

Foreword

SUSAN GEWIRTZ, *Annie E. Casey Foundation*

MORE THAN ONE out of four American working families (9.2 million families) now earn wages so low that they have difficulty surviving financially and providing a secure future for their families. Twenty million children live in these families (Waldron, Roberts, & Reamer, 2004). As stated in our 2005 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* essay, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has “long believed that the most powerful approach to altering the future of our nation’s most disadvantaged kids is to enhance the financial security of their parents in the present” (Annie E. Casey Foundation, p. 5). At the same time, there has been growing media and scholarly attention to the changing economy due to globalization, demand for workers with higher skills, decreasing wage mobility at the lower end of the wage scale, and the increasing percentage of jobs that do not offer health benefits or paid sick leave. And although there is a sense of growing insecurity even among middle-class workers, low-wage workers and their families are particularly vulnerable to these labor market forces. Recent publications have chronicled the struggle of long-term welfare recipients to join the mainstream economy and the challenges facing workers who work at jobs that pay the minimum wage.

In 1998, when the research described in this book was begun, there was considerable and important research being initiated related to the impacts of welfare reform on families and on the effectiveness of welfare-to-work programs. The families in the Casey Foundation’s multicity, multiyear Jobs Initiative include adults who have been on welfare, but also those with a long history in the low-wage labor market, men and women returning from incarceration, single-parent families, and two-parent working families. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, through its grant-making strategy related to connecting adults to good entry-level jobs with career paths, was particularly interested in learning more about the intersection of employment training, family, work, and community. With its Jobs Initiative as the setting, the Casey Foundation supported in-depth ethnographic research to help understand family economic mobility, the impacts of adult employment on children’s lives, and the ways working families connect with their communities. The research that started in two cities, Milwaukee and Seattle, soon led to an expanded research study in all five demonstration sites with twenty-five families.

Jobs Aren’t Enough places the twenty-five families of this research squarely in the context of low-wage workers across the United States who are struggling to get ahead, meet the needs of their children, and find a workable balance among the many demands on their lives. The families in this book were motivated to seek out employment and training programs, to work full time, and were generally placed in or hired by firms that offered health-care benefits. The starting wage for participants in the Jobs Initiative averages \$9.41 per hour (personal communication, Metis

Associates, May 2005), thus placing their wages above welfare leavers whose median hourly wage is \$8.06 (Loprest, 2003) and well above the earnings of minimum-wage workers.

By examining the lives of these low-wage working families, this research illustrates the particular vulnerabilities of families whose earnings begin to make them ineligible for critical work supports such as child-care subsidies and government provided health-care benefits. It also demonstrates the tenuousness of their employment as they lose good paying jobs in sectors such as manufacturing during the 2001 recession or see their wages reduced through reduced work hours and overtime. Although in some ways and for some periods of time a few steps above America's lowest paid workers, these families are just like the 9.2 million working families struggling to make ends meet and to provide a secure future for their children. They are in similar jobs, their children are in struggling schools, and their families provide both support and added financial burdens. This research clearly demonstrates the challenges that all workers in low-paying jobs face in moving toward family economic stability.

Rooted in five years of in-depth ethnographic research, *Jobs Aren't Enough* offers important lessons and a theoretical framework for workforce development professionals, students planning to enter the related fields of sociology, urban studies, social work, economics and political science, and for decision makers who can influence the policies and practices affecting low-wage working families. The framework offers readers a view that looks beyond simple notions of blaming low-wage workers for their failure to rise to the middle class and the equally flawed thinking that places all responsibility on society and government policies. Taking a more complex view based on rich data, *Jobs Aren't Enough* urges us to think about how the family as a whole intersects with the critical institutions that can either aid or hinder the achievement of family economic success. In this analysis firms, schools, workforce development programs, families, community supports, and public policy all play an important role and need to be understood individually and as they relate to one another as a first step in helping families move toward stronger financial futures.

This research sheds new light on the challenges facing workers in low-wage jobs and provides analysis relevant to practitioners, policymakers, and researchers committed to addressing the problems of urban poverty. The family stories, for example, reveal the existence of a "life-stage mismatch," by which well-meaning and well-designed workforce programs may place individuals into good paying entry level jobs in physically demanding occupations that might not be a good fit for a forty-year-old with health problems, family responsibilities, and time constraints in moving up the career ladder. *Jobs Aren't Enough* also highlights the impact depression has on job seekers' performance in training and at work and how employment with adequate wages and the availability of ongoing work supports may reduce those symptoms. The research also demonstrates a greater need to focus on career management and reemployment services. Career mobility is becoming increasingly difficult for low-wage earners, and for even those workers who may start in a good job in a sector with strong wages and benefits, this analysis suggests that their ability to translate this opportunity into a clear upward pathway is not automatic or guaranteed. It is worth noting, however, that despite the multiple

challenges facing these twenty-five families, over a three-year period their incomes show an 18 percent increase on average over their initial post-training wages, three times the average 6 percent gain reported for other low-income earners (Andersson, Holzer, & Lane, 2005). Yet as the stories behind the numbers suggest, these wages are not high and steady enough to guarantee family economic mobility.

