

## **CHANGING PLACES**





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HOW COMMUNITIES WILL IMPROVE  
THE HEALTH OF BOYS OF COLOR

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and Jorge Ruiz de Velasco**

With a foreword by Robert Phillips



The Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Race, Ethnicity and Diversity at the University of California at Berkeley School of Law is a multidisciplinary, collaborative venture to produce research, research-based policy analysis, and curricular innovation on issues of racial and ethnic justice in California and the nation.

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*Cover:* The cover image was designed by Oakland, California-based printmaker and digital artist Favianna Rodriguez. Using high-contrast colors and vivid figures, her composites reflect literal and imaginative migration, global community, and interdependence. She has lectured widely on the use of art in civic engagement and the work of bridging community and museum, local and international. Rodriguez is coeditor of *Reproduce and Revolt!* with stencil artist and art critic Josh MacPhee (Soft Skull Press, 2008). An unprecedented contribution to the Creative Commons, this two-hundred-page book contains more than six hundred bold, high-quality black and white illustrations for royalty-free creative use. Rodriguez's artwork also appears in *The Design of Dissent* (Rockport Publishers, 2006), *Peace Signs: The Anti-War Movement Illustrated* (Edition Olms, 2004), and *The Triumph of Our Communities: Four Decades of Mexican Art* (Bilingual Review Press, 2005).

**BIG BOYS DON'T CRY,  
BLACK BOYS DON'T FEEL**

*The Intersection of Shame and Worry on Community  
Violence and the Social Construction of Masculinity among  
Urban African American Males: The Case of Derrion Albert*

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and Jarvis Ray Givens

**ABSTRACT**

In the fall of 2009, Derrion Albert, a sixteen-year-old African American male honor student at Chicago's Christian Fenger Academy High School, made international news. On his way home from school, Albert was brutally attacked and murdered by a group of assailants. It is alleged that he was caught in a brawl involving factions of two neighborhood gangs. Albert had no affiliation with either of the gangs; he was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. This chapter explores Derrion Albert's death and situates it within the context of violence between and among African American males more broadly. Specifically, this chapter examines the intersection between the social construction of masculinity among African American young males and violence in low-income urban communities. The authors conduct three levels of analysis to explore the social determinants of health and mental well-being at the individual, community, and social system levels. The first part discusses two current theoretical determinants of community violence: shame and worry. The second part employs an examination of print and Web-based archival data to reassess Derrion Albert's murder and community responses to that event, within the context of individual and community shame and worry.

## INTRODUCTION

On the afternoon of September 24, 2009, Derrion Albert, a sixteen-year-old honor student at Christian Fenger Academy High School on Chicago's South Side, was brutally beaten to death before a crowd of more than fifty spectators, largely his male peers, as he waited at a bus stop. Within twenty-four hours the melee had been witnessed worldwide. Bystanders had recorded the attack using camera phones that captured images of assailants wielding parts of railroad ties, the rectangular-shaped wooden objects used as the base of railroad tracks in the United States.

Roseland, the community area where the incident occurred, is often characterized as among Chicago's most violent neighborhoods—a once thriving neighborhood, where community violence is now a daily occurrence, according to residents. Media reports suggest that the deadly after-school brawl began as a dispute between factions of two neighborhood gangs: one from the Altgeld Gardens neighborhood, in which Derrion resided, and another from “The Ville,” a section of the Roseland community centered about a block from Fenger. The actual location of the melee was just outside the Agape Community Center, a long-standing neighborhood sanctuary where students could complete homework, take Bible classes, or simply escape the chaotic streets of Chicago's Southeast side.

Derrion Albert had been walking east among fellow Fenger classmates to the bus stop when approximately ten teens converged from opposite directions on the vacant lot adjacent to the community center. The two groups of students began quarreling on the street about the details of a shooting in Altgeld Gardens earlier that day that police reported was gang-related. The quarrel became physically violent and within minutes dozens of teen males converged on the vacant lot as bystanders. Witnesses confirm that Albert was not initially a target; rather, he was swept up into the altercation as he approached the bus stop. There, he was confronted by Eric Carson and another unidentified member of the Ville faction. Carson struck Albert in the head with a piece of a wooden railroad tie, and the second person punched him in the face. He was briefly knocked unconscious but regained consciousness and was trying to get up when he was attacked by a second group, apparently from his own Altgeld Gardens neighborhood. He was struck in the head by Eugene Riley with a piece of railroad tie. When Derrion was on the ground again, Silvonus Shannon could be seen on video “stomping on his head repeatedly.”

An amateur video shot by a witness showed the attack unfolding and has been subsequently viewed thousands of times nationally. “Derrion, get

up!” a female voice pleads on the video. Earlier in the video, a male voice is overheard exclaiming: “Beat that . . .” The video reveals that, as the attackers ran away, the person with the camera, who remains unidentified, and several other bystanders approached Derrion. When it was all over, Derrion lay in the gravel and his slight, five-seven frame was dented and damaged from the pummeling. He was pulled into the community center by T’awannya Piper, a youth worker employed by the center. He was taken to Roseland Community Hospital and then transferred to Advocate Christ Hospital and Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead.

A local TV station received the video and turned it over to police. Four teens—Eugene Bailey, seventeen; Eric Carson, sixteen; Eugene Riley, eighteen; and Silvonus Shannon, nineteen—were initially charged with his murder. Riley and Shannon were Derrion’s fellow Fenger classmates and before the brawl, neither had criminal records. Carson was on probation for a 2008 robbery conviction. Charges against Bailey have since been dropped for insufficient evidence. On January 20, 2010, nineteen-year-old Lapoleon Colbert was charged with first-degree murder in the beating death. He is presently being held in jail without access to bail.

This chapter examines the tensions between the two impoverished neighborhoods from which the victim and his assailants hail to offer a broader context for understanding the events of that day. We consider how public policies in response to economic shifts and downturns, housing and demographic patterns, and declining educational and employment opportunities interact with community social structures and resulting community behavior in ways that might otherwise be viewed as solely individually motivated and potentially criminal. The neighborhood context provides a lens through which we examine community violence and the social construction of masculinity among African American males. This lens helps us understand the life trajectories of Derrion Albert and his attackers. This perspective might also help to explain how community violence may derive from a set of social structures within which Albert and his assailants may *both* be victims. We consider shame and worry as social stressors that may also promote violence among African American males within this neighborhood context.

These young males are both active agents and passive reactors in an ongoing, downward spiral of diminishing social and economic opportunities for individual and community development. Such circumscribed urban spaces are fertile terrains for community violence. The chronically violent atmosphere in which these young males reside invokes individual stressors not the least of which is the persistent worry that they may be the targets of

violence and shame. Such social stressors, coupled with the narrow options available to these young men of color within the social construction of masculinity in their communities, may cause these African American males to resort to violent behavior against strangers and neighborhood peers as a socially tolerated means of coping and survival.

