space for himself, and he began referring to his former companions as “lame whites.”

Felix asserted his Latino identity by befriending a Puerto Rican injector named Victor, who drove a forklift at a corrugated cardboard factory in South San Francisco. A barrel of glue had fallen on Victor at work, fracturing two disks in his lower back, and he was placed on disability payments for three months to recover. During those months, he spent most of his time with Felix. Shortly after returning to work, Victor was arrested while purchasing a ten-dollar bag of heroin during his lunch break. He claimed he needed the heroin to treat his ongoing lower back pain, but he spent three days dopesick in the county jail before the charges were dismissed. His supervisor immediately fired him for absenteeism, and he began hanging out full time on Edgewater Boulevard.

A few weeks later, Victor’s twenty-four-year-old son, Little Vic, just released from two years in San Quentin prison for crack selling, drove up to the corner in a brand-new Mitsubishi Montero SUV looking for his father. Little Vic stayed with his grandmother in the housing project up the hill. He forced his girlfriend, whose parents owned the SUV he was driving, to sleep alone in the vehicle, which he parked in the alley behind the corner store because his grandmother did not approve of premarital sex.

Like most of the under-thirty-year-olds who passed through our scene, Little Vic spurned heroin and needle use, but he wanted to spend time with his father and treated him to a prolonged crack binge. Felix joined them, and soon Little Vic was calling him “uncle.” Little Vic’s mother was white, but he presented himself proudly as “Puerto Rican one hundred percent,

just like my father.” Maintaining a perennially angry expression on his face, he began harassing the whites. He referred to Felix’s running partner, Frank, as “that white trash motherfucker.” In contrast, he curried favor with the African-Americans and spent most of his time hanging out with the younger crack sellers by the barbecue grill and at the bus stops.

In the court deposition given by Little Vic’s mother requesting that her son be remanded to drug treatment rather than sent to prison, the roots of Little Vic’s polarized ethnic identity become clear. His mother begins by describing herself as “a third generation San Franciscan [from] a solid middle-class family . . . [of] Irish, Scottish and Italian descent” and pointedly notes that Victor Senior is “unfortunately . . . [from] quite a different background. He is a man of Puerto Rican descent from New York City.”

Victor would constantly awaken the children at all hours of the night, e.g., 3 A.M. and insist that they speak Spanish to him, although they did not know the language. He would argue with the young children as if they were his equal. . . .

. . . My children and I . . . would barricade the front door to try to avoid Victor’s drunken rages. He would come home and break down the barricades and my children and I would have to flee through the back door and over the fence to my parents’ house 2 doors away. I kept a complete change of clothes for the children and myself packed so we could run away at a moment’s notice. . . .

Victor would steal money from Little Vic and the other children to buy drugs. He sold their television to buy drugs. He would take the welfare checks that would arrive, cash them, and spend the money for drugs. We’d be left with nothing for food. There were times when our family had literally nothing, furniture had to be repossessed, all went involuntarily . . . to support Victor’s drug habit.

The details of her account illustrate how domestic violence is often channeled along patriarchal fault lines. In this case, a failed father figure was lashing out at the children he could no longer control (see Bourgois 1995:213–222, 301–307). In an incident reminiscent of Carter’s outrage against his niece, “disrespect” from a young girl in the household elicits especially abusive behavior by the unemployed, drug-using, alcoholic father striving to hold onto his waning male privilege:

Once while Little Vic was present his twin sister Nina made a “smart” remark to her father. Victor picked her up by her 2 ponytails up to his shoulder height. Victor would also stand by the corner of our children’s school and yell obscenities at them as they were exiting the school . . . and spit on [them].

Little Vic’s mother specifies that her son was socialized into male violence well before adolescence. Her account evokes a standard tragic/heroic oedipal scenario: the son valiantly protecting his long-suffering mother from a violent father.

Once Little Vic happened to walk through the door with his cousin when Victor was beating me severely on the living room floor. . . . That night he told me, “Mom, if dad touches you one

more time I’m going to kill him.” I told Little Vic that if he were to do such a thing he would be taken to jail and I would never see him again. Little Vic replied, “Mom, but if dad killed you I won’t ever see you again.” Little Vic was 8 years old at the time.

The judge was not sympathetic to the pleas of Little Vic’s mother and sentenced him to two years in San Quentin instead of mandating drug treatment.

Victor Senior’s memories of himself as a family man are remarkably different from those of his wife. He clings to a discourse of responsible patriarchy, buttressed by romance and evangelical faith.

