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I'LL TELL YOU WHAT'S PATHOLOGICAL

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The purpose of the SCCR Working Paper Series is to publish works that significantly advance our knowledge about Chicanos and other Latinos. We invite your comments and critiques. Please address your remarks to the author.

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It must have been almost thirty years ago when *I* first came into contact with the word pathological. Perhaps you remember those days. It was somewhere around the time when the great Gus Johnson played for the Baltimore Bullets, when Nikita Khrushchev led the Soviet Union, and when the United States was still involved in a set of wars that together defined our nation's political consciousness, the Cold War, the War in Southeast Asia, the War on Poverty, and what I regard as the Civil Rights War. As long ago as that now seems, I still distinctly recall my efforts to make some sense of the word. Pathological certainly wasn't a term that I could remember my mom, my dad, my sister, my brother or anybody else in our family ever using. And that was usually decisive for me. I was a firm believer that mom and dad (though they didn't get past high school) knew a lot of words, especially when you counted both Spanish and English. So I half dismissed pathological as unimportant or at least irrelevant.

But something nagged at me. Maybe our not knowing precisely what the term meant, I thought to myself at the time, was part of the point being made by those who were employing it. The label pathological was, after all, being used by experts who had apparently finally figured out what was wrong with people who couldn't "make it" here in the United States the way everybody else did—people who didn't have much money, education, or clout, people who couldn't seem to stop getting into messes and trouble, people who were part of something that was being called a "culture of poverty," a term developed explicitly to describe Latino culture, particularly Mexican and Puerto Rican cultures. And the label was, "naturally" enough, being applied to people I knew well, to the very Chicanos about whom it seemed an insightful explanation—people around my neighborhood, people in my school, people at my kitchen table, people who looked an awful lot like me. Under the circumstances it wouldn't be at all surprising, I said to myself, that I and my family would be the last ones to understand either our own problems or the fancy word used to best describe them. After all, wasn't that true of pretty much everything that was said by experts about people like us who lived in places like the east side of Los Angeles?

Back then the word pathological was formidable even beyond its newness to me. I remember that it seemed big, serious, even scientific-sounding. It was one of those words that was even more powerful than most big, serious, scientific-sounding words. It had the special aura of a label experts would use only reluctantly, only when they had concluded nothing else would quite do, only when they had exhausted every other possibility and found themselves

facing an unavoidable truth in need of a name. Maybe my impression of the care with which people used pathological was pure delusion, or simple deference to expertise, or some complicated form of denial. Maybe my impression had something to do either with how unusually somber people looked whenever they used the word or with how they seemed to enunciate it in a decidedly deliberate, deep-toned, and drawn-out way. (You know, P-a-t-h-o-l-o-g-i-c-a-l.) In any event, there was this sense that if you really meant to be profoundly constructive about what you believed to be describing, the term was sometimes just inescapable. Pathological had the quality of moral as well as scientific truth.

So much has changed in the past three decades that on some days the world feels almost unrecognizable. Most people in the United States probably don't remember a great deal about Nikita Krushchev or anything at all about Gus Johnson. That's a pity. Most people don't know how to think about the dissolution of the Soviet Union, much less recognize the current names of its former parts. That's revealing. Most people don't know many details about the wars. That's an embarrassment, I think, particularly since down deep they probably cling to the conviction that we won the Cold One, should have won the Vietnam One, and never should have wasted our time and money the way we did fighting the Poverty One or maybe even the Civil Rights One. Other changes have not been in any way global or nationally prominent, though they still can sometimes leave me disoriented. I no longer live on the east side of L.A., though most of my family still calls it home and a part of me still resides there. I no longer believe my mom and dad knew everything, though even now I'm discovering just how much they did know that I never fully appreciated. And I no longer have the same youthful impression of big, serious, scientific-sounding words or the experts who so frequently use them.

If the world looks much different now, the word pathological is still very much with us. Yes, the name of the game has changed: over the past thirty years the "culture of poverty" debate propagated initially to explain poor, messed-up Latinos has become the "underclass" debate developed principally to explain poor, messed-up African Americans. But, if anything, the label pathological has become even more central to explanations of why some folks in this country just can't seem to make it. It no longer is a label reserved exclusively for somber intellectuals; in fact, nowadays it seems downright "in fashion." Everyone throws around the term. Experts in different academic fields, policymakers, bureaucrats, people who work for the media, and many lawyers, social workers, teachers and community organizers who serve as "front-line" activists. Hell, I've even heard some of the low-income people with whom activists work describing one another in this way. In the 1990s, the label pathological has achieved a certain cachet. It's hip.

Although it may now belong to popular culture, the label somehow

seems to retain a distinctive moral and scientific force. To describe a group of peoples' behavior as pathological is to offer a view that is regarded as, at once, brutally honest and clinically detached. It doesn't matter how many times the same things get written in Newsweek and Time. It doesn't matter whether the person offering the view is some highfalutin policy theorist or some cub reporter, on the right or on the left, white or of color, running for or from public office. If you're willing to use the label pathological to describe the behavior of those who are having a tough time keeping their lives together in the face of severely limited job possibilities, staggeringly low income, poor housing, mediocre education, inadequate health care, and violent crime, you are admired as somebody who is alert to the facts, candid, and perhaps even brave. You're regarded as calling them as you see them in American life, in a way that's presumed to lead to meaningful discussion if not productive solutions. And, not coincidentally, you seem to be saying what many people in this country want so very much to hear.

All this has bothered the hell out of me for some time now. And I know I haven't been alone. Other progressives, particularly other progressives of color, have found this celebration of the scientific precision and moral bite of the label pathological to be deeply disturbing. Our feelings haven't exactly been a secret. We've at least mentioned them in national policy debates and local city council hearings, in scholarly journals and on op-ed pages, as part of lawsuits and voter registration drives. Though we've not typically elaborated our concerns in much detail, we've fussed enough about this rhetoric of pathology that now we ourselves face a set of serious charges. We have been accused of running from the truth about peoples' lives, of being unwilling to deal with what others see so lucidly, of contributing through our evasion to the very conditions we claim to want so badly to transform. It seems we're being told, in increasingly blunt terms, that we're part of the pathology that seems so intractable.