It is clear that for many families it will be necessary to combine human capital strategies with publicly funded work supports such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, food stamps, and health-care and child-care benefits. The families in *Jobs Aren't Enough* vividly illustrate the difference these benefits can make for a struggling family and the consequences for adults and children when these benefits are removed as earnings increase. In fact, these families are particularly vulnerable to the loss of work-supporting benefits as wages fluctuate due to reductions in overtime, during short gaps in employment, and as income rises just above eligibility levels. This research also adds nuance to recent findings that suggest positive benefits for younger children when their parents are working and income is increased. The family stories described here demonstrate that although work, which brings increased earnings and positive adult role models, can have a favorable influence on family functioning and child outcomes, children are very much affected by the ups and downs of parents' work and instability in family income. Furthermore, as working parents put in overtime and pursue educational and training opportunities to further their career mobility, time with children may be sacrificed. The interactions or noninteractions among social institutions are most palpable as families try to balance work, child care, school, and time with family.

Jobs Aren't Enough presents a theoretical framework that urges readers to look beyond the individual institutions of family, school, workforce development, firms, and policy, and to understand how these relate to each other. It also suggests that we already know a great deal about approaches that work and have the potential to increase family economic opportunity. For example, we know that good paying jobs and benefits matter and that publicly supported work supports make a real difference for adults and their children. We also know that effective workforce development efforts require partnerships among employers, community-based organizations, the public sector, and educational institutions. The great challenge therefore is whether we can create the public will to implement the policies and practices that can assist the growing numbers of American families who work and want to provide for their families but are still unable to move out of poverty.

REFERENCES

- Andersson, R., Holzer, H. J., & Lane, J. I. (2005). *Moving up or moving on: Who advances in the low-wage labor market?* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2005). *Kids count data book 2005*. Baltimore, MD: Author.
- Loprest, P. J. (2003). *Fewer welfare leavers employed in weak economy*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Waldron, T., Roberts, B., & Reamer, A. (2004). *Working hard, falling short: America's working families and the pursuit of economic security*. Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation.

1 Are Jobs Enough for Economic Mobility?

THE STORY

Twenty-five parents, their fifteen spouses or partners, and their sixty-six children in Philadelphia, Milwaukee, New Orleans, St. Louis, and Seattle let us share their lives from the late 1990s to mid-2003 to learn about low-income families and economic mobility. During this time we also talk with and observe at least one thousand auxiliaries associated with the families' mobility efforts. Through these contacts we learn that the families' attempts to move up economically through work both mesh and clash with the characteristics and conditions they encounter in workforce development programs and systems, firms, children's schools, and public policy.

The story begins with the families. Over the years, the families' infants enter child care and preschool, their preschool children progress to elementary school, their elementary-age children move up to middle school, their teenagers enter or complete high school, and new babies are born. The parents go to their children's basketball games, concerts, school conferences, and special education meetings. They go to the grocery, to the laundromat, to grandparents, to neighbors, to community centers, and to church. They tend to children with asthma, developmental delays, and school performance problems. They take children to doctors, go to doctors themselves, and worry about aging parents. The parents read to their children; the children read to their parents. The parents help with math homework and oversee school projects. They counsel children about conflicts with peers and give birthday parties.

At the same time the parents move up, down, and laterally in their jobs. Some take courses after work hours to try to upgrade their positions. Others wish they could. On the job they commune with coworkers, strive to get along with supervisors, and worry about how to make more money. They work overtime, get second or third jobs, and survive—at times relatively well and at other times barely—on sometimes-rising, sometimes-falling, but generally too-low wages. Many “do without” to provide enriching after-school or summer activities for their children and wish they could afford home computers and build assets and savings. Some make progress on these goals, but many do not no matter how hard they try. They make decisions they later question and mistakes they later rue about work, parenting, job training, and expenditures.

In many ways these families are like most other families in the United States, but they are different at the same time. In the richest large country in the world, they work full time year round, but they still do not earn enough to support their families. In this they are like one out of four other families in twenty-first-century America (Waldron, Roberts, & Reamer, 2004), most of whom work at full-time jobs that keep the country running but do not pay living wages.