I respected my wife and my children and my home. I never used [heroin] in my house or got them involved. I didn’t fix [inject] in my house. I had a family that I cared about. I went through the Victory Ministry Christian program after prison, and my morals got stronger. I did love my wife.

Back on Edgewater Boulevard, Little Vic, now grown up, bonded with his father through crack smoking and aggression against the whites. He “beat down” Jim, a newly arrived heroin injector from San Francisco’s white, formerly working-class suburb of Brisbane, chasing him permanently out of the scene. Little Vic also regularly bullied Hogan, the weakest man in the group, taxing his panhandling earnings. He also mugged Frank, and, to our surprise, Felix helped him:

Frank: Little Vic walks up the hill here at night with his father when I’m by myself. Felix is comin’ up behind them. “Hey, Frank! Come here.” They act all friendly.

Then the kid grabs me. [in a gruff voice] “Hey, man. Where’s that twenty dollars you owe me from last year before I went to the pen?”

I don’t know the kid from Adam. I just met the guy, and he starts this “I’m gonna motherfuckin’ kick your ass.”

The kid is bigger than me, younger than me, and I’m thinking, “I got a problem here.” He takes a swing at me and grabs me, but I break loose. But where am I gonna go? Through the trees and across the fuckin’ freeway and get killed?

I’m backed up against the freeway, lookin’ around. I call, “Hey, Felix! Come here.” I’m figuring Felix would back me up, but instead Felix—he pushes me, grabs me around the back, and puts me in a bear hug. *Felix* does!

I twist around and Felix punches me in the stomach. When I flinch, the kid snatches the money from my pocket and runs down the hill. And Felix runs right after him. That motherfucking lying sack of shit!

Scared and depressed after this betrayal by his long-term running partner, Frank entered a twenty-one-day methadone detox facility. He abandoned his mattress and all his possessions under the overpass, declaring, “Felix didn’t stab me in the back. He stabbed me right here [patting his heart].” Frank lasted for a week in detox before dropping out and settling into the new encampment of whites behind the Docks Bar & Grill. He became Max’s

running partner. Felix, meanwhile, felt guilty: “I wish Frank knew what really happened. I was trying to help him. I was just trying to push him aside, and now he blames me for beating him up. Oh, man! Frank has left me forever.”

Shortly after mugging Frank, Little Vic drove off in his girlfriend’s SUV with another woman and disappeared on an extended crack binge across town. Before leaving, Little Vic ordered his girlfriend to stay with Felix under the I-beam. To enforce his mandate, he took her shoes, leaving her barefoot in the mud. Little Vic’s girlfriend remained semi-catatonic next to Felix’s mattress, ignoring our offers to help. At first, she did not touch any alcohol or drugs, but Tina reached out to her and, in a gesture of feminine solidarity, shared food with her. Soon they were smoking crack together and drinking malt liquor. Reactions to Little Vic’s girlfriend highlight the misogyny of street scenes. Felix bolstered his masculinity at her expense by jousting with Reggie in front of the A&C corner store:

Felix: Little Vic ran off with some other ho’, and now his bitch is cryin’ all the time. Women can’t live on the streets like a man. Why is she out here living in the dirt when she’s got an apartment in the East Bay? She’s got to wash her pussy, wash her ass. Women have more needs than men and I’m not going to change my style. I’m going to shit and piss where I have to and I don’t give a shit about her.

Reggie: Aw, shut up, Felix! That fat hairy bitch gives you good head.

Felix: I wouldn’t fuck her with your dick!

Little Vic’s binge ended with his arrest for bashing a man over the head with a forty-ounce bottle of malt liquor while stealing his wallet. According to Little Vic’s attorney, the woman accompanying him stabbed the robbery victim in the neck during the mugging, and they were both facing twenty-to-twenty-five-year potential sentences. Despite the violence of the assault, however, Little Vic was not prosecuted. Instead, because of overcrowding in California’s courts—one of the effects of the War on Drugs—he was administratively sanctioned with a “parole violation” and received an automatic four-to-six-month sentence. This short sentence represents one of the many unintended bureaucratic consequences of the dysfunctional institutional dynamic that prevailed in the California courts following the state’s “parole reform” initiative in the 1980s, which turned California’s parole system into the most draconian in the nation (State of California, Little Hoover Commission 2003). Judges with overbooked dockets preferred to rely on streamlined administrative procedures for parole violators rather than preside over costly new trials, even for violent crimes.