These are serious charges; at least I take them seriously. I don't know many people who want to be part of a problem, much less a disease. And no progressive, perhaps particularly no progressive of color, should want to deepen his own people's misery and suffering by hiding from or faking what's happening. So I thought it was about time I begin facing up to what bothers me about this rhetoric. Obviously, I don't mean what bothers me about the word pathological itself. (Hell, it's an interesting enough word, referring to that part of medical science that deals with the nature of diseases, especially the structural and functional changes caused by disease.) I mean that I need to confront what apparently bothers me about the rhetoric of pathology that pervades the national community's efforts to explain folks who just don't make it here. That way maybe I can begin to get a handle on just how much it helps us to understand conditions and dynamics we claim to want to correct. That way maybe I can begin to understand why

its messages seem frank and insightful to some, off-putting and scapegoating to others, and frightening in one way or another to nearly everyone.

You should know that I have been warned *not* to make this the topic of the Gerber Lecture. "It just won't sell to a law school audience" is how one sociologist put it. "They'll just think it's all about your personal politics, not about law or lawyers." But I don't believe you buy that any more than I do. We've long since passed the time when law schools could comfortably believe that they could responsibly train future lawyers without systematically studying the people and the institutions in whose lives lawyers and law intervene. As a lawyer, you can't think at all well about dealmaking or corporate fraud without a deep understanding of how businesses work. As a lawyer, you can't think at all well about tax reform and consumer protection without a deep understanding of how middle-income people spend and save their money. And as a lawyer, you can't think at all well about welfare policies and educational reform without a deep understanding of how low-income people get where they are, stretch the little they've got, and regularly deal with problems almost everyone else with enough money buys their way out of.

But if studying people and institutions is central to educating every sort of lawyer, it has a particular urgency when thinking about training lawyers who may do work to challenge the status quo on behalf of people of color, women, gays and lesbians, and low-income people—on behalf of people I often describe as subordinated, because they lack the power that largely defines and sustains dominant groups in this country. Historically, the tendency of all lawyers, including activist lawyers, has been to intervene without knowing much about, let alone regularly studying, those subordinated groups with whom they work. Yet before there can be any discussion of strategies and tactics, before there can be any realistic hope of forging a relationship that doesn't simply reproduce what it hopes to fundamentally alter, progressive lawyers must begin to understand the economic, political and social forces that create and perpetuate subordination. And the understanding of these forces must run deeper than the familiar, superficial psychobabble that has in the past so often dominated courthouses, law offices and law school classrooms. If any of us plans on working with low-income and relatively powerless people or on policies that intimately affect them, it's our job to try to understand exactly what the label pathological may reveal both about their situation and about any hopes we may have of helping them to change it. "Otherwise," to only slightly paraphrase what a client once told me, "maybe we should just stay out of the way."

The Rhetoric of Pathology
 _in the Contemporary "Underclass" Debate

The rhetoric of pathology has been central to the so-called

underclass debate for over a decade now. Ken Auletta, a journalist with a master's degree in political science, is widely regarded as having popularized the connection between pathologies and an unrecognized national underclass. In a series of 3 articles appearing in the *New Yorker* in 1981 and later pulled together in a 1982 Random House book entitled *The Underclass*, Auletta described himself as trying to draw national attention to a diverse mixture of "persistently poor [people] somehow thought to be outside the American class system." Whatever Auletta's aims, the Random House jacket cover made certain no browser or reviewer could miss the pathologies of the people who were the focus of the book:

They are the underclass: the people who prey on our communities committing the senseless, heinous murders, rapes, and muggings that haunt the news every day; the thieves who break into our homes night after night; the hard-core unemployed; the hustlers of the underground economy—the peddlers of loot, the "gentlemen of leisure," the prostitutes, the drug pushers; the passive poor who are unable to cope in the workaday world; the single mothers living chronically on welfare; the strung-out junkies and the aimless juvenile delinquents; the deranged vagrants and the homeless and helpless shopping-bag ladies. These millions of social dropouts—from New York City to Oakland, from the mountains of Appalachia and small towns in Mississippi to the streets of St. Louis and of Chicago—account for a disproportionate amount of the street crime, long-term welfare dependency, chronic unemployment and antisocial behavior in America today. Both traditional poverty programs and the penal system have so far failed to socialize these increasingly desperate, often virulent members of our society. Can something still be done to help members of the underclass become productive citizens—for their sake and ours?

For all this flamboyance, Auletta, in linking these pathologies to an underclass, merely resurfaced much that had been at the heart of the so-called culture of poverty debate during the 1960s. That debate began in earnest with the publication at the beginning of the decade of Oscar Lewis's work about Latinos. (Perhaps you remember some of these books. *The Children of Sánchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family* (New York: Random House, 1961), *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty—San Juan and New York* (New York: Random House, 1966) *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1959), "The Culture of Poverty" in Daniel Patrick Moynihan, ed., *On Understanding Poverty: Perspectives from the Social Sciences* (New York: Basic Books, 1968). Lewis's work put a particularly troublesome cultural spin on the vicious cycle of poverty that had been brought to the attention of the Kennedy Administration with the publication of John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, (1958) and, in particular, of Michael Harrington's much celebrated *The Other America: Poverty in the*

United States (New York: Macmillan, 1962). According to Lewis, the poverty that Lyndon Johnson declared war against was, at least for groups like Chicanos and Puertorriqueños, attributable to deeply cultural, self-perpetuating behavior, and not to the social organization of an industrial society in the way that Harrington and Galbraith seemed to insist.

Although views about a "culture of poverty" originated in Lewis's efforts to explain certain pathological Latino cultures, they were almost immediately put to use to explain low-income African Americans as well. In no time at all, the "culture of poverty" debate and the White/Black "race problem" that centrally animated the Civil Rights War became linked: each seemed increasingly to define and reinforce the other, in the popular imagination if not in scholarly and policymaking minds. Race and the Civil Rights War, some claim, even played a much more central role in the development of the War on Poverty than conventional historical wisdom has thus far acknowledged. In any event, the link between views grounded in Lewis' culture of poverty hypothesis and the predicament of millions of poor African Americans in the early 1960s became thoroughly and heatedly contested with the publication in 1965 of the Moynihan Report on "The Negro Family" (Office of Policy Planning and Research, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Labor, 1965). The Moynihan Report's assertions about the "disintegration" of the Negro family led to fundamental and passionate disputes over the objectivity of the research, the effect on scholarship of the racial background of social science investigators, and the hidden agendas of the protagonists in the debate. (Peterson at 4.) "Amidst this turmoil," as one commentator recently put it, "college students and younger scholars turned their attention elsewhere, foundation and government agencies reoriented their research priorities, and universities closed down their urban studies programs. " (Id.)