Spending their childhoods and teen years in impoverished urban neighborhoods means that many of the parents receive too little education and have too few skills for today's jobs (Holzer, 1996). Most of their underfinanced, embattled urban schools yield poor-quality education, and their high school diplomas translate into eighth-grade reading level at best. These schools often fail to diagnose their learning disabilities or identify family problems that influence their dropping out of high school. Some complete their education in a foreign country, in one case a four-year college degree, to find that American firms do not recognize these accomplishments. Many seek vocational training in for-profit institutes that does not lead to a job and leaves them in debt. Policy prohibitions about debt then disqualify them from further education funding.

Other parents are immigrants and political refugees from war-torn countries who find that their new communities offer few acculturation or language services. This lack of services leaves them ill-equipped to navigate the dangers of low-level jobs, the medical system, and community programs for their children. Still other parents grow up in families who suffer from substance abuse, mental health problems, or domestic violence. Some struggle with bouts of depression themselves, which may result in alternating welfare and low-paid work. A few parents make serious mistakes in their youth or young adulthood, such as selling or taking drugs. Whether the cause is perceiving or experiencing few legitimate opportunities in the labor market or simply making wrong choices, they spend time in prison or rehabilitation facilities to compensate for these wrongs. Rehabilitation notwithstanding, felony incarceration may block or limit their access to housing subsidies, financial aid, and other opportunities that they need to move ahead.

At the same time, the parents, and indirectly their children, contend with a labor market that relies increasingly on contingent labor and with firms that offer inadequate wages and limited or too costly nonwage benefits, like health insurance. Despite the fact that the families contribute to the national well-being through production and taxes, they live in a country that denies subsidy assistance to many immigrants and refugees, disproportionately incarcerates African Americans and Hispanics, and puts time and allotment limits on transitional public assistance. Without adequate wages, benefits, and work supports, past history and current social and labor market conditions intersect to limit the families' economic mobility in a country that prides itself on meritocracy, a "second chance" after rehabilitation, and opportunity for all.

The story continues with the auxiliary contacts who further illustrate that economic mobility is highly complex. We learn this from instructors, administrators, and colleagues in the families' education and job training programs and institutions, often attending classes alongside the key parents¹ and following them as they navigate training, jobs, and family responsibilities. We learn this from neighbors, friends, extended family, faith leaders, human service workers, civic leaders, and policymakers in the families' neighborhoods and cities and observe how these varied community actors aid or constrain family economic mobility. We learn this from coworkers, managers, supervisors, CEOs, and labor leaders at the families' seventy-four firms as we accompany the parents through their work days and overnight shifts. We learn this from over 120 days spent with teachers,

administrators, and students in the children's child-care facilities, preschools, and elementary and secondary schools, observing how children and faculty alike learn and simultaneously cope with impoverished and embattled environments.

The fact that these families identify labor market, education, and public policy institutions that do not but *could* facilitate mobility is a significant impetus for this book. In short, *Jobs Aren't Enough* argues that multiple social institutions influence contemporary economic mobility: in particular, the traditional institutions of the family and the labor market (firms) as they intersect with the institutions of education (public schools and workforce development) and public policy. As such this book is an exposé of *intersections*—their presence and more often their absence in the world of public beliefs about human and institutional behaviors and policy solutions to human and institutional problems that exist in the form of contained, unconnected silos. We focus here on intersections *between* the institution of the family and other social institutions as well as on intersections *among* these institutions in different forms, intensities, and geographies.

We note at the outset that our research in New Orleans took place before Hurricane Katrina wreaked its havoc on the city and its surrounds. We address the particular implications of this disaster for the New Orleans families in the Afterword.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY FAMILY, ECONOMIC MOBILITY, INSTITUTIONS, LOW INCOME, AND THE CONTEXT OF CAPITALISM?

First, we define family, economic mobility, institutions, and low income as used in this book. We then briefly discuss the economic system of capitalism as the context for the old mobility experiences of the families and institutions here and as the potential context for a new economic mobility.

FAMILY

Definitions and conceptualizations of “family” range from a strict view of biologically or adoptively related parents and children residing together to a constructionist view of whomever one considers “family” is family. In this book we tend toward the latter definition, privileging the way in which the respondents define their family constellation in their particular emotional, economic, spatial, and meaning-centered contexts. We also conceptualize family as “a social group, and social institution, with an identifiable structure based on positions and interactions among people who occupy those positions” (Gelles & Levine, 1999, p. 405). As such, families are agents of socialization and cultural reproduction: in effect, navigational vehicles for older and younger members alike. More broadly, we conceptualize all persons as “familied,” meaning that every person's life holds others who are significant to them along the dimensions of structure and meaning that influence daily work, decisions, and social being.