Victor Senior reduced his presence on the boulevard following his son’s reincarceration. He persuaded his mother to pay for him to enter a methadone maintenance program, and she invited him to move into her housing project apartment. We occasionally saw him in the neighborhood up the hill, carrying his mother’s grocery bags in the supermarket or walking her to the Senior Services Center.

Victor’s exit from Edgewater Boulevard left Felix isolated. He claimed that Victor refused to recognize him when he chanced upon him up the hill, where Felix scavenged for alu-

minum cans with his shopping cart. Felix now had no running partner and was sandwiched between the African-Americans and the whites. The one other Latino in the scene, Sal, a Chicano, was a successful heroin dealer who had moved his operations to the neighborhood several months earlier to escape a law enforcement offensive in the Mission District. He snubbed Felix as “a knucklehead.” Sal gloated when Felix’s heroin supplier eventually cut him off for failing to pay for a round of “fronted” bags.

At the time, Sal lived with his girlfriend, Carmen, a Chicana, in a metal shipping container parked on a vacant lot in the alley behind the A&C corner store. Carmen had just been released from jail. The couple adopted two pit bull puppies named My Girl and My Boy. Carmen smoked crack and maintained her habit by selling crack in the back alley. She carried a gun in her right pocket, and when a coke rush made her paranoid, she would pull it out to bolster her credibility as a woman dealer. Carmen eventually disappeared. It was rumored that she had been killed “turning tricks on Capp Street,” but we did not dare verify the details with Sal.

Unable to compete with Reggie and Tina (who now maintained a full-time presence on the boulevard) for space in front of the store, Felix stopped panhandling at the corner. “You can’t make money out there when there’s five blacks in front of the store. It scares away the customers!” Instead, he scavenged full time for cans and bottles to recycle and began selling clean syringes for two dollars each. Syringe selling proved to be an excellent business. He would exchange “one clean one for two dirties” and was able to double his supply of clean syringes by regularly visiting the once-a-week needle exchange across town. He was also able to increase his heroin consumption because, in lieu of payment, he let customers come back to his camp to inject so long as they gave him a taste.

Felix began accusing his African-American campmates of stealing from his supply of used needles. He started carrying the syringes with him at all times in an overflowing fanny pack, sometimes confusing the clean ones with the dirty. This increased his risk of arrest for “possession of controlled paraphernalia with intent to sell.” The epithet “nigger” returned to his everyday lexicon and he reduced his crack smoking. Soon he was routinely referring to the African-Americans as “crack monster motherfuckers” and blaming them for attracting the police. He responded defensively when we asked him about his change in attitude:

I might be racist, but hell! It’s the niggers that are making me this way. They’re power tripping. . . . Trying to take over the entire show. They didn’t used to be like that with me, but once a nigger, always a nigger.

That Carter is the fuckin’ ringleader. He’s the biggest nigger of them all. The big, black nigger. I’m gonna move down with Frank and the whites. I gotta get away from the niggers.

As a first step toward rapprochement with the whites, Felix began parking his shopping cart at their camp overnight, to keep his cans and bottles “safe from the niggers.” A week later, he moved into the white camp full time and slid back into his former honorary white status.

Ethnicity and Habitus

In everyday interaction, the Edgewater homeless were forced to commingle intensely across ethnic lines. African-Americans, whites, and Latinos shared and competed for the same limited resources—public space, income, and drugs. It might seem reasonable to suppose that physical addiction to drugs to the point of indigence would override the social distinctions that drive ordinary life and reduce people to a common human denominator. But the homeless on Edgewater Boulevard were deeply divided along racialized lines, and their hostility was exacerbated by their physical proximity.

In the 1990s and 2000s, San Francisco was an ethnically diverse city by U.S. standards. Its visible multiculturalism, however, was shallow. We developed the term *intimate apartheid* to convey the involuntary and predictable manner in which sharply delineated segregation and conflict impose themselves at the level of the everyday practices driven by habitus (Bourgois and Schonberg 2007). Intimate apartheid manifests itself explicitly in the special demarcations the Edgewater homeless drew between blacks and whites in their encampments. It also operates at the preconscious level, expressing itself as embodied emotions, attitudes, and ways of acting that reinforce distinctions, which in turn become misrecognized as natural racial attributes.