Poverty-focused research may well have dried up during the 1970s, but the rhetoric of pathology had already taken hold of the body politic. It helped provide the citizenry a way of thinking about those people who had brought their troubles on themselves (the "undeserving" poor) as opposed to those who were the victims of circumstances beyond their control (the "deserving" poor). It helped provide the citizenry an explanation for why they were correct in believing that hierarchy was natural and justified and that government intervention, particularly in the form of a "safety net" for all those who didn't compete successfully in the labor market, was morally and practically repugnant. ("Hand outs" are wrong because it takes wealth created by competent, industrious individuals and gives it to others who had no legitimate claim on it.) The rhetoric of pathology had taken on a life of its own, perhaps inspired by the particulars of Lewis's and Moynihan's views, but entirely liberated from them, too. And, perhaps to the chagrin of many academics, the rhetoric's influence over the body

politic seemed not at all dampened by the mere absence of scholarly research no one much read anyway.

By the mid-1970s, what was soon to become the New Right began to argue ever more forcefully about the illegitimacy of liberal social policy in terms that echoed and extended the rhetoric of pathology. They railed against Kennedy, Johnson, the War on Poverty, and the Civil Rights War to be sure. But they railed every bit as forcefully against Democratic Congresses which, even during the Nixon and Ford administrations, managed to federalize a food stamp program and expand federal rent subsidies for the poor, largely through "Section 8" subsidies to private developers who set aside apartments for low-income families. The fact that these programs had a profound unevenness to them, in part because they were the piecemeal products of one or another committee and not the result of any coherent social vision, and the fact that there were gaping holes in this "social net" seemed ironically only to further enrage all those who found liberal social policy deeply misguided. All that mattered to them was the bottom line: Congress under the Nixon and Ford watch managed ultimately to spend more money on its safety net than Johnson had ever spent on his equal opportunity programs. And that, in their eyes, not just wrongheaded but morally corrupt.

In this sense, Auletta's book—how it was crafted, touted and received—was simply part of the New Right politics that came to power with Reagan's election in 1980. In linking the rhetoric of pathology to this new and dangerous underclass, Auletta was only putting on paper what people had been thinking for some time, in a language that they were quick to embrace because it was of course already quite nearly their own. "Speak openly about these pathologies," Auletta's book seemed to be read as saying, "in order that we might avoid deepening them." Auletta himself may well have meant, in part, to challenge certain underlying assumptions of neoconservative politics, but his book seemed to be swallowed and reinterpreted by them, converting it into journalistic justification for finally being "honest" about poor, messed-up, dangerous people who prey not just on one another but on all of us. Auletta had lifted the taboo against speaking "the truth," partly by exploiting and partly by being exploited by the rhetoric of pathology. Facing this "truth" through this rhetoric was, yet again, our means of national redemption.

Auletta was certainly instrumental in linking the familiar rhetoric of pathology to a new "underclass," even if he had a ready-made audience. But a small number of social scientists has been most influential in building the intellectual framework that underlies what by now can only be described as an open civic debate about how to think about and respond to these problems. These social scientists seemed catalyzed, and not a little put off, by a public conversation about poverty that had been shaped so prominently by journalists and the citizenry. Some of these social scientists

wanted to deepen and extend the debate; others wanted to narrow and sharpen it. All seemed anxious, however, to take advantage of the fact that the taboo against speaking openly about the "obvious pathologies" of the poor had been lifted. Either they were conservatives and correctly perceived that they're time had come. Or they were liberals (or to the left of liberals) and perceived that the debate they had abandoned now tilted heavily, if not irretrievably, toward the right.

These social scientists included prominent (though not exactly household) names like Thomas Sowell and Charles Murray, Christopher Jencks and Robert Greenstein, Paul Peterson and Theda Skocpol. But, without question, the central figure has been William Julius Wilson, a highly acclaimed African American sociologist and public policy theorist, a MacArthur Prize Fellow who teaches at the University of Chicago. Building on his earlier scholarly work, particularly his 1978 book *The Declining Significance of Race*, and borrowing the term Auletta had popularized, Wilson's book *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, The Underclass and Public Policy* first appeared in 1987 and has, ever since, been the focal point of serious intellectual inquiry. (*The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, The Underclass and Public Policy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Unlike Auletta who set out to describe a diverse underclass (and who was later criticized for sloppily lumping groups like mothers on AFDC and heroine addicts under the same label), Wilson aimed in particular to explain the explosion of an African American underclass in cities like Chicago, a population that he openly regarded as having been deserted by liberal scholars in the 1970s and 1980s and left to the intellectual and policy itinerary of the right. Because he self-consciously hoped to correct this failing, Wilson made a point of elaborately connecting his theoretical explanations to "a comprehensive public policy agenda to improve the life chances of truly disadvantaged groups such as the ghetto underclass."

Wilson's basic account is straightforward. Black ghettos have always been poor. But only since roughly the mid-1960s have they also been characterized by what he described as a "tangle of pathologies," including violent crime, teenage pregnancy, female-headed households, and welfare dependency. The main cause of these disturbing changes, said Wilson, has been a profound transformation in the economy. In the face of increasing competition from foreign countries, the United States has been moving from a unionized, oligopolistic, manufacturing economy to a more competitive, less unionized, service economy in which hourly earnings are falling while skill requirements are rising. These changes are having a disproportionate effect on inner-city African Americans because the loss of manufacturing jobs has been greatest within the large cities like Chicago in the midwest and like Baltimore in the northeast, and most of the new, high-technology service industries are located in smaller cities or on the fringes of the metropolitan area. Ghetto blacks do not have ready access to the new jobs

because the jobs are difficult to reach and educational requirements are high. As a result, the percentage of urban, working age black men who are employed in stable, reasonably well paid jobs has fallen dramatically.