ECONOMIC MOBILITY

By “economic mobility,” which we call either mobility or economic mobility, we refer specifically to the phenomenon of moving forward financially through wage work. “Labor mobility” is the term commonly used in economics for how people move between jobs and occupations. “Social mobility” and “occupational mobility” are the terms commonly used in sociology (Breiger, 1990; Granovetter, 1995). We use the term economic mobility for several reasons. First, our concern is with the ability of low-earning parents to support their families through wage income, defined by the Census Bureau as “money income before taxes, exclusive of noncash benefits and employer-provided fringe benefits” (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Mills, 2004, p. 1). For our purposes, social mobility is too closely aligned with social status, class, and systems of occupational ranking, and labor mobility focuses on individual workers, not on workers as parents or members of families. Second, economic mobility suggests an emphasis on the worker–family labor market interface and is thus more descriptive of our inquiry than is occupational mobility which addresses prestige criteria that are not relevant here. Economic mobility is also more consistent with the theoretical heritage of economic sociology which is the body of theory we draw upon and aim to extend.

Mobility has generally been viewed and explored as a microeconomic phenomenon; however we argue that mobility is both micro- and macroeconomic. In Weberian terms, we look at economically conditioned phenomena, those that partly—but only partly—can be explained through the influence of economic factors, and economically relevant phenomena, those that are not economic in themselves, but that influence economic phenomena (Weber, 1904/1949, p. 65). Historic examinations of “family” mobility focus on intergenerational patterns (Blau & Duncan, 1967), whereas more recent ones have begun to look at intragenerational patterns (Warren, Hauser, & Sheridan, 2002). Our focus on the family as a *generational institutional unit* affords exploration of the dynamic intersections within families as well as between families and other social institutions—intersections that have both intra- and intergenerational implications for economic mobility.

INSTITUTIONS

Although some might call the spheres of family, education, firms, and the state systems, we characterize them as social institutions. So doing we draw attention to the fact that institutions have structure. All involve aspects of authority and loyalty and are constituted and molded by policies and laws. All thus inherently intersect with one another, even if bureaucracies and funding streams do not acknowledge or attend to these intersections. In Brinton and Nee’s (1998, p. 8) definition, institutions are “webs of interrelated rules and norms—formal and informal—that govern social relationships.” In contrast, systems are contained entities that form a unity or organic whole in which the “relationships and interactions between elements explain the behavior of the whole” (Grint, 1991, p. 137). From a systems perspective, variation rests within rather than between, which tends to result in deterministic conceptions and atomistic silos. From a social institution perspective, variation occurs dynamically in the nexuses of the intersecting components.

LOW INCOME

In the United States, wage and salary earnings are the primary source of income for many families (McCall, 2000), particularly those like the ones in this book. However, definitions of “low income” vary and the term is often used synonymously with the term “working poor” (Gitterman, Howard, & Cotton, 2003). Briefly here, as we discuss this at length in Chapter 6, the most common metric used to define low income is 100 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL)—commonly called the poverty line, even though many scholars and policymakers view 200 percent of the poverty level as the minimum income that families need to meet their basic needs (Waldron, Roberts, & Reamer 2004). Others define low income more generously in terms of the median national income (Gitterman, Howard, & Cotton, 2003), which at \$44,686 in 2004 dollars (Fronczek, 2005) is the equivalent of about 300% FPL. Still others assess income adequacy in terms of an alternative poverty metric such as the Self-Sufficiency Standard (Pearce, 2000, 2001; Wider Opportunities for Women, 2001, 2004).

We explicitly focus on wage income alone in the discussion of “low income” here, as the dominant metric to assess economic mobility and family well-being over the long run is what a parent can earn. Although transitional subsidies and wage supports mediate low incomes in the short run, we argue that earnings are ultimately the key to economic mobility. Accordingly, *Jobs Aren't Enough* uses what we consider to be a relatively conservative definition of low income—200 percent or less of the federal poverty level—a definition that, if anything, underreports the constraints that millions of working parents confront in their attempts to support their families through work.

For example, according to census analyses for 2004, thirty-seven million Americans live in families with incomes below 100 percent of the poverty level (Cadena & Sallee, 2005). In addition, the number of Americans with low incomes (below 200 percent FPL) increased by seven million between 2000 and 2003 (Ku, Broaddus, & Wachino, 2005), and by an additional 1.6 percent between 2003 and 2004 (Fronczek, 2005). In 2003 about 24.3 percent of Americans, essentially one in every four workers in the labor force, earned less than \$9.04 an hour, which results in an annual income that just reaches 100 percent poverty for a family of four, even working full time year round (Mishel, Bernstein, & Allegretto, 2005). Especially pertinent to the families here, in 2002 more than one in four (27.4 percent) working parents with children in the United States was classified as low income by earning less than 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold (Waldron, Roberts, & Reamer, 2004). From another perspective, more than one in four children living with married parents is considered low income (Koball & Douglas-Hall, 2005). Thus from any vantage point, families with low incomes are widespread across the United States.