On one level, cultural difference and ethnic style are expressions of creative diversity. They frequently express resistance to subordination and assert dignity and self-respect (see Bourgois 2003b:8–11, 17; see also MacLeod 1987; Willis 1981). In the United States, however, cultural symbols carry a double-edged power valence that can have devastating implications for the socially vulnerable, especially the poor. What we call the ethnic components to habitus have emerged in the United States out of a history of slavery, racism, and socioeconomic inequality. They manifest themselves through everyday practices that enforce social hierarchies and constrain the life choices of large categories of vulnerable people, who become identified in an essentialized manner as “races” or “cultural groups.” Ethnic components to habitus thereby become a strategic cog in the logic of symbolic violence that legitimizes and administers ethnic hierarchy, fuels racism, and obscures economic inequality.

Ethnographic and especially photographic documentation of ethnic habitus risks inadvertently reifying the racist stereotypes that we aim to critique through the lens of fieldwork. To expose and analyze coercive cultural distinctions in the United States, one needs to examine misrecognition in action among individuals because these routine interactions create the “common sense” that justifies conflict and subordination as if it were inherent in the essence of “race” or “culture.”

In everyday practice, as Jeff’s photographs document, individuals do not consistently behave in racially dichotomous ways. Segregation is frequently violated, and many individuals purposefully transgress ethnic practices. Al, for example, did not move into the white camp when he returned to Edgewater Boulevard after renovating his parents’ house in the suburbs. Instead, he slept under the I-beam, curled up between Sonny, Carter, Tina, and

Stretch, a conspicuous white body in a now all-black scene. He also traveled regularly to Third Street, the main thoroughfare in the African-American neighborhood of Hunters Point, where crack was cheaper. His behavior was considered unusual by the African-Americans, but, for the most part, they welcomed him. He was dismissed by all the whites as a bizarre and embarrassing person. Nickie, for example, was genuinely befuddled: “I just don’t know. . . . Al just likes to be with blacks.” Felix was more aggressive: “Al likes the crack, and crack’s around niggers.” Felix conveniently ignored the inconsistency that he often binged on crack. Al referred to himself as having “black friends” but continued to treat racism against African-Americans as self-evident and acceptable. On one occasion, he used the epithet “nigger” in front of Sonny, provoking an awkward silence rather than the violent response we expected.

Early childhood socialization processes tend to generate many of the most durable dimensions of habitus. Al had grown up in the Potrero housing projects, a dozen blocks east of Edgewater Boulevard. “We were the only white family in the whole place, surrounded by niggers. I ran with the Medallions [a local African-American gang].” This background may have been the reason why he violated intimate apartheid with such ease. Sonny had belonged to another teenage gang, which fought with the Medallions. He would reminisce with Al about their famous childhood acquaintance in the Potrero projects, retired football star O. J. Simpson, whose prolonged televised trial for the murder of his ex-wife and her friend took place during the early months of our fieldwork. The reactions of the Edgewater homeless to Simpson’s acquittal underlined the racialized divisions that existed all across the United States. National surveys revealed that whites were convinced that O. J. was guilty, whereas most African-Americans declared him innocent (CNN 1995). Significantly, Al defended O. J., claiming that “he was framed.” This assertion did not stop Al from quipping, however, that Simpson’s murdered ex-wife deserved her fate: “She’s nothin’ but white trash! After all, she married a nigger, didn’t she?”

Al purchased a dilapidated 1979 Volvo station wagon with the money he earned renovating his parents’ garage and invited Sonny to “move in” with him. They slept side by side on the folded-down bucket seats and became inseparable running partners. They eventually upgraded to a late 1970s Ford pickup truck outfitted with a camper shell, which was given to Al by a racist white construction worker, who told him, “I been watching you because I been wanting to give this camper to a good, hardworking white man. We white guys gotta stick together out here.” At the time Al had been alone, pushing a shopping cart full of aluminum cans in front of the tool rental outlet on Edgewater Boulevard where he and Sonny sometimes stole tools from the backs of customers’ pickup trucks. When recounting the story in front of Sonny, Al joked that he had responded, “Thanks. That’s mighty white of you.”

The cross-ethnic running partnership of Sonny and Al was the subject of hostile gossip on the boulevard. On one occasion, Sal engineered a confrontation between the two men,

as if to prove the impossibility of companionship between blacks and whites. Sal, who was Chicano, portrayed Al as a feminized loser for partnering with an African-American:

Why does Al stay with such a nigger's nigger like Sonny? He must like that dick in his ass. He needs to get that big black dick out of his mouth, because whenever I see Al, he complains and complains about Sonny. And Sonny is one punk-ass typical nigger.