Derrion Albert may have been viewed as an unlikely target because he was neither a gang member nor known to hang out and participate in antisocial behavior. Yet violent male bravado characterizes the social construction of masculinity within the cultural context of his impoverished neighborhood. This narrow and confining construction of masculinity poses both real and imagined threats to healthy male physical and mental development. In fact, Albert's reputation as an honor student and "a good kid" (both descriptions are at odds with the social construction of "street cred" masculinity in his social environment) coupled with the fact that he found himself in a contested space at an importune time may have enhanced his vulnerability to violence. The violence was initially perpetrated by angry young men from an opposing neighborhood, but strangers and fellow neighborhood peers ultimately joined in it.

#### **HOW PRECIPITATING AND REACTIVE PUBLIC POLICIES CONTRIBUTE TO CONTESTED NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY STRUCTURAL CONTEXTS**

Derrion Albert and several of his alleged assailants were residents of Altgeld Gardens, a neighborhood within the Riverdale community, one of the seventy-seven Chicago community areas. Chicago's community areas were originally defined by the Social Science Research Committee at the University of Chicago, which during the 1920s unofficially divided the city into seventy-seven areas. These well-defined and static U.S. Census areas serve as the basis for a variety of local and regional planning initiatives. At one time they corresponded roughly to neighborhoods within the city. With few exceptions, however, the original boundaries have not been revised since to reflect any demographic change. Today, many of the community areas no longer correspond to any single neighborhood; some of their names have fallen out of colloquial use. In many cases the actual character of the community area is quite independent of the individual neighborhoods it comprises. According to the City of Chicago Department of Community Development, Chicago neighborhoods have changed substantially over time due to urban redevelopment, gentrification, and the constant shuffle and absorption of the immigrant population.

Today, the Altgeld neighborhood is often colloquially characterized as a community area because of the large public-housing complex, Altgeld Gardens, which encompasses the area. Since the late 1990s, Chicago's transformation of public housing has resulted in the demolition of large public-housing complexes, including the Robert Taylor Homes, Stateway Gardens, and Cabrini Green located along Grand Boulevard. The Douglas and Gold Coast community areas are less than a mile from Chicago's alluring lakefront, within blocks of major highway arteries, and equally close to the expanding and gentrifying South Loop and central business district. The neighborhoods and community areas where these massive public-housing complexes were once located have also undergone gentrification to a lesser degree. Perhaps most visibly missing from these neighborhoods and communities, besides the demolished housing units, is the array of both private and public social-welfare services, including schools, health, and social-service organizations, that were once located within blocks of the housing complexes.

Ironically, the transformation of public housing in close proximity to Chicago's lakefront and its expanding central business district forced the relocation of the vast majority of former residents to more remote and impoverished neighborhoods, like Roseland and even Altgeld Gardens to a lesser degree. Concurrently, other policies sought to address the declining high school attendance rates among students in neighborhoods experiencing escalating crime and violence. These policies contributed to the conversion of the Altgeld Gardens neighborhood high school into a military academy (George Washington Carver), with its accompanying selection criteria and appeal. Roseland's neighborhood high school (Christian Fenger Academy High School) was reconstituted into a general academic center that aimed to unify the two opposing neighborhoods into one high school district.

Although Derrion Albert's neighborhood has not witnessed the demolition of its large public-housing complex, Altgeld Gardens and neighboring Roseland have not escaped the public policies that have resulted in transforming, reconstituting, and even closing schools that previously were largely populated along neighborhood boundaries. The neighborhood high school that served residents of Altgeld Gardens, George Washington Carver, began its transition to a military academy in 2000, thus forcing Altgeld Gardens high school students seeking an area general academic curriculum to attend Fenger. Located in the Roseland community area, Fenger was designated as a "turnaround school," in which improvements to curriculum and programming began during the 2008–09 school year. The accompanying escalating high school drop-out rate, particularly among

African American students, also contributed to the reduction of available high school options in light of changing neighborhood demographics and decreasing public-school funding. In addition, a proliferation of military schools emerged as high school options within the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) during this period. In light of the rising community violence and history of crime associated with Altgeld Gardens and surrounding neighborhoods, a military academy was viewed as a viable option for enhancing youth development and expanding educational opportunities.

These considerations notwithstanding, neighborhood high schools in large urban communities provide accessible educational services to residents whose geographic mobility is constrained. They also serve important safety and social control functions. As a metropolis renowned as the City of Neighborhoods, Chicago celebrates many ethnic cultures within its seventy-seven community areas. It boasts the largest Polish community outside of Poland, expansive Italian and Irish neighborhoods, as well as Asian, Caribbean, and Latino communities in its North Side and South Side areas. These neighborhoods or communities, often used interchangeably, are widely recognized for their maintenance of food, cultural celebrations, and other events identified with their countries and nations of origin.

Neighborhoods also form distinguishing individual, familial, or structural identities. Before late-twentieth-century gentrification, for example, Chicago's South and West Loops were historically characterized as non-residential warehouse and business districts. Over time, and because of their proximity to the central business district (CBD), these neighborhoods became increasingly attractive to middle- and upper-income urban dwellers as mixed-use areas for residential, business services, recreation, restaurants, and entertainment. Community areas like Roseland and Altgeld Gardens in the neighboring Riverdale community, miles removed from the CBD in contrast, are contemporaneously recognized as the affordable but largely residential communities of former public-housing residents evicted from adjacent impoverished neighborhoods, including Cabrini Green on the Gold Coast and Lincoln Park on the Near North Side, the Robert Taylor Homes, Stateway Gardens, and the Harold Ickes Homes located in the Near South Side, and the Douglas and Grand Boulevard neighborhoods just south of the CBD.

The latest wave of gentrification in communities within a mile or so of Chicago's central business district has yet to fully reach the Roseland community, and demographic changes within this neighborhood have led to economic and social decline over time. Historically, Roseland, the home of the opposing assailants in the Derrion Albert case, was a cosmopolitan,

multiethnic bedroom community next to industrial Pullman, where George Pullman had manufactured his “Palace” railway coaches. Fortunes began to change in the 1960s, when industry patterns led to economic decline. Steel mills were shuttered. Pullman scaled back production and closed for good in 1981. A period of rapid ethnic succession took place. Skyrocketing crime rates, gang violence, and urban decay forced longtime Roseland residents and businesses to move away—a phenomenon referred to locally as white flight. New residents, almost exclusively African American, purchased homes with federal subsidies and mortgages backed by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). By the mid-1980s Roseland had one of the highest Housing and Urban Development (HUD) repossession rates in the city. Much needed economic and social revival remains elusive.