Even prolonged joblessness might not have led to the tangle of pathologies, said Wilson, had the economic transformation not been accompanied by the departure of the African American middle- and working-classes from ghettos where they had previously been confined by legalized residential segregation. If middle- and working-class families had not left the ghetto in pursuit of jobs, better housing and more effective education, argued Wilson, then important inner-city institutions like churches, schools, stores, and recreational facilities would have survived and helped to sustain and socialize the black poor around traditional family values. With the exodus of black middle- and working- classes, the ghetto lost what Wilson called its "social buffer." Little remained to stop poor blacks from thinking that not just joblessness but welfare dependence, female-headed households, crime and drugs were, as Wilson puts it, "a way of life." (p. 57). Gone were the "role models," to use Wilson's words, keeping alive the idea "that education is meaningful, that steady employment is a viable alternative to welfare, and that family stability is the norm, not the exception." (p.56).

Both in *The Truly Disadvantaged* and in subsequent work, Wilson trumpeted his own ideas as a considerable improvement on the two sets of what he calls "easy explanations" that have dominated intellectual and policy debate since the late 1950s—namely, explanations of a "culture of poverty" that have been persistently promoted by the right, and explanations of racism tenaciously advanced by the left. He has been particularly careful to try to distance his account of the black urban underclass from "culture of poverty" arguments, particularly as they have been reduced and reframed by neoconservative researchers like Charles Murray. While Wilson has admitted that "ghetto-specific cultural traits are not irrelevant in understanding the behavior of inner-city residents," (p.137) and while he has openly confessed that "it would be dogmatic to rule out . . . the possibility that some cultural traits may in fact take on a life of their own for a period of time and thereby become a constraining or liberating factor in the life of certain individuals and groups in the inner-city," he has insisted that these pathologies are the result of joblessness and social isolation, and that they are neither self-perpetuating nor exacerbated by "liberal social policies." The "key conclusion from a public policy perspective," said Wilson, "is that programs created to alleviate poverty, joblessness, and related forms of social dislocation should place primary focus on changing the social and economic situations, not the cultural traits, of the ghetto underclass." (p. 137).

Wilson has perhaps even less patience for explanations of the

pathological black ghetto underclass that are grounded in claims about contemporary racism. Historical racism, as he put it, certainly has led to a disproportionate concentration of blacks in impoverished urban ghettos. "No serious students of American race relations," said Wilson, "can deny [this] relationship." (p. 10) But contemporary racism is not central to, or perhaps even a necessary part of, an explanation for the black urban underclass and its pathologies. How can racism, asked Wilson, explain a deterioration in the inner city that has been more rapid in the post-civil rights era than in the era that immediately preceded notable civil rights victories? How can racism, asked Wilson, explain a black middle class that prospered during the same years that the black ghetto underclass deteriorated. "One does not," insisted Wilson, "have to 'trot out' the concept of racism to demonstrate, for example, that blacks have been severely hurt by deindustrialization because of their heavy concentration in the automobile, rubber, steel, and other smokestack industries."

Wilson is, I think, justified in promoting his own theory as considerable improvement over the "easy explanations" he means to counter and ultimately bury. It's not so much that his book won scholarly recognition like the C. Wright Mills Award of the Society for the Study of Social Problems and popular acclaim like being selected by the editors of the New York Times Book Review as one of the sixteen best books of 1987. Lots of fatuous junk gets heavy praise in and out of the academy. It's that *The Truly Disadvantaged* has actually moved intellectual debate to a more demanding, even responsible level. Unlike most of the work that had previously informed conventional wisdom about the ghetto poor, Wilson's views were informed by an unusual wealth of information set within a broad and evocative frame of analysis. After Wilson's book appeared on the scene, historical, economic, and sociological activity seemed again obviously crucial to understanding not just how the ghetto poor got where they are but how they might get out. In many important respects, Wilson's work shifted the terms of the debate, and in no small way reinvigorated it, at least for intellectuals, think tanks, foundations, universities and some policymakers. In other words, *The Truly Disadvantaged* is one of those unusual books that actually deserved the attention and the honors it received.

That's not to say Wilson's analysis necessarily hangs together. Even on its own terms, it seems open to doubts, disagreements and criticisms, many of them empirical. For example, a growing body of evidence suggests to some that the fact that many jobs moved out of the inner-city to the suburbs may have only a modest effect on African American teenagers' chances of working and may not matter much at all for older men. Even unemployment for younger African American men may, in the view of others, have less to do with the location of jobs and more to do with the twin facts that a slack labor market disproportionately affects ghetto residents and that this nation has decided that it would rather control inflation than

tighten up the job market. And, still others insist, that ghetto blacks marry less today than before not simply because labor market conditions for young black men have grown steadily worse, but perhaps because the economic position of black women relative to black men increased significantly since the 1950s, and perhaps because more young blacks enroll and stay in school, where student marriage rates are lower than rates for non students.

Wilson responds to these sorts of challenges to his analysis almost as quickly as they are issued. To the assertion that his theory has overemphasized the mismatch between job location and ghetto residence as an explanation for underclass unemployment, Wilson replies with citations to recent studies that he insists support his analysis by revealing how much the employment of inner-city African Americans has deteriorated relative to suburban African Americans, by disclosing that inner-city African Americans have less access to employment than do central-city whites (as measured by the ratio of jobs to people and the average time to and from work), and by demonstrating that the inner-city African Americans would be significantly more likely to have a job if they lived in the suburbs than if they lived in the ghetto. To the assertion that his theory has overemphasized the relationship between the sharp rise in poor single-parent families with the declining employment status of young black men, Wilson replies with a citation to a recent study that he insists supports his analysis (if only in a qualified way) by revealing that black men in inner-city Chicago who have stable work are twice as likely to marry as black men who are jobless and not in school or in the military, though this disparity in rates admittedly declines for older groups.

Whatever our judgment on the merits, the very existence and nature of these exchanges reveal just how successful Wilson has been in his efforts to reframe, deepen and enliven the national debate about poverty in the United States. To a remarkable degree, the exchanges are cast as reactions to Wilson's work, yes not always supporting, sometimes disputing, certainly refining what he's had to say, but almost always responding to the theoretical questions and the practical quandaries his work principally defined. And the exchanges often take place in anything but the low-profile, poorly-financed seclusion that defines so much of what social scientists and other academics do. The exchanges over Wilson's work occur in conferences supported by outfits like the Ford, Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations, where vying positions are informed by data recently collected by think tanks like the University of Wisconsin's Institute for Research on Poverty, the Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, and Wilson's own Urban Poverty and Family Structure Project, which are, in turn, financed by organizations and agencies like the Carnegie and Russell Sage Foundations and the Department of Health and Human Services. Conference papers and proceedings are then published by presses

like Brookings, The American Academy of Political and Social Science, Harvard University Press and Basic Books. And these publications are, in no time at all, reviewed and discussed in magazines that range from Commentary to Dissent, from the New York Review of Books to People Magazine and regularly relied upon, if not cited chapter and verse, by the media, particularly in its down-and-dirty coverage of inner-city life.