When I first started dealing, Sonny would let me fix in the camper in the morning and I was giving him a taste each time. He told me it was his camper, and that Al was only sleeping in it. He told me to be quiet because he didn't want me to wake Al up. He didn't want to have to turn Al on to a taste of my dope.

Then one day I bumped into Al, and he told me that it wasn't Sonny's camper, but his camper. He asked me what time I would be coming by the next morning and told me, "I'll pretend I'm asleep, like the other mornings. Then you can ask him whose camper it is."

So I come over the next morning. And I ask Sonny, "Whose camper is this?"

And Sonny says, "Shhh, don't wake Al."

And I ask him again.

And he says, "It's my camper."

And then Al gets up and says, "You fuckin' nigger. It ain't your camper."

And Sonny says, "It's Al's and mine."

And Al says, "No, nigger. It's my camper."

And I tell Al, "I'm going to turn on the owner of this camper." And I give Al a big taste and tell him, "Don't give Sonny none of this. If you do, I'll never give you a taste again."

And so Al did it. A big hit, while Sonny just sat there.

Like all running partners in the gray zone of Edgewater Boulevard, Al and Sonny frequently traded accusations of injecting heroin "on the sneak-tip [secretly]." Sonny, for example, complained:

I don't wanna hurt Al's feelings and shit. But goddamn! He don't seem to care about nobody else's. Yesterday he come back and bring me some dope already mixed and in an outfit [syringe]. And tell me, "That's half of the bag."

I tell him, "That's a sign of greed. Because when I get a bag, I bring it to the house [patting the seat of the camper]. I mix it on up in front of you. I even it up in front of you. And here you are bringing me shit that's already in the rig and I don't know what the fuck it is. It's probably just a cotton."

He got a spot right here [patting the seat again]. He should mix the shit up in his own little house.

Al saw things differently:

I give half of everything to Sonny. But Sonny just sits around and begs for dope. This morning I gave Sonny forty units. And he just sat around and watched me load up my buggy [supermarket shopping cart].

And Sonny doesn't work. Only goes around looking for what he can steal. That's why the cops are around here all the time now.

Sonny reversed the moral valence on theft:

I bust my ass late at night—three, four o'clock in the morning—and take a chance on a burglary to make sure we have dope in the morning. And all he has got is a little cardboard to recycle. He go and cash it in and don't come back to fix with me. Playing his fuckin' games.

He wanna tell people that "Yeah, me and Sonny, we cool. We always split our shit. We ain't like the rest of them. We don't go behind each other's back. Doin' this and doin' that." But all the time that's what he's doing. He's not really lying to me—he's lyin' to his self.

Despite their bickering, Al and Sonny enjoyed one another's company and were often publicly affectionate. Sonny took great pleasure in his heroin highs and was prone to overdosing. Immediately after injecting, he often fell into a heavy nod of euphoric relaxation or else became hyperenergized and "tweaked" in eccentric ways, such as shadowboxing furiously until collapsing, or twirling himself around a signpost, oblivious to the world around him. Al indulged Sonny's ecstatic displays by watching over him carefully to prevent Sonny from injuring himself:

Al: [his arm over Sonny's shoulder] I had to take care of my pal Sonny yesterday. He was in a different world. I called him back to our world a couple of times, you know.

Sonny: [nodding and hugging Al] I could have hurt myself bad, man.

Al: I go like this [pounding his chest]. Then, boom! He comes back from a different world, man.

Sonny: I'm tellin' you, man. I nodded straight off into the fire [pointing to the candle on the camper's Formica counter]. My hair was burning and shit.

Al: That's why I stay with him. I don't go nowhere.

Sonny: Yeah. Lord have mercy! We a close-knit thing, man. We watching out for each other and shit. When I get a bag, I bring it to the house, and I mix it on up in front of you [patting Al on the shoulder]. And Al too. If we divided, then we ain't caring nothing about each other.

This morning, when Al went to pick up his welfare check, he went sicker than a mother-fucker. But I didn't go, you know, because I had to make sure we had some dope.

And I got it, and I finished mixing it up and everything, and I ride down there to bring it to him, you know, at the welfare building. And I said, "You ain't got to worry about being dopesick no more." And I handed him the rig right then and there.

Al: I was happy to see Sonny! I went straight to the McDonald's [bathroom] and fixed.

Al and Sonny could not, of course, escape the logic of the gray zone and frequently betrayed one another. Nevertheless, by Edgewater Boulevard standards, they maintained a friendship of exceptional solidarity that violated the patterns of intimate apartheid, to everyone's discomfort and surprise.