Unlike the now demolished Robert Taylor Homes and Stateway Gardens public-housing complexes, Altgeld Gardens has never enjoyed a wide complement of social and public services, in part because of its remoteness from the CBD. As a public-housing complex located on Chicago’s far southeastern border, it has generally been “out of sight and out of mind.” Even the physical construction and traffic patterns of the housing complex reflect its distal physical location from neighboring communities, businesses, and social services, except those physically housed within the complex. The proximal environment of urban decline reflected in lost economic enterprise and community infrastructure, deteriorating housing, and educational opportunities is nearly a stone’s throw from the yet distal oases of thriving communities near the CBD, where social order and development positively interact with economic opportunity to promote civic engagement and reinforce positive youth development.

Carver High School’s transition to a military academy redefined the neighborhood boundaries between Altgeld Gardens and the Roseland community, which were at best fragile. The reconstitution and closure of high schools, another public policy designed to respond to budgetary crises affecting public education, also implicitly addresses youth violence in schools and neighborhoods and aims to enhance civic order within these communities. As a consequence, school-age youth residing in Altgeld Gardens must now travel the streets of the adjacent yet often unfamiliar neighborhoods in pursuit of education on a daily basis. This combining of neighborhood school boundaries was intended to enhance the high school matriculation rate, particularly among African American males. In reality, though, it functioned to diminish the likelihood that the young males will continue their high school education. This, in part, is due to the heightening tension and hostility between youth peers in the neighboring com-

munities. Concerned, engaged parents often elect to enroll their students in another school. A select few gifted and academically talented African American male high school students enroll in better schools. The majority of transferees, however, enroll in equally mediocre schools or in schools with even lesser academic reputations—all of which may require several hours of commuting each way on a daily basis.

These neighborhood tensions, which in earlier generations resulted in youthful verbal disagreements and occasional skirmishes between youth residents, are now characterized by frequent and devastating gun violence among youth. In Chicago alone twenty-four youths have been the victims of school- and community-related shootings and deaths since the beginning of the 2009–10 academic term. Ironically, the motivations for the violence, popularly attributed to gang struggles for drugs and weapons turf, are generally unknown to the legions of largely involuntary foot soldiers who are engaged in fighting the turf wars. It is quite likely that the origins of these neighborhood hostilities that pit youth against youth are more ideological than resulting from actual physical or personal transgressions. Police and witnesses have said that the melee of September 24, 2009, was a culmination of a simmering rivalry between two groups of Fenger students—one that lived near the school and the other from the Altgeld Gardens housing development. Neighbors have said the feud had been building since August 2009, spilling across Roseland streets and, some have said, into Fenger. Others have held that the feud between the two communities is a long-standing one, going back as many as twenty years.

#### **IDENTITY AND MASCULINITY DEVELOPMENT WITHIN COMMUNITIES IN CHAOS**

Although both male and female youth must navigate the streets and negotiate safety issues within troubled communities, young African American males face unique threats to their physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual development. Namely, they must develop a healthy masculine identity while avoiding potential threats to personal safety. Derrion Albert was no exception. Although African American females are threatened by physical violence and deplorable sexual assault, African American males are more likely to be the daily targets of gang recruitment. Gang members are often the perpetrators of these gendered physical and sexual offenses against young girls and women, at times within the context of gang initiation, but also increasingly for sport as depicted in misogynist music, video, and media presentations in which females are routinely degraded.

By all available accounts, Derrion Albert had successfully resisted these constant entreatments to join neighborhood gangs. Nor was he characterized as an individual who participated in antisocial and criminal activities. He was widely recognized as a mannerable and disciplined young man. “This gang violence is escalating beyond control,” said T’Awanna Piper, the youth worker who pulled Derrion’s beaten body into the building. “He was caught in it. The kids directly involved walked away healthy, and this kid didn’t walk away at all.” Ms. Muhammad, a life-long resident of Altgeld who worked as a community activist for CeaseFire, a community-based organization, affirmed that Derrion was not affiliated with a gang. She reported that he did not even engage in behaviors like wearing his cap turned around or using profanity that some view as a means of signaling affiliation with their neighborhoods or to deflect gang recruitment and attack. Derrion’s grandfather, Joseph Walker, described his grandson as a peaceful young man who attended Bible class on Tuesday evenings and church routinely on Sunday.

Derrion’s academic record reflected that he was very engaged in his studies and was an honor roll student. School peers have described him as an athlete and member of the Fenger football team, despite his slight build, who loved computers and who was popular with the young ladies in his school. Such personality characteristics were unlikely to win Derrion respect or what his young peers might call “street cred.” Street cred is accorded to individuals who demonstrate experience in or knowledge of issues affecting the local community environment. Even the prestige and honor generally attributed to being a student-athlete has declining value among neighborhood peers, as reflected in the shooting death of Chicago prep athletes such as sixteen-year-old Ben Wilson, a legendary basketball player at Chicago’s Simeon High School. Wilson was slain by a gang member in November 1984. More recently is the example of Blair Holt, a sixteen-year-old high school junior who died on a city bus after he attempted to shield a fellow student from a spray of gunfire targeted toward a rival gang member in May 2007. Derrion’s humanity, although largely unknown before his untimely death, became a national and international symbol of a young African American male struggling to achieve in the face of tremendous odds.

In sharp contrast, as public-health researcher John Rich has so poignantly articulated, young men like Silvonus Shannon, Eugene Bailey, Eric Carson, Lapoleon Colbert, and Eugene Riley have become, for many people, “strange icons of fear.” In his 2009 book *Wrong Place, Wrong Time: Trauma and Violence in the Lives of Young Black Men*, Rich explains:

“Each time a shooting or stabbing or an assault is reported in the news, the details obscure a young man with a story. Without any access to their voices, we could easily formulate solutions that are out of sync with the realities of their lives and that would be ineffective or outright destructive” (ibid.: xv). Instead, as a result of their notoriety, their humanity is diminished and they are viewed as inhumane, cold-blooded killers. Their aberrant behavior is assessed out of context, devoid of the violent environment in which they, not unlike Derrion, are victimized. Diminishing their humanity validates the assumption held by many in society that these youths are “Black ghetto gangsters warring over turf and drug trade and when they are injured or killed, they deserve what they get” (ibid.: xv).

Limited information about Shannon and Riley, beyond their videotaped confessions, have contributed to the public perception of these young men as juvenile delinquents en route to becoming hardened criminals who should be severely punished. Yet, in addition to being one of Derrion’s fellow classmates at Fenger, Shannon had a job as a landscaper. Riley, a high school graduate, worked part time at a health-care center and an auto repair shop. In thoughtful reflection, then, we are left wanting more information about the lives of these young men, far more than the details of a criminal charge of murder can offer.