The Price of Success

Yet all this success came at a price. To gain this extraordinary intellectual and cultural influence, Wilson's view had to have been in harmony with the rhetoric of pathology in ways he seems either unable to acknowledge or at least too ready to dismiss as unimportant. That may seem inaccurate, even unfair. After all, Wilson spent considerable space and energy carefully explaining in *The Truly Disadvantaged* (and then in later exchanges) precisely why he was willing to openly discuss, as he put it, "the sharp increase in social pathologies in ghetto communities." And I have no reason to believe that he was anything other than forthright in his explanations. (At least in my eyes, he's absolutely *not*, as a few have shouted and many others have whispered, a closeted reactionary, a more technically capable Thomas Sowell in drag.) Still, I believe the rhetoric of pathology, powerful paradigm that it is, dictated in many ways what Wilson could see, what he could ask questions about, what he could count as relevant evidence, and what he could consider as powerful explanations. It manifestly skewed both the terms in which Wilson framed his theory and the impact his book had on the popular and intellectual environment of which it almost instantaneously became a central and featured part. In other words, there's reason to believe Wilson's analysis in *The Truly Disadvantaged* has been unusually influential because it was almost as prescribed as it was surprising.

Let me explain. Wilson is, by any measure, a gifted intellectual. He asks ambitious questions. He fairly evaluates available evidence. He resourcefully gathers new data where others frequently have relied upon data too narrow or too general to be of much help. He draws on a variety of disciplines in trying to understand how to approach, how to analyze and how to respond to what we know. And, by all accounts, he works well with others, inviting their views, integrating many of their insights, and testing his own tentative conclusions along the way. Like the rest of us, however, and by his own admission, Wilson's work reflects his own deeply held convictions. As he put it in *The Truly Disadvantaged*, "despite pious claims about objectivity in social research, it is true that values influence not only our selection of problems for investigation but also our interpretation of empirical data." (p.5) Deeply-held convictions don't necessarily invalidate an explanation, but as he himself cautioned "attempts to arrive at a satisfactory explanation may be impeded by ideological blinders or views restricted by value premises."

By the time Wilson researched and wrote *The Truly Disadvantaged*, he was, if anything, a mature thinker with certain values and deeply-held convictions. As his own published work reveals, already saw the world in terms compatible with the rhetoric of pathology and empirical social scientific methods. When in *The Truly Disadvantaged* he looked at the South Side of Chicago—and certainly when he looked at large housing projects like Cabrini-Green and the Robert Taylor Homes—he saw, predictably enough, not just social problems but the same "tangle of pathologies" he had used almost ten years earlier to define the ghetto underclass in his influential book *The Declining Significance of Race*. And he didn't just see joblessness, female-headed households, out-of-wedlock births, welfare dependency, and crime as pathologies and leave it at that. He saw complex, interrelated issues that needed to be defined, framed, hypothesized about, and studied. For him, concepts like class and race needed to be functionally defined, and phenomena like causation needed to be meticulously spelled out so that data could be collected and digested, so that hypotheses could be advanced, tested, refined, or discarded, if necessary. Loose speculation, of the sort too often engaged in by journalists, and even close descriptive studies of ghetto life, of the sort occasionally engaged in by social reformers and anthropologists, may detail the conditions of urban poverty but, in Wilson's words, "provided little in the way of analytical insights on the relationship between poverty and the social organization of industrializing society." (p. 165)

But Wilson's analysis in *The Truly Disadvantaged* reflected not just his agreement with the rhetoric of pathology and not just his own robust approach to social research. Wilson understood that, in the political climate of the 1980s, liberals of all sorts (perhaps particularly a self-described "social democrat" like himself) had to be willing not just to acknowledge but to "address straightforwardly the rise of social pathologies in the ghetto." Otherwise, said Wilson, they could not expect to gain an audience, to relegate liberal perspectives on the ghetto underclass, and to provoke, in his words, a "more balanced intellectual discussion of why the problems in the inner city sharply increased" (p. 5). Since Wilson already saw the ghetto poor in terms of pathology, it was not at all difficult, let alone disingenuous, for him to merge effective strategy and honest analysis. That's why in *The Truly Disadvantaged* Wilson took the opportunity to issue what amounted to a new call to arms. No longer, declared Wilson, can liberals avoid describing behavior that might be construed as unflattering or stigmatizing. No longer, insisted Wilson, can liberals refuse to use such terms as underclass. No longer, warned Wilson, can liberals reinterpret every pathological aspect of ghetto life as unequivocal evidence of the resilience, creativity and courage in the face of an oppressive society. And no longer, emphasized Wilson, can liberals explain everything in terms of contemporary racism.

Wilson's strongly personal sense of intellectual honesty and political practicality guided him in producing an analysis that reveals, ironically enough, not so much that he chose what he was buying into but that he responded as an integrated part of what had become, by 1987, a national way of thinking. For all of Wilson's remarkable resourcefulness and obvious passion, the analysis in *The Truly Disadvantaged* originated in a script that had been written almost three decades before his book was published—a script authored not by Oscar Lewis alone, not by Oscar Lewis and Daniel Moynihan together, but by a national community that almost instinctively adopted, then regularly reinforced, the basic structure and practices of the rhetoric of pathology. For all his deliberateness in approaching work, Wilson seems to have been unaware of just how much this rhetoric may have been making fundamental decisions for him, decisions that shaped how he approached and responded to all that he saw and studied. Perhaps nowhere is this more telling than in Wilson's painstaking efforts to distinguish what was, from his perspective, the fresh complexity of his own ideas from both the left's tired and simplistic race-based explanations and the right's equally tired and simplistic culture of poverty explanations.