THE CONTEXT OF CAPITALISM

Although a review of the contested definitions and critiques of capitalist economic and social organization is beyond the purpose and scope of this book (see, e.g., Bowles & Gintis, 1987; Braverman, 1974; Edwards, 1979; Hart, 2005; Lafer, 2002;

Wacquant, 2002), many consider capitalism to be the dominant way of organizing the economy, legally, politically, and socially in today's world (Swedberg, 2003, p. 54). As such, it forms part of the context for the families and other institutions here.

Common definitions of capitalism incorporate some variation of the theme that it constitutes an organization of economic interests that allows for the "pursuit of profit, and forever renewed profit" (Weber, 1904/1949). According to some, the commodification of and control over the labor process by employers under capitalism is the established route to such profit (Edwards, 1979; Marx, 1867/1978). On this view authority, exploitation and power hold sway and profit-making trumps other organizational aspects of firms such as investment in training and reciprocity relations. A contrasting approach to the general nature of capitalism is what Swedberg (2003, p. 57) calls "the economists' traditional definition of the economy as consisting of production, distribution, and exchange." Although all economies involve these three factors, capitalism is distinguished from other economic systems primarily by the fact that distribution is organized as exchange in the market rather than as reciprocity or redistribution. Presciently, in *Economy and Society* Weber (1922/1978) speaks not of a single capitalism but of capitalisms: rational (or modern) capitalism, political capitalism, and what can be termed traditional commercial capitalism. Leicht (2002) echoes this perspective almost a century later in his global perspective on "capitalisms" as do Hall and Soskice (2001) in their discussion of "varieties of capitalism," Esping-Anderson (1990) in his configuration of "three worlds of welfare capitalism," Eisenstadt (1963/1993) in his identification of different "capitalist regimes," and Nee and Swedberg (2005) in their presentation of "the many forms and varieties" of contemporary capitalism.

Although some see capitalism as the cause of all labor market ills, we view capitalism as a social form that is historically based, nondeterministic, thus one in which practices and structures can be altered, at least at micro- and mesolevels of the labor market. Newman (2002, p. 1590) concludes similarly that "reformist struggles over government policies within capitalist states can change the fate of the poor for the better." Fundamentally, institutions are rule-governed social constructions (Nee, 2003); thus we argue, as does Miller (1999, 2003), that greater fairness and cooperation and increased economic mobility are possible through the reconstruction of contemporary labor and other social institutions, even in a market economy. In effect, social and economic relations are processes in perpetual construction and reconstruction, as Braverman (1974) suggests earlier and as Swedberg (2003, p. 63) underscores: "No single form of governance—including the market—is responsible for the way that a national economy works." As Bowles and Gintis (1987, p. xiii) hold, "The view that there is an ineluctable conflict between moral and material incentives, between cooperation and competition, or that one of these modes can operate effectively in the absence of the other, is a quaint and anachronistic aspect of our intellectual heritage. Finally, Heilbroner (1999, p. 320) argues that "Economic vision (here we might add economic sociology) . . . could become the source of an awareness of ways by which a capitalist structure can broaden its motivations, increase its flexibility, and develop its social responsibility."

In this vein we are intrigued by the notion of an economic system in which *household and profit* matter (Weber, 1922/1978). Although Weber refers to large capitalist households of antiquity in his discussion, we argue that it may be worth reexamining this prioritization with an eye toward householding *and* profit making in contemporary firms. In this construction, household would not refer solely to consumption, as in Weber's formulation and in Aristotle's earlier one (Swedberg, 2005), but to taking joint responsibility for keeping the property (the firm) intact and for allocating profits equally to meet the interests of all the involved social actors. This reformulation is akin to Swedberg's (2003, p. 6) argument that because institutions are "durable amalgamations of interests *and* social relations," analysis of the capitalist economic system must take the interests of both individuals and corporate actors into account (Swedberg, 2004). Hart's (2005, p. xli) similar position is that "By creating a new, more inclusive brand of capitalism, one that incorporates previously excluded voices, concerns, and interests, the corporate sector could be the catalyst for a truly sustainable form of global development—and prosper in the process."