Similarly, in his book *The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates*, Rhodes Scholar Wes Moore ponders how he might have fared without family and community support during his troubled adolescent transition in Brooklyn and subsequently in military high school in Pennsylvania. This support helped to redirect Moore’s energies to become a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Johns Hopkins University. His book outlines the life trajectories of two African American males named Wes Moore, born within a few years of one another and residing in the same Baltimore neighborhood as youths. Author Wes Moore’s father died unexpectedly and both male youths grew up in female-headed, single-parent households. The mother of author Wes Moore drew on family and community resources that assisted her in protecting her son from the mean Baltimore streets; she relocated to Brooklyn to reside with her parents. Still residing in a tough urban environment and growing increasingly angered by his impoverished circumstances throughout his childhood, author Wes Moore succeeded against tremendous odds while the other Wes Moore is currently serving a life sentence in prison for murder.

Derrion Albert and his alleged assailants are not unlike other young African American males residing in urban environments who encounter daily tests of wills in which the outcomes can be life altering. Derrion’s

family structure mirrored that of the two Wes Moores. His mother was unable to maintain parental custody, so he was being reared by his grandfather. Derrion's academic performance suggested that he was similar to the author Wes Moore, but unlike the author's mother, Derrion's grandfather was unable to provide the needed sanctuary that could protect him from harm's way. Our limited insight into the family structures and family life of Derrion's alleged assailants provide insufficient knowledge to make different or parallel comparisons, but given the pervasiveness of female-headed, single-parent households among this population, the authors feel reasonably certain that parallel comparisons about the victim and the alleged assailants' family life can be asserted.

Those held personally responsible for Derrion's death, as well as the small legion of "innocent bystanders" who watched the brutal killing, are young African American males who in some respects are undiagnosed victims of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This disorder results from the cumulative physical and psychological effects of chronic exposure to community violence. As young males whose identities are in part inextricably linked to their neighborhoods, their behavior can be viewed as context to the structural conditions within. Irrespective of male bravado and maladaptive masculine identities imposed upon them, all of these young males worry about their own vulnerability to becoming victims of violence in their own and neighboring communities.

Thug identities all too often have become the monikers of celebrity and respect among male youth within communities like Altgeld Gardens and beyond, even among in middle-class urban and suburban communities. However, for male youth in these communities, such monikers may more likely be youthful identities of sport—that is, one of a range of socially constructed identities drawn from popular youth culture from which these youth may mimic. However, family socioeconomic status, neighborhood context, community norms of behavior, and access to a broader opportunity structure may regulate adoption of the thug identity as the sole or primary moniker.

In sharp contrast, young boys and adolescent males residing in impoverished neighborhoods are often enchanted by and regale in the bravado accorded the thug identity and access to other monikers of success are often unrepresented or far less accessible. Some seek to obtain such thug status even as young boys. In 1994, for example, the Roseland community gained notoriety as the stomping ground of Robert "Yummy" Sandifer, the African American youth who was executed by his gang at age eleven. Nicknamed Yummy because of his love of junk food, Sandifer was a mem-

ber of Chicago's Black Disciples street gang. After committing murder, arson, and armed robbery, he was executed by fellow gang members who feared he had turned snitch. Media coverage of Sandifer's death and widely published retrospectives on his short, violent life became symbols of the gang problem in America, the failure of the social safety net, and the shortcomings of the juvenile justice system.

### **THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF BLACK MASCULINITY IN THE URBAN CONTEXT**

Young African American males like Derrion Albert, who successfully negotiate daily taunts and entreatments to affiliate with a gang or to engage in other juvenile delinquent activities, face constant threats to their physical safety, psychological well-being and to their masculine development. Rich (2009) has empirically examined an all-too-often held assumption about urban violence among young African American males. His study confirms that the pervasive urban violence is only part of the story. He cites statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) which confirm that homicide is the leading cause of death for African American men between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four. In 2006, for example, the homicide rate for African American males ages fifteen to twenty-four was 92 in 100,000, while for white males in the same age group, the homicide rate was 4.7 in 100,000. In other words the homicide death rate was more than nineteen times higher for young African American males than young white men. Rich (*ibid.*) has also pointed out that while the overall homicide rates have appeared stable since 1999, the homicide rate among African American men between twenty-five and forty-four has increased substantially.

Rich's study is even more insightful: "Homicide represents only the tip of the iceberg with regard to violence. . . . Nonfatal injuries are far more common than fatal injuries. The CDC estimates that for every homicide, there are more than 94 nonfatal violent incidents. In other words for every person who gets shot and dies, another four get shot and survive" (*ibid.*: x). Rich also points out that violence studies suggest that violence is a recurrent problem: "Up to 45 percent of people who have had a penetrating injury—a gunshot or stab wound—will have another similar injury within five years. More disturbing is the finding that five years after their initial injury, 20 percent of these individuals are dead" (*ibid.*: xi). According to Rich, researchers have tried to identify predictors of who is most likely to be shot or stabbed again. Among the factors that predict reinjury are

being black, being male, being poor, past or current drug use, carrying a weapon, living in an unsafe neighborhood, unemployment, and prior arrest. However, the risks are so general that they are associated with health risks other than violence and tell us little about how violence recurs.

These findings have important implications for the physical, psychological, emotional, and even spiritual statuses of young African American males. Even within communities where violence is less pervasive, young males are uniquely at risk as targets of violence if they must routinely exit their relatively safe environs to enter or cross neighborhoods where chronic violence abounds. Now challenged to navigate the streets of unfamiliar neighborhoods often hostile to “young male outsiders,” all the while negotiating constant refusals to join gangs within their own neighborhoods, young African American males like Derrion Albert may be viewed with universal suspicion by adult neighborhood residents who perceive them as threats to their physical selves before given the opportunity to present themselves otherwise. At worst, they may be perceived as rival neighborhood gang members by their peers when in reality these young males may be delicately negotiating contested urban spaces without the protection of gang affiliation. Several contemporaneous reports have suggested that this account aptly describes the context in which Derrion Albert navigated the Ville area of the Roseland community as an African American male student attending Fenger High School but as a resident of Altgeld Gardens. Such constant scrutiny and potential peril mandate a level of hypervigilance and self-affirmation that is developmentally demanding for a sixteen-year-old male. In his 2009 work, Rich also mentions Carnell Cooper, a Baltimore trauma surgeon, who has reported that some young African American men cited “being dissed” as a cause of their injuries, hinting at more complex factors in the environment that might spur violence to erupt.