Wilson's desire to distance himself from the more vulgar versions of racism as an explanation seem entirely understandable, if only because such explanations tried to explain the economic and social situation of ghetto blacks exclusively in terms of the "conscious refusal of whites to accept blacks as equal human beings and their willful, systematic effort to deny blacks equal opportunity." (p.10). But Wilson's efforts to distance his analysis from this rather limited version of contemporary racism appears to mask a certain fundamental ambivalence. Although he believes that ghetto blacks have been made more vulnerable because historical racism left them less able to adapt to changes in the political economy, and although in recent essays he insists that contemporary racism no doubt "contributed to the increasing social and economic woes of the ghetto underclass" (page 605 Ethics), at some deep level he seems unable to deal with—or at least to integrate into his analysis—any version of contemporary racism other than the one he so justifiably rejects.

At first glance, this may seem odd, maybe even paradoxical. Ever the resourceful intellectual, Wilson is obviously aware that contemporary racism has been described, both by highly visible intellectuals and by largely invisible people on the street, as operating in complex ways that can't be simply reduced to conscious and willful activity. But here Wilson's particular brand of social science and political pragmatism win out over the more intellectually eclectic and streetwise parts of him that believe contemporary racism exists and matters. Wilson rejects the idea that the deteriorating position of the ghetto poor should be discussed in terms like "the economic structure of racism." Problems that are about the broader issues of economic organization

are, for Wilson, "not made more understandable by associating them directly or indirectly with racism," particularly when racism has been used so indiscriminately, with so many definitions, to cover up a lack of information and knowledge of complex issues. (p. 12) Besides, says Wilson (and this seems for him to be the kicker), "indiscriminate use of this term in any analysis of contemporary racial problems immediately signals that the arguments typify worn-out themes and make conservative writers more interesting in comparison because they seem, on the surface at least, to have some fresh ideas." (p. 12).

Wilson makes good sense in wanting to correct for the past tendency to sloppily and fervently reduce complex issues to nothing but racism, particularly if racism is defined as intentional and willful. And of course Wilson seems right in appreciating that this nation long since passed its short-lived willingness to hear arguments about, much less accept responsibility for, inequalities that are the product of persistent racism. But Wilson's response overcorrects for past sloppiness and overacquiesces in this country's resistance to claims of contemporary racism. Instead of trying to develop a working definition of contemporary racism that matches its complexity in social life, Wilson ended up developing a theory that, in effect, radically isolates and limits the role of race. Instead of recognizing how race helps shape the politics of the state and the market, Wilson ended up seeing only how the state and the market helped configure race relations. In *The Truly Disadvantaged*, it is economic transformations and other "race-neutral" factors that for Wilson best explain the pathologies he sees in the South Side of Chicago.

Maybe describing the world in this way seems more manageable to academic sociologists and more attractive to mainstream readers. But it's a description that is not just counter-intuitive but counter-factual. As much as Wilson would like to believe that the switch from a manufacturing to a service economy and the suburbanization of industries are the more or less unavoidable results of impersonal economic structures, they are choices made by people and institutions. Like all choices, they are of course often impelled by forces that appear to be beyond our immediate control. They may even seem to have nothing to do with us. But they are nevertheless exercises of private and public will and are no more "race-neutral" than they are "gender-neutral," and "class-neutral." Wilson makes the mistake of concluding that since intentional and wilful racism can't plausibly be described as the only cause of the social deterioration of urban ghettos, it makes sense to assign race no significant role whatsoever. According to Wilson, the only alternatives for explaining how the ghetto poor have been affected by the operation of the political economy are either intentional discrimination or race-neutral dynamics.

Wilson's account of racism may not even sit well with him. That's my hunch anyway. It's not just his acknowledgment that perhaps he

originally understated how much present-day employers consciously screen black ghetto residents from their employee pools, treating "ghetto blackness" as a proxy for being uncooperative, unstable and unproductive. It's that in his more recent essays he has stressed more than he did initially in *The Truly Disadvantaged* how contemporary racism may well worsen the woes of the ghetto poor. But he stresses "worsen" rather than "help cause" because his world view and his sense of practical politics preclude him from going further. There is no place for complex ideas of racism in an analysis that was framed and marketed, in significant part, to disavow the slipshod and tired use of race as a conceptual device. In order to avoid sounding like yet another race-fixated liberal, Wilson fashioned a role for race in his theory that he himself should have trouble believing.

But it is not merely Wilson's insistence on isolating and oversimplifying race as a factor in explaining the decline of ghetto communities that is revealing, it is also the related ease with which he appears to describe each of these communities as essentially a "tangle of pathologies," even as he tries to distance himself from the right's tired "culture of poverty" thesis. Wilson's desire to distinguish his position from the "culture of poverty" explanations seems entirely understandable. Such arguments rest on the implausible premise that culture is a self-perpetuating and impermeable "thing," passed on almost genetically from one generation to the next, never influenced by, say, other "cultures" or by any other social, political or economic forces.

But Wilson's effort to disavow the "culture of poverty" thesis seems again to mask a more fundamental ambivalence. Although he believes that black ghettos aren't self-perpetuating cultures, at some deep level he apparently finds a scientific and moral truthfulness in labeling (and understanding) the social problems of the ghetto poor in terms of pathology—in terms that take their form and content from the very culture of poverty theory he otherwise rejects. So much does this rhetoric seem "to speak" to Wilson that he never even bothers to define "pathology" or, perhaps more importantly, to pause and ask whether talking in this way about the social conditions and behavior of the ghetto poor seems accurate, illuminating, and helpful to ambitious social analysis.

These failures seem, at first glance, strange and inexplicable. Ever the responsible social scientist, Wilson characteristically defines the central terms he chooses to employ in his work and explains why such terms seem accurate, illuminating and helpful to the analysis. And, as an astute intellectual historian and political pragmatist, Wilson typically attends to, and has strong views about, the role of rhetoric in honest and effective social theory. Both in *The Truly Disadvantaged* and in later essays, Wilson spent considerable energy explaining the promise and the threat of using a term like "underclass" to describe ghetto blacks, an explanation that sensibly took account of the complicated role

the term already played not just in social scientific circles but in the popular imagination. But Wilson's failure to define and justify the rhetoric that is the impetus and fulcrum of his analysis reveals, I think, just how much he, like so many before him and around him, unself-consciously conflates talking honestly and effectively about the social problems of ghetto blacks with talking about pathologies. Even as he tried to distance himself from Oscar Lewis, Charles Murray, and others like them, he never underscores the reliability of the rhetoric of pathology as an issue, much less an issue central to the very legitimacy of his analysis.