We hold that laws and policies currently upholding the modern economic order *can* be changed, prevailing political standpoints *can* be changed, and social perspectives in current ascendancy *can* be changed. As we discuss further in Chapter 8, however, all require significant change in what we refer to as the "public will."

PLAN OF THE BOOK

Jobs Aren't Enough is an ethnographic rendition of the experiences of families who are trying to transition from prior economic disadvantage to family-supporting wages through work. Their journeys and our previous work on occupational attainment and workforce development lead us in this initial chapter to question why and how economic mobility is still limited for so many in twenty-first-century America. The immediate context is the lived experience of low-income families trying to move up through work and the daily realities of how they and other social institutions (firms, workforce development, schools, and public policy) intersect to foster or obstruct their mobility goals.

The situation facing us and the families is thus. Scholarly and policy interest in urban poverty in the 1990s and early 2000s is primarily focused on welfare reform, particularly on the assessment of how different types of welfare-to-work programs move single mothers into the labor market, thereby lowering the rolls and costs of public assistance. Little notice is paid to the fact that increasing numbers of *two-parent working families* are poor (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2001a, 2004). Even though rates of child poverty decrease slightly in the early 2000s, from 43 percent in 2000 to 40 percent in 2001 (Child Trends, 2003), two in five American children remain poor according to the most stringent measure of poverty—at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty line. Similar to other states, Wisconsin reports a 20 percent increase in child poverty between 2000 and 2003 (Dresser & Wright, 2004). Why is this occurring? Why are so many parents unable to support their families through work? This book as a whole implicates

multiple intersecting social institutions in the persistent limits to family economic mobility.

The story continues in Chapter 2 with social theory because what the populace thinks, believes, and assumes about economic mobility forms the lattice for the relevant actors, social structures, and practices and policies in organizations and institutions.

FROM THE OLD TO THE NEW ECONOMIC MOBILITY

Chapter 2 first presents what we call the *old paradigm for economic mobility*. In this paradigm, jobs are the expected way for families to get ahead financially in the United States. Yet by the early 2000s over one in four parents works full time year round but does not earn enough to support his or her family. Explanations for this often split into two poles: the “it’s their own fault” view and the “it’s society’s fault” view.

Holders of the “it’s their own fault” view believe that opportunity, meritocracy, and initiative are realities in today’s America, thus any deviation from the open terrain of mobility must be the person’s fault. In effect these persons are viewed as atomistic, individually or personally responsible actors who are thus classified as the “nondeserving poor.” Less extreme holders of the “own fault” view, especially those who remember the Great Depression or the civil rights period of the 1960s, may acknowledge—albeit hesitantly and carefully—that life events outside the control of individuals sometimes happen. The company goes out of business, the father becomes disabled from a work injury, or the mother leaves an abusive partner. These individuals are then classified as the “deserving poor,” even though holders of this view still tend to believe that atomistic, responsible actors can overcome these happenstances through initiative if they “just put their minds to it.”

Holders of the “it’s society’s fault” view perceive seismic shifts in the socio-economic landscape over the past several decades, such as shifts in the structure, practices, and geography of the labor market and firms; shifts in welfare and workforce development policy that curtail eligibility and skill training in favor of rapid job attachment; shifts in how the demography of contemporary workers matches the characteristics of contemporary firms—what we call a *life-stage mismatch* (Iversen, 2002)—and shifts that show increasing rates of child poverty in working households. The most extreme “society’s fault” proponents believe that capitalism determines immobility; thus the economic chances of low-income working families cannot improve without radical reconstruction of the country’s political economy. The more moderate “society’s fault” proponents seek a middle ground between individual and societal responsibility, understanding that people sometimes make mistakes, wrong choices, or face structural conditions such as inadequate housing, poorly funded schools, inadequate wages, or discrimination that constrains or blocks their opportunity or initiative. More moderate proponents are also more likely to believe that the children of poor parents should not be made to suffer for a parent’s limitations or for social structural constraints.

These are simplifications of the worldviews of the American populace to be sure, but they suggest the landscape of assumptions, beliefs, and theories that underlies the structure and practices of the contemporary institutions of social

reproduction that are germane to economic mobility—the family, workforce development, firms, children’s schools, and the state through its public policies. The voices in this book, all of whom inhabit these institutional spheres, show us how the old paradigm limits or precludes economic mobility for families without prior economic advantage.

These voices also point to the need for a *new paradigm for economic mobility* that we sketch out in Chapter 2, especially as firms and other institutions face the forces of globalization and restructuring, however great or small these forces actually are. To maintain our country’s historic philosophical principles and economic productivity, we argue that concepts from economic sociology form the framework for a new paradigm that our ethnographic findings laminate. In effect, a new paradigm for economic mobility fosters foundational American principles that are obscured by geographic and political dispersion and by neoliberal reliance on the market to solve all ills and needs: principles of interdependence, fairness, equity, and real opportunity.