Daniel Bennett (2010) has also identified “being dissed” as part of a larger perspective in which young African American males disproportionately experience hassles with authority figures and with peers. Chronic assaults on their personhood can ignite visceral responses that contribute to the escalation of violence. Michael Lindsey (2010) has linked community violence to heightened levels of stress and mental illness among African American adolescents. He cites depression as a major undiagnosed mental illness among African American adolescent males, who are particularly vulnerable as they perceive fewer future opportunities, low neighborhood social capital, lack of kinship social support, and expanded violence. Lindsey’s findings support earlier research by Phaedra Corso and her colleagues (2007, also cited in Rich 2009, xiv) by pointing out that beyond the

staggering human and financial costs, urban violence has broader social effects: "Violence in neighborhoods breeds fear, which hinders community members from coming to the aid of others in need. Violence in schools leads to increased absenteeism because children are afraid to go to school. School violence also increases behavioral problems in schools."

Rich (2009) has suggested that fragmentation of urban families, while often attributed to the lack of responsibility on the part of the father, may have roots in trauma itself. We know that traumatized people can find it difficult to connect to loved ones and to feel. We also know that in the setting of poverty and lack of opportunity, young men may find it difficult to fulfill their responsibilities, even if they desire to do so. A high level of community violence makes young men feel physically, psychologically, and socially unsafe. "Physically, young men who have been shot, stabbed or attacked feel that unless they arm themselves, someone else might attempt to harm them as they have been injured before," Rich (*ibid.*: xv) continues: "Psychologically, they are left with the hyper vigilance and disruption that comes from trauma. Socially, they have been raised in communities where there is a shared idea that if you fail to defend yourself when challenged, you become a 'sucker,' which will lead other people, who now believe you are weak, to take advantage of you. This idea, which takes on a life of its own in communities where young people feel threatened, is also spurred on by ideas of what it means to be a man and what it means to stand up for oneself."

Earlier scholarship by Elijah Anderson (1999 and 2008) has documented the widening grip of urban violence and the default identities that young males within these communities assume as perpetrators of violence. Fellow urban scholars like Ronald Mincy (2006), Sudhir Ventkatesh (2008, 2006, and 2000), William Wilson (2010, 1997, 1990 and 1987), and Alford Young (2004) have attested to the physical transformation of once thriving urban communities into contemporary oases of crime and deterioration and the impact of this transformation on residents, particularly young African American males. Originally populated by residents working to achieve "the American Dream," these communities have become urban battlegrounds where those who can, move out, and those left behind engage in a daily test of will. Youths are pitted against adults; residents are numbed by chronic violence; and the most vibrant opportunities for living the American Dream appear to lie within the underground economy that is accompanied by personal and family risk.

Gangs and ganglike activities within communities are increasingly responsible for curtailing youth activities that have historically character-

ized youth transition into adulthood and masculine physical development. For example, physical exertion in public playgrounds, pick-up ballgames, and league participation in neighborhood parks as well as park district leagues have all been reduced significantly as a result of increasing gang presence in neighborhoods. In addition, childhood obesity, asthma, and other health problems among urban youth often result or are exacerbated due in part to a lack of physical activity and subsequent decline in mental acumen, particularly among African American youths. Some scholars have linked improper diet and preoccupation with video games to these physical problems, but the impact of community violence on a range of options available for healthy exercise, youth hobbies and exploration, sports, and other activities important to physical and mental health is often underestimated. These physical exertion limitations resulting from community violence have important implications for male development during the transitional developmental stages from childhood to adolescence and again to adulthood.

Despite the tension and risk that gang presence invokes, young males are more likely to spend time outside during childhood, seek communion with other male peers during late boyhood, and desire to navigate the sidewalks and streets during adolescence without adult supervision. Like the playgrounds and neighborhood parks that are under siege, community sidewalks, bus stops, and neighborhood streets in Altgeld Gardens and Roseland have become the pathways and arteries that are settings for interpersonal and random community violence. This severely limits youth and adult mobility and engagement within these neighborhoods. Historical myths and notions regarding the resilience of males in navigating such boundaries may have the effect of minimizing the real dangers they face, which inevitably places them at far greater risk of violence. Derrion Albert, recognized as a “good kid” with academic potential, is such an example.

Indeed, healthy masculine development is challenged on nearly every front, not only in violent urban neighborhoods but also in American society in general. The country’s violent societal context, its tolerance not only for the right to bear arms but also the penchant for sustaining extremist public policy that fosters access to assault weapons, bears some responsibility for the inevitable transformation of boys and adolescent males, particularly males of color growing up in impoverished communities, into the perpetrators of heinous criminal activity. As a result, the “bleeding of boys into men” (Johnson 2010) is clearly reflected in the implementation of public policies where youthful offenders are now routinely removed from

the neighborhoods and increasingly from the jurisdiction of juvenile courts and are charged and tried as adults with accompanying sentences, including death. The development of a healthy masculine identity is also challenged by dominant social expectations within poor communities in which males are expected to exhibit powerful, strong, brave, and in-control personas irrespective of context. Not only is this expectation unrealistic and contextually bound; it is also psychologically unhealthy given that these expectations begin all too often for African American males during childhood.

For example, the contention that “big boys don’t cry” is often a verbal chiding to suppress an emotional reaction that is equally uncomfortable for all involved. Yet boys are not men—neither chronologically nor developmentally—even if their physical stature may suggest otherwise. Perhaps more important, boys and men alike should not be socialized to believe that expressing emotions connotes less than masculine traits, and crying is indeed contextually appropriate when they experience disappointment or loss. Boys, like girls, need to develop and engage in the range of emotional responses to personal disappointment and loss as well as public tragedy that are contextually appropriate over the life course. Psychologist Joshua Coleman (2005) has revealed that a man’s emotional life is as complex and rich as a woman’s but often remains a mystery to him as well as to any woman who loves him. Although emotions have long been considered a female trait, men report feelings as often as women and describe their experiences of emotion similarly. In Coleman’s 2005 analysis of the emotional intelligence of five hundred thousand adults, men rated just as high in emotional awareness.

In studies of married couples, “husbands proved as attuned to their mates’ stress levels as wives, and just as capable of offering support. Although both men and women sigh, cry, rejoice, express rage, shout, and pout, the sexes process and express emotions differently. Emotions live in the background of a man’s life and the foreground of a woman’s. Testosterone dampens feelings in men, who compartmentalize and intellectualize more. Women seem naturally more in touch with their emotions, while men have to work at it. But when they do, it’s a win-win situation. They discover a whole new dimension of themselves. Their relationships are happier, and they’re happier too” (ibid.: 178). Coleman’s findings suggest that men lead healthier lives when they recognize the full range of emotional responses and engage in them.