Had Wilson more carefully considered his choice of rhetoric, I'd like to believe he would have found the matter deeply problematic. In *The Truly Disadvantaged*, pathological and healthy appear to be presumptively treated as categories around which social analysis can be productively organized. I say "appear" because Wilson never explicitly defines pathological and he never so much as mentions healthy. He apparently regards this as unnecessary. I suppose that shouldn't be surprising. While Wilson never clarifies what's healthy and why the black underclass diverges from the norm, it's not very difficult to discern that he is implicitly contrasting the ghetto poor with something like two, heterosexual, wedded adults who have babies the family can afford to support. And while Wilson never explicitly elaborates why his "straight" view of life should be regarded as superior, it's not all that hard to piece together (though admittedly with a little guesswork) that he probably means to defend in rather traditional terms rather traditional views of gender, family life, sexuality, work and law-abidingness.

But the problem runs deeper still. Even had Wilson more explicitly defined his categories, it's far from self-evident that they are lucid, stable or even coherent. Wilson nowhere addresses whether any group of people has ever conformed to his tidy picture of healthy Americana in a way that would permit the conditions and behavior of ghetto blacks to be reliably and responsibly, much less presumptively, contrasted as singularly pathological. Think only for a moment about what Wilson did *not* consider when making the rhetoric of pathology so central to *The Truly Disadvantaged*. African Americans who live in today's ghettos are not the only African Americans who have ever scuffled and hustled—yes, sometimes or even regularly "broken the law"—to get by. Reliable evidence tell us many African Americans, even those who have been "fully employed," have had to scuffle and hustle because wage labor available to them has been unreliable as a means of survival. Modern ghetto neighborhoods are not the only ones manifesting increased joblessness, reliance on welfare, and female-headed households. Statistics indicate that most "mainstream" neighborhoods are evidencing these same characteristics, perhaps to an extent even greater than ghetto neighborhoods.

Of course, there's more. Modern ghetto residents are not the only

folks increasingly having kids out of wedlock. Reliable evidence reveals that births among unmarried white females have increased, too, and continue to do so even as the increase has slowed among their African American counterparts. Modern ghetto residents are not the only folks who do themselves in with serious substance abuse. Reliable evidence tells us that substance abuse pervades nearly every neighborhood, community, and campus; there are even indications that the crack-cocaine use may be higher among some affluent white suburbanites than among hard-core ghetto poor. Ghetto drug lords are not the only folks who develop and sustain a market at apparently any price and who are into "paper," "Benzos," "Beemers," "Vettes," and "fine females." Reliable evidence tells us that many "captains of industry" and a fair share of government officials are themselves heavy into money, fancy cars, and beautiful women and are willing to countenance social devastation, and yes, even murder, to maintain their market share.

The messiness of social reality undermines Wilson's categorical scheme in yet other ways still. It's not just that what's true of some African Americans living in socially isolated ghettos is also true of African Americans in past decades and of white people today. It's also that which people it's true of, both inside and outside the ghetto, can often shift with time and circumstance. People of all sorts have been, by turns, in and out of joblessness. In and out of needing government help. In and out of scuffling, hustling, "getting over," and breaking the law in one way or another to get by. In and out of wedlock and in and out of single parenting. In and out and in and out and, yes, too often back into substance abuse. In and out of and in and out of and, yes, too often back into conspicuous material consumption and controlling a market at any price. The fact is the lines between healthy and pathological don't just blur and shift, they zigzag, and not just between groups, but even within groups and even within a single individual's lifetime. It sometimes seems that more often than not people straddle the two categories in ways that make it difficult, if not meaningless, to describe their behavior as either healthy or pathological along the dimensions that seem so important to Wilson.

Don't misunderstand me. That the behaviors of the ghetto poor Wilson has described as a "tangle of pathologies" are on the rise in mainstream society shouldn't alone minimize our concern for what may be self-destructive in these behaviors. That's all the more true, I suppose, if you agree with Wilson that these behaviors are "far more characteristic of inner city ghettos and inimical to successful performance in the larger society." In any event, I certainly am *not* into romanticizing drug dealing, vicious money making practices, or homicides among the "ghetto underclass" or anybody else. Still, I think Wilson keeps missing the point, certainly the point I'm making. No one is asking Wilson or anybody else not to study the situation of African Americans in this nation's urban ghettos. No one is asking him not to write about what he learns in bold and honest terms. No one is asking him not

to argue and lobby for policies he regards as responsive to circumstances in need of revitalization.

What I am asking is that Wilson reconsider whether the very rhetorical terms in which the debate is currently framed accurately reflect social reality—not the simplistic portrayal of reality Wilson attributes to the media and so dislikes, but the messy, elusive reality that is the stuff of ambitious sociology. If Wilson took a closer look at the same realities we've only glimpsed, would it still make sense to label ghetto blacks pathological and almost everyone else healthy? Would it still make sense to employ a rhetoric that seems not only largely misleading and badly muddled, but, from its inception, linked with simplistic views about how certain groups of color couldn't make it here in the United States? Would it tell us what we most need to understand about African Americans, about mainstream white Americans, and about everyone else? Wilson keeps missing the point, I think, because he can't see it. The truth seems to be that Wilson, though he keeps insisting he can't live with the idea of a culture of poverty, obviously can't seem to live entirely without it either.

The Predicament We Share

But let's not mislead ourselves. Wilson, for all his importance, is only part of the problem. Whether he shifts the terms of his own analysis is of less concern to me than what happens to the rest of us. Whatever our intellectual approach and our read of practical politics, we all more or less share Wilson's predicament. What we see and don't see, what we study and don't study, and what we say and don't say about the world around us seem inordinately shaped by the same rhetoric of pathology that Wilson has ironically and perhaps unintentionally reinforced through his work. It doesn't seem to much matter whether we ourselves ever use the word "pathology" or whether we've ever even heard the word or know what it means. Pathology has become our national reference point. Whether we are white, relatively privileged and in the mainstream (whatever that is), or are of color, disadvantaged and at the margins (wherever they begin), we all seem incapable of escaping the trap. We routinely use the rhetoric, however unself-consciously, to define ourselves and others, as groups and as individuals.