Understanding that economic mobility is a thoroughly relational process leads toward the establishment of genuine trust and reciprocity in the intersecting relationships among education and workforce development institutions, workers and firms, as well as among families, firms, and children’s schools. Successful mobility outcomes thus require developing and extending social and cultural capital along with human capital, as the weak ties of social networks (Granovetter, 1973) and the sanctioned credentials that result from institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2001) merge with human capital attainment to form a legitimizing signal for those who make mobility-influencing decisions about hiring, promotion, layoff, and termination.

Finally, understanding that economic mobility is increasingly dynamic and variable, and that choice and decision processes involve both cognitive and emotional components, leads toward the development of greater mutuality in the authority relations and practices of firms and other organizations. Power relations then become more horizontal than vertical, multiple voices are sought in the crafting of procedures and regulations, and responsibility becomes relational rather than individual.

BACKGROUNDS AND LOCATIONS OF THE PARENTS AND CHILDREN

This theoretical framework undergirds the remaining chapters in the book. Chapter 3 lays out the characteristics of the key parents that illustrate the confluence of old paradigm experiences and new paradigm needs. The parents contend with both personal and structural challenges and constraints to mobility, not the least of which is a vulnerability to symptoms of depression as they lose hard-won jobs and employer-paid health insurance during the economic downturn in 2001 and beyond. The parents utilize extant subsidies and work supports to augment inadequate wages and employ geographic strategies and community involvement to enhance their own and their children’s well-being. These parents are found to be similar to millions of other low-income adults in the country today on a selection of demographic characteristics, extending the likelihood that their experiences and voices express widespread realities and sentiments. Chapter 3 also explores the role of “place” in economic mobility, concluding that although knowledge about

place-based particularities is critical to the development of appropriate local policies and programs, state and national policies are the key to economic mobility writ large.

Chapter 4 leads us into the world of the children, illuminating the intersection of family history, developmental environments, violence and safety, and daily lives through the eyes and voices of the parents' preschool and school-age children and youth. Perhaps most important for intergenerational mobility, children of all ages cast a critical eye on the labor market based on how they experience their parents' work struggles. Although the children are grateful for the material benefits of their parents' new and better jobs, lessened family time, added family responsibilities, dangers and injuries to their mothers and fathers in the workplace, and mercurial job tenures seem to lead some children to express these concerns in the form of behavior and performance problems at school (details in Chapter 7) or through aggravated health conditions. Many children doubt that their merit will be rewarded with opportunity in the future as they see that trust, reciprocity, and mutuality are often lacking in the vital mobility spheres of firms and social policy.

The voices of the families and auxiliaries in the core analytical chapters of the book, Chapters 5 through 7, then show in depth how the institutions involved in economic mobility act and intersect.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND SYSTEMS

Chapter 5 takes us briefly through the history of federal education and job training legislation and programs, showing how they evolve from a human capital to a "work-first" focus. This evolution also entails a shift in nomenclature from "education and training" to "workforce development" which denotes a more systemic network orientation to employment and economic mobility.

Not fully successful yet in this goal at the federal level, local and regional workforce development networks, both in and external to the federal system, such as the one in which the key parents participate, are emerging. These new networks explicitly engage multiple organizations and institutions in a collaborative approach to both workforce and community economic development. Network partners often include but are not limited to workforce intermediaries, social and human service organizations, community colleges, vocational institutes, workforce policy boards, area businesses and firms, and state and local policymakers.

In effect, understanding that multiple institutions are integral to real opportunity for economic mobility leads toward the ways in which trust, power, reciprocity, and shared meanings can be used, horizontally and vertically, to craft and nurture dynamic and strategic partnerships among firms and other mobility-relevant social institutions. These partnerships aim to effectively span what Burt (1992, 2002) refers to in market relations as "structural holes," turning them into what we call *structured wholes* for the mobility of families and communities.

Countering earlier evaluation findings that education and job training programs "don't pay," conversion of workforce development networks into structured wholes constitutes the first bridge to economic opportunity for the families here. For sustained mobility, however, these networks need to be positioned to effect reciprocal changes in firms and public policy.

THE PARENTS' FIRMS

Despite good initial jobs in a wide array of industry sectors that result from the parents' workforce development programs, system reforms, and the tight economy of the late 1990s, Chapter 6 reveals that yesterday's firms seldom sustain or forward the mobility efforts of today's families. For the most part, the seventy-four firms in which the key parents work between 1998 and mid-2003 take the form of "autocratic family," "disengaged family," "fair-weather friend," or "roommate" rather than the more reciprocal form of "firm as partner" per the new mobility paradigm.