The development of healthy masculine identity begins during boyhood

and continues to mature during adolescence (Biddulph 1995). But for young males growing up in urban environments, the challenges of negotiating multiple environments, many of which are hostile to their sensibilities (Bennett 2010), often mandates the formation of masculine development in late childhood. Educational psychologist Courtland Lee (1994) has posited that the urban context often accelerates adolescent development, calling into question the traditional developmental markers that characterize theories of adolescent development articulated by developmental psychologists Eric Erikson and Jean Piaget. Lee's research on African American urban youth builds on the scholarship of Allison Davis, Burleigh Gardner, and Mary Gardner (1941), whose pathbreaking research focused on socialized anxiety within adolescence and drew particular attention to race and social class position of "Negroes" in American society. More recently, developmental psychologist Margaret Spencer (2008) has examined African American male youths in the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST). PVEST serves as the foundation for Spencer's gendered research that addresses the resiliency, identity, and competence formation processes of African American, Hispanic, Asian American, and Euro-American youth. Spencer's continuing research addresses youths' emerging capacity for healthy outcomes and constructive coping methods while developing under unacknowledged and stressful conditions.

For those young males, especially African American boys and adolescents who experience abridged childhoods in chronically violent settings, masculine development is often neither healthy nor socially adaptive. They may seek to control their emotions and environment by intimidating those viewed as more vulnerable than themselves and retaliating in the form of verbal and physical confrontation against those who threaten violence. The failure to help African American boys and adolescents to recognize and appropriately employ the range of emotional responses to individual and structural phenomena—including self-reflection, responding to loss by crying, and acknowledging grief—can wreak havoc on their orderly growth and development. Growing up in neighborhoods like Altgeld Gardens potentially encourages young African American boys and adolescent males to grow up too fast and to adopt unhealthy masculine character traits in lieu of more adaptive strategies for coping with interpersonal, family, and community violence. As a result, young African American boys and adolescent males are not only admonished that big boys don't cry, they are also implicitly attuned to becoming black boys who don't feel, who are insensitive to the feelings of their fellow peers, and ultimately who devalue their own humanity.

**SHAME AND WORRY AS CONCEPTUAL MOTIVES  
AND BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES TO COMMUNITY VIOLENCE**

The Derrion Albert story can be easily written off as just another case of urban youth violence—an all-too-frequent phenomenon in communities like Albert's. Absent from most accounts, however, is an analysis of the motivations of the alleged perpetrators of the crime. Subsequent to the initial shock and public outcry, many similar incidents are therefore simply dismissed as black males killing other black males. These young males are typically characterized as innately hyperaggressive, predisposed to both interpersonal and community violence, and intrinsically inhumane. They are perceived as such because society offers little or no critical insight or reasoning as to why these events of community violence are largely situated within African American communities (and in this case almost exclusively among adolescent and young adult African American males). Reports in newspaper articles, local news stations, and other popular media frequently depict superficial accounts of African American male violence. A shallow understanding of these young males has thus become standard practice in reporting their daily activities and the lack of contextual understanding of their numbing, violent responses to the interplay of individual and structural factors goes largely unchallenged.

This chapter offers an alternative perspective, however. It simultaneously affirms that such violent behavior is appalling, yet posits that these young males are in part reacting to other structural phenomena. As perpetrators of community violence, these young males are responding to macro-structural forces and public policies that inadvertently motivate such behavior. This account builds on two conceptual perspectives—worry and shame—as being precipitating and reactive factors to community violence among African American males. In this discussion shame is referenced as “an overwhelmingly powerful emotion that is associated with feelings of worthlessness, inferiority, and damaged self image” (De Hooge, Zeelenberg, and Breugelmans, in press). The concept of shame challenges one to think more critically about how individuals who commit unprovoked acts of violence against fellow community members view themselves, and how their self-perception may trigger certain behavioral responses to the presence of others. The question of how self-perception develops is critical and can be understood as resulting from media depictions as well as from a sense of diminished socioeconomic status. When these young men are socialized to embrace certain gender roles, with respect to male responsibility, and are unable to meet these expectations,

the result can become a shameful and conditioning experience. For many of them diminished socioeconomic status is widely reflected in nearly every social dimension of their life experience as well as in the lived experiences of those with whom they associate. It is intergenerational.

However, shame may manifest as something that young men endeavor to hide or mask. Coauthors Richard Majors and Janet Billson (1992) have identified “cool pose” as young African American males’ attempt to hide their frustration or shame by appearing completely emotionless. This may result in other unhealthy forms of masculine identity to assert and maintain social constructions of manhood. According to this perspective, the idea of being (or at least appearing) apathetic, indifferent, or detached to emotions or events that affect the individual is a coping mechanism used to maintain sanity and perceived psychological balance. In other words these young males appear to or choose not to work toward attaining things that may be foreign or unattainable (education, obtaining jobs in the legitimate labor market, being a supportive father or husband). Instead, enacting aggression and violence can be used as a means by which they acquire the respect or power that would otherwise escape them, and in the process these young males seek to appear neither ashamed nor weak.

“The link between masculinity and aggression can be partly understood from a social learning perspective,” anxiety scholars Matthew Jakupcak, Matthew Tull, and Lizabeth Roemer (2005: 281) have written, “in which media images, cultural expectations, and adult male modeling of aggressive responses influence men’s beliefs and behaviors associated with anger and hostility. However, expressions of hostility and aggression may serve a more immediate, emotion-regulatory function for men; men may learn to regulate their emotional experiences by using aggression and hostility to terminate their experience of vulnerable emotions, such as fear and shame.” Shame, therefore, can operate as a stimulant for violence. There are a number of reasons why so many young men and boys are ashamed or maintain a negative self-view. In the case of Derrion Albert, the community is poverty-stricken. Drug abuse, broken homes, and lack of educational opportunity largely characterize the environment and likely affected the young men involved in the brawl that killed Albert. In communities such as these, the intense shame among residents is increasingly manifested as community violence.

In exploring this concept of shame, it is important to also understand how aggression and violence are attributable to the development of masculinity as defined by Western standards. This is important to note because

although young African American males may be unable to affirm their manhood in socially acceptable ways (such as through work or educational attainment), they may assert their masculinity through violence. Furthermore, to compensate for the diminished sense of power or respect gained through socially acceptable channels (for example, employment, status, or conspicuous display of personal wealth), young black males may come to be hyperaggressive and violent. Aggression scholar Shaun Hegdeth (2006) has discussed the intersection of shame and aggression in the following manner: "Among lower working-class, racial minority boys, the youth group or gang is the central arena within which masculinity is enacted. The street, rather than school or workplace, provides gang members with the resources to display manhood. Crime becomes a means of transcending class and race domination and an important resource for accomplishing gender. In this setting, the gang is the public repository for a collective staging of manhood."