We should not presume, however, that the implications of living in and through the rhetoric are the same for everyone. Think about just some groups. People who are white, relatively privileged and in the mainstream regularly contrast themselves with those they see as pathological as a way of affirming their own "obvious" distinctiveness and superiority. After all, could anyone really mistake them for a "ghetto lowlife"—for a Rodney King? They never investigate, much less acknowledge, what they may share with ghetto residents. They know all they need to know from the rhetoric

itself. They can buy black music, emulate black style, applaud black talent on T.V., and all the while live at a safe distance from, and never plan to set foot in, inner-city ghettos, except of course perhaps to go to a ballgame or the symphony.

Then there are poor inner-city African Americans themselves, apparently the only members of the "underclass" of major concern to Wilson. Long the center of attention among academics, policymakers, media pundits, and the general public, these folks do face a host of problems in their everyday lives. Many of these problems are the serious sort Wilson identifies. And, yes, they do appear to be on the rise. But the fixation on the pervasiveness and pathological nature of these problems obscures the hard work, ingenuity, and commitment that define much of ghetto life. We lose sight of the way many single African American moms cope—combining meager government benefits with "off-the-books" work in order to provide for themselves and their kids. We lose sight of the way many African American men cope—hustling low-paying, sporadic, dead-end jobs in order to help make ends meet. We lose sight of the way family and friends help—cooking, babysitting, cleaning up, and sharing the little they got in order to keep one another and their communities intact (more or less together).

But poor inner-city African Americans are caught in a double bind. They can emphasize their obscured virtues only at the risk of sacrificing their own prominence in current debates and, hence, their advantage in the competition for those resources so critical to their efforts to combat deprivations. They often find themselves having to parrot the rhetoric of pathology in degrading and demeaning fashion, rather than being able to straightforwardly and honestly describe the problems they confront. And whenever poor inner-city African Americans do point with pride to their many virtues and achievements, there is a powerful incentive to do so only while contrasting these stories with tales of rampant pathology. In this regard, they seem to be playing the same tune as everyone else—a tune that implies, by virtue of the lyrics left out, that what is good about inner-city African American life is somehow insignificant in comparison with what is far more commonplace and bad, and that what is bad is somehow radically distinctive from what is bad in every American community.

And what of middle-, and upper-class African Americans who can never comfortably decide whether to distinguish themselves from, or to identify with, their ghetto brothers and sisters. They understandably want to point out the differences between the "better elements" in the black community and those "other folks" who may richly merit the label pathological. But not only do these distinctions further divide African Americans, they also often backfire. When "respectable" black voices invoke the rhetoric of pathology to describe the inner-city poor, they only heighten suspicion and fear of all African Americans. In a country where color does matter, and matter a lot, most people have more trouble

than they'd like to admit distinguishing between "good" and "bad" blacks. And being mistaken for a "dangerous black character" is a startling reminder for African Americans outside the ghetto of half-forgotten bonds with the inner-city poor who they know aren't simply pathological. It is a reminder that, although joblessness is hardly healthy and drug dealing hardly rebellious, what appears to others to be only pathetic and destructive is at times militant and even heroic.

Latinos, particularly Chicanos and Puertorriqueños, are trapped in a somewhat different but no less insidious double-bind. Like their African American counterparts, the poorest among them have never had their resourcefulness much celebrated in the media, the academy, or policymaking circles. But unlike poor inner-city African Americans, Latinos living at the margins have garnered little public attention whatsoever. In their eyes, they have had to scarp for paltry resources that are left over once blacks have gotten their share. Latino choices thus seem terribly perverse. They can either demean themselves by promoting their own "pathologies" and by asserting they are every bit as "messed up" as ghetto blacks. Or they can hide their own problems and run the risk of becoming increasingly irrelevant to the contemporary underclass debate. Even when Latinos try to extol their own strengths, they are encouraged to do so principally by contrasting these virtues with the grotesque pathologies plaguing other people of color. Whatever they end up doing in hopes of escaping the bind presented by the rhetoric of pathology inevitably intensifies conflicts between not just themselves and African Americans but different ethnic groups and classes within the Latino community itself.

For Asian Americans, who have long been lumped together and trumpeted as a "model minority," the rhetoric of pathology poses a predicament in yet another insidious form. Like poor Latinos, poor Asian Americans have been largely invisible in discussions of inner-city blight. Unlike Latinos and African Americans, however, Asian Americans have routinely been caricatured as an almost flawless people. They have only strengths and virtues and, if you can believe what you read and hear, seem never to fail. Not only are their problems ignored, they are placed in the uncomfortable position of being constantly contrasted with supposedly pathological people of color who can't make it. They can either surrender to a romanticized vision of their communities and remain misunderstood and tangential to public debate. Or they can draw attention to their own pockets of poverty, gangs, drug-trafficking, and prostitution at the risk of denigrating those accomplishments deserving of praise. And, of course, as is true for Latinos and African Americans, whatever they do only endangers already fragile relations between themselves and other people of color and their own efforts to forge a shared Asian American identity.

Lost in all of this are poor whites. These folks are left to

wonder why they continue to be overlooked. Why, they ask themselves, do you have to live in the ghetto of a big midwestern or eastern city to be seen as wanting? Why do you have to be non-white and poor to be on anyone's agenda? Why, they ask at their ugliest, do you have to be pathological like all those ghetto blacks and hispanics to have a shot at the help you need? For them, the choices are no less troublesome than they are for anyone else. Either they can publicly identify with "screwed up" people of color and perhaps undermine their already fragile sense of self worth. Or they can deny that they share much of anything with these groups and sacrifice any chance of building multi-racial coalitions that might effectively reshape public policy.

So that's where the rhetoric of pathology has left us. All of us. Whatever our color, our class, our gender. Whether we're fancy academics like William Julius Wilson, or ordinary folks trying to get by. We're all left feeling like we gotta embrace this way of seeing and talking to be taken seriously. Pointing fingers at others and at ourselves, fighting about who and what is more or less messed up, whacked out, and just plain sick. Always in exaggerated terms. Never quite capturing accurately what is really going on. Maybe that's somebody else's idea about how to be brutally honest and clinically detached, morally and scientifically truthful. Maybe that's somebody else's idea about how to change the world. Maybe I'm just out of it. But I gotta admit, finally, that to my mind, *all* of that's what's *really* pathological. And, the fact is I'm not entirely certain we're any more up to escaping this "tangled web" than the Simi Valley jury was up to escaping the related judgment of acquittal of those four cops who brutalized Rodney King. And that may tell us more than we care to know about ourselves.