Chapters 3 and 5 show that work supports and skill training are important but not sufficient for economic mobility. Chapter 6 shows that wages, the adequacy of the wages, and how firms are organized and run profoundly affect the economic mobility of low-income families. Reportedly, these factors increasingly affect the mobility of managers and white collar workers as well (Cappelli, 1999; Osterman, 2005). While some view wage inadequacy as expectable in a capitalist political economy (Braverman, 1974; Edwards, 1979; Lafer, 2002), this chapter suggests that wage inadequacy results from choices about organizational conditions and relations that workers, firms, educators, and policymakers make according to old paradigm assumptions and myths, as other scholars see it in part (Miller, 1999, 2003; Nee, 2003; Newman, 2002; Swedberg, 2003). Turbulent global, national, and local conditions affecting the production capacities and profitability of contemporary firms, together with old paradigm forms of wage distribution, organizational structure, and relations, intersect in firms' and workers' responses to these external and internal challenges.

Despite turbulence, two in five of the families make substantial progress toward family-sustaining incomes—at least for a time. Still, three in five families do not, many of whose progress is buffeted by firm, economic, family, and policy disconnects. Although many parents change firms two or three times over the five years we know them, in line with the old paradigm view of advancement, few find that their hard work or persistence ensures mobility. For all the families, sustained mobility requires an intersecting network that consists of their firms, the economy, public policy, and their children's schools.

THE CHILDREN'S SCHOOLS

Children's schools influence children's mobility vertically (intergenerationally) through human capital attainment, but they also influence family mobility horizontally (intragenerationally) through their impact on parents' work. Chapter 7 details the dangers, material inadequacies, and tensions that children confront in their daily "work" at school that are likely to influence their future mobility. At the same time parents and schools both confront stumbling blocks to their respective goals because labor market and educational institutions frequently do not recognize the other's value. This chapter details two sets of intersecting but misaligned actors: first, children's schools, families, and firms; and second, children's schools, families, and public and school policies.

Further, because the institutional actors are organized and funded as silos, the communication and creative strategizing that could emerge from trusted, reciprocal

relationships is philosophically and operationally absent. Parents make many sacrifices as they strive to meet their children's educational and developmental needs, often in the form of lost wages or lost jobs as a result of this fundamental misalignment. Inter- and intragenerational mobility are then constrained in turn. Only where multi-institutional alignments are created, fostered, and sustained can economic mobility for low-income families be widespread. What will it take to foster such alignment?

ENGAGING THE “PUBLIC WILL” TOWARD AN AGENDA FOR FAMILY ECONOMIC MOBILITY

During the ethnographic research and writing of this book, we expected to present a set of policy recommendations in Chapter 8. Instead we recognize that a wealth of program and policy strategies to move low-income families forward through work have been offered in recent years, yet most have not been funded or implemented, leaving one to ponder, where is the “public will”?

Accordingly, Chapter 8 expands upon the premise introduced in Chapter 2 that we (the people) *can* and *do* make choices about our own and others' well-being that keep low-income families relatively immobile but *could* help them be economically mobile. We articulate in this chapter how the philosophical and distributive principles that constitute a new view of mobility, such as trust and reciprocity, equity and equality, and above all, social relatedness can move toward institutional structure and form. We ultimately suggest reframing the notion of individual (personal) responsibility as “responsibility for persons” or “relational responsibility,” an action that forces attention to the interdependence and mutuality of purpose that can improve conditions for individuals, families and institutions alike in today's world. We conclude with a series of recommendations for action toward an agenda for family economic mobility.

Finally, we suggest that *Jobs Aren't Enough* can be read consecutively or selectively, through either engaging with the “whole story” or through focusing on chapters that amplify particular institutional and family characteristics and experiences. As with most stories however, we believe the coherence and richness of the book are cumulative. To enhance accessibility, we put several detailed documents in Appendices for those who wish to more deeply examine the research design and data.

Ultimately we hope that the book as a whole, as well as individual chapters, will be useful for educating students about the intersecting roles in economic mobility of stratification, poverty, education, workforce development, urban environments, gender, race and ethnicity, families, and institutions. We hope that policymakers and professionals will become more informed about the scope of the problems facing millions of American families that stem from an outdated view of mobility and be moved to remedy these through collaborative action. We hope that scholars in economic sociology and related fields will find this book a useful contribution toward further development of mobility theory. And finally we hope that all readers will find the families' stories compelling enough to consider new perspectives on mobility that can forward the country's foundational principles of interdependence, equity and real opportunity for all.