Hegdeth stresses that community spaces or streets where gangs form become a stage on which gender can be enacted and defined. As opposed to dealing with the shame associated with the lack of accessibility to jobs or a proper education, violence and aggression in the street becomes the alternative. Community violence serves as a mechanism to escape the powerlessness and shame that comes with being a part of a subordinate group. Within this theoretical frame the brutal killing of Derrion Albert can be seen as a performance of young black men struggling to maintain a purpose for their existence within the norm of Western gender politics. Although this may seem extreme, it is important to understand that at the core of one's humanity is the longing to have a positive self-view and to be at peace with one's individuality. However, when a person is ashamed, his positive self-image is challenged, as is his or her feeling of self-worth (De Hooze, Zeelenberg, Breugelmans, in press). The young men involved in the brawl that killed Albert were therefore going to extreme measures to validate their masculinity, because in just about every other sector of society they are devalued. "The harsher the environment, the more accentuated the behavior. The more depleted the resources for augmenting manhood, the higher the stakes for the accrual of honor" (Hegdeth 2006: 38).

The next stage to this model is worry, or the anxiety that comes with keeping uncontrollable realities or feelings private from the outside world. Worry is the afterthought of shame. If a boy is ashamed, he will worry about others finding out and viewing him as weak. As stated before, shame in a young man by dominant standards is not a positive attribute. Feelings

can be interpreted as weakness while a show of anger often equates to strength. This leads young men to believe that to protect themselves they should suppress the feelings that are characterized as weak and amplify anger. Therefore, worry can be seen as the link between shame and aggression. Although shame is created internally when a young boy does not measure up, it is the worry about how others will view him that drives him to aggressive behavior as he seeks to mask his emotions or to maintain respect as a masculine being. Many young boys have a fear of losing face if their shame is exposed (Jakupcak, Tull, and Roemer 2005).

The progression from shame to worry, and then to violence, is a symptom that has become commonplace in impoverished African American urban communities. Young African American males have been positioned such that they have far more to be ashamed of than proud, therefore as young males they worry about masking their negative self-image and feelings of worthlessness. Thus they are left with violence as their most adept means of asserting personal agency, protecting their manhood, and validating their worth. This stress and strife serves as a “powerful predictor of future life difficulties” (Rich 2009: xv). Rich (*ibid.*: xiii) has asserted that “trauma looms even larger in the hostile environments in which these young men live. . . . It drives their reactions and decisions and disrupts their normal supportive relationships that all of us depend on. In this same environment, there is great pressure to ‘be a man’ (perhaps in the presumed and real absence of men serving in more traditional roles as residential and custodial fathers) and not acknowledge these [daily] traumas, lest they appear weak. The pressure not to be seen as weak piles on even more pressure to prove that they are strong. All of these pressures prime the pump for the cycle of violence.”

#### **THE DERRION ALBERT MURDER: SAMPLING APPROACH AND DATA COLLECTION**

The conceptual and theoretical framework presented in this chapter aims to situate the Derrion Albert case contextually lest the data be taken out of context and assessed in terms of the visceral reactions they engender. We examined the events surrounding the murder by collecting and assessing newspaper reports and TV newscasts on the murder. Data were also obtained through content analysis of selected YouTube videos and electronic message boards from September 24, 2009, through March 31, 2010. Most of these materials were posted during the months of September through November 2009.

### **Data Analysis**

The print, visual, and audio materials collected were analyzed using ethnographic content analysis or, as it is more commonly referred to, document-analysis techniques.<sup>1</sup> The goal of document analysis is to be systematic and analytic but not rigid. This type of study allows for an orientation toward constant discovery and constant comparison of relevant images and meanings. The qualitative content analysis employed a final sample consisting of seventy-seven newspaper articles, three National Public Radio programs, and three hundred videos—all providing reflective editorial comments on the murder of Derrion Albert. The informants included newscasters, identified family members, identified friends, and residents of the Roseland community. The analysis allowed us to capture meaning and emphasis of the data through the identification of frames, themes, and discourse (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Altheide 1996).

### **Demographics**

The review of the various materials provided a snapshot of the “voices” of anger, frustration, stress, shame, confusion, and sadness. The majority of the informants on the videos and in the newspaper interviews were men of various ages. We estimate that the ages of these men ranged from sixteen to the mid-sixties. Women also provided editorial commentary on the Derrion Albert murder, but the overwhelming majority of informants were men. Another primary source of material were blogs associated with the various YouTube videos; many of these blogs contained messages written by women, but the “voices” of men were overwhelmingly present. The only media that allowed for visual examination of commentary were videos and television newscasts. These informants were primarily Black men and women; however, there were a few young white and Latino men and women providing commentary as well.

### **Limitations of the Research Methodology**

The primary limitation of this methodology is the lack of an opportunity for the researchers to directly observe the social and cultural environments of the informants in the printed and visual media. In previous years someone conducting media analysis would have been constrained by limited access to the various types of media material discussed; however, electronic and information technology has progressed significantly in the past ten

years. Therefore, the ability to conduct content analysis has been significantly enhanced.

### **Research Findings: “Why Are They So Angry?”**

“This is a perfect example of how parents need to do a better job of raising their kids. Seriously, who would want to live near these people, and give them jobs? This video is sick, I cried while watching it. This was brutality and a senseless crime. I am praying for everyone involved. This is why black people are thought of as so stupid and dumb . . . my people . . . let’s be serious.” The preceding comment was posted in response to the raw video showing the beating of Derrion Albert. The video was posted on YouTube seventy-two hours after Albert’s death. The video prompted President Obama to dispatch Attorney General Eric Holder and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to Chicago to meet with Mayor Daley and other community and political leaders. The video gained a national as well as an international audience. Since September 27, 2009, there have been more than two million viewings of this YouTube video, accompanied by more than four thousand comments. A Google news search will yield over ninety thousand stories on the death of the sophomore “honor” student at Christian Fenger High School in the Roseland Community. The total number of YouTube video postings as of March 31, 2010, was at 692 and growing. The majority of these postings occurred during the months September through November 2009 and do not significantly taper off until the week before Thanksgiving of that year.

Despite the outpouring of emotion for the family, the death of Derrion Albert has produced various reactions across the country. We hypothesize that these reactions are different depending on whether people view the video images of the killing versus only hearing about it. Based on our analysis, there have been four prominent public reactions (themes) to the actual viewing of the raw footage of the killing. The reaction recorded most often was sadness; another reaction was to blame the parents for failing to teach morals and values to their children; another reaction was anger and frustration with the death of another young innocent black male; and the final reaction was a negative moral judgment of the way of life and community interactions. Some people identify with the perpetrators of the horrible crime and are ashamed of their community. A discussion of the community’s reactions to viewing the raw footage of the beating of Derrion Albert follows. The community’s reaction has been categorized into the four themes of (1) sadness, (2) parental responsibility, (3) frustration and anger, and (4) moral judgment and embarrassment.

*Sadness.* Many of the reactions to viewing of the Albert video were characterized by sadness, often profound sadness followed by an offering of condolences to the family. A young woman offered her reaction: “This is so sad, I cried as I watched the video of this young man being beat to death, especially since there appeared to [be] many people, who included adults standing around . . . and not one person lifted a voice or a hand to intervene, possibly saving Derrion’s life. Where is all of this anger coming from amongst our young adults? It is truly time for the saints of God to cry out to God to heal this land so we can stop the murder and annihilation of our future generations. Will the real saints please stand in prayer, set the atmosphere and make a difference? Be Blessed!”

A young African American woman described her reaction after viewing the video as “the most disturbing and sickest thing I’ve ever seen in my life.” Another person provided a historical context to his sadness with the circumstances surrounding the Albert family with this reaction: “What is even sadder is the fact that Albert was not a part . . . of the 2 sides fighting. Instead both sides took advantage of a [innocent] bystander on the [ground] and decided to gang up on [Derrion who was left] with no defenses. Talk about the epitome of cowardice, I truly hate gangsters. They are the scum of America. I remember in 1984 the killing of Ben Wilson, the standout basketball star from Simeon high school who was gunned down by senseless thugs here in Chicago. That was 25 years ago, and the senseless murder of this young man Derrion Albert reminds me so much of that tragedy.”

Many of the high-school-age community members who viewed the video reacted in a violent and sad manner. The following and final quote is from a sixteen-year-old African American female student: “I almost cried when I saw the footage of those kids hitting him with those pieces of wood. I’m 16 years old and I cannot believe that [this] happened. Fuck those kids who killed him, they should be on death row. . . . I felt like I couldn’t be safe around there [the Roseland community] anymore so I stop visiting my father [in this neighborhood].” One Roseland community resident provided these insightful and historical comments: “I just live blocks from where this happen[ed]. Night after night I hear sirens, either police or ambulances. Roseland is a good neighborhood at times, filled with good people. We just have some lost and misdirected teens. Instead of focusing on the Olympic games in 2016, help our kids. Give them programs . . . give them jobs . . . upgrade their schools. I hope we don’t win the bid . . . this city definitely doesn’t deserve it. Rest in peace, Derrion!” There were many references in the print and visual materials about the now failed bid for

the Olympics and that there should be more attention given to the youth violence in the communities.

*Parental responsibility.* The second highest reaction to the viewing of the video was that parents need to take more responsibility for their children. Specifically, the viewers were referring to the parents of the alleged murderers. Take this comment, for example: “Many people are becoming parents who are not willing to put in the time or discipline or income to do it right. I have opted not to have children after much thought because I am afraid. I can’t do it correctly as a single woman. I don’t expect taxpayers to fund my child’s upbringing. I don’t think the community should be responsible for picking up where my potential failings could leave off. What we are seeing here is kids who have not been raised like Derrion, who have not been paid attention to or disciplined, who feel they have no options. We are not at fault for that. Their parents are. And I frankly don’t think their parents care one iota about what they did last Thursday.” A final comment on this theme was from a man residing in Kentucky: “I live in rural Kentucky . . . but I agree with [others, that] our children are not being brought up with the right value’s. . . . Parents should be responsible for teaching their kids what is important in life.” Many of the comments reiterated the same recommendation that parents needed to take more responsibility for their children’s behavior.

*Anger and frustration.* The third theme combines the emotions of anger and frustration. Many of the video presentations included many men, primarily black men, expressing anger and simple frustration with the beating of Derrion. A demonstrably frustrated sixteen-year-old black youth sat facing the camera and stated: “I really need to just speak on this, America. I honestly want to thank whoever videotaped this and this is why [I am thanking her] because America needs to realize how destructive it can be . . . most of these things happen behind the scenes . . . so you cannot ignore it [the video] . . . you need to see it with your [own] two eyes. . . . As a black youth, it really hurts my heart and as an American we need to get our shit together. . . . People around the world will realize that his death was not in vain. . . . I pray that it makes a change . . . we gotta get it together people. . . . I really do not know what to say man . . . we need to wake up, America!”

Derrion Albert’s grandfather, Joseph Walker, stated that he was frustrated and that his grandson was a good kid who did not deserve to die. “He was in Bible class this Tuesday night. Church on Sunday,” Walker told WLS-TV. “I have no trouble out of my grandson whatsoever. This thing that happened to him is so horrific that we just don’t know what we’re

going to do. We lost a really dear friend in my grandson. He was a blessed child. I don't know where all this anger comes from these people today. That's just too much anger for someone to have in their heart. All I can do is, I'm going to pray for these people, I'm going to pray for forgiveness." Another man expressed his anger by simply saying that he was "a black man . . . [and] when I see this video, it is safe to say that our children are turning into animals."

A man in his early twenties expressed his strong frustration this way: "I do not understand what the fuck these little kids fighting for. . . . I do not even know if you can call it gangbanging . . . it is not for money . . . I just think that there is just a lot of angry little niggers out . . . there ain't no money out there in drugs . . . he got mobbed by a gang and his life got stomped out of him . . . he was coming home from school, a baby . . . he never got to experience life, he probably never had his first car, he did not get to experience college, he probably never had his first love . . . they killing our kids, killing our babies, they [Chicago] does not care, but his mother has go to deal with that for the rest of her life . . . this is my reality . . . and I had to deal with this when I was young . . . it is not even safe in school . . . nobody cares about us [blacks] . . . if they keep killing our youth, what is our future?"

Finally, a young black man who identified as a college student in his YouTube response stated his frustration and issued a cry for action: "This is really sad and awful. . . . I come home from my class and I look at this and kids are dying on the street every day. . . . He was an honor student, had no gang affiliation or membership . . . an innocent kid is murdered. . . . What are we going to do? When is this going to stop? Tell me, what you think? There is an urban underclass of poverty, they are destitute and what are going to do? . . . No resources, no way to escape their prison. What are we going to do? How are we going to stop this? . . . Our destinies are tied."

*Moral judgment and embarrassment.* The final theme included expressions of moral judgment and embarrassment after viewing the video of the beating of Derrion Albert. This comment expresses both embarrassment and condemnation of the parents: "This is a perfect example of how parents need to do a better job of raising their kids. Secondly this is why [we] African Americans keep ourselves down with hate and insensitive behavior. It is completely understandable that's why [black people] are victims of racism." Another man in a heavy British accent said: "Will Derrion Albert become a household name in Black America? . . . We all know Jena Six, Sean Bell . . . this is [the] reason why things are the way they are. . . . How do you gain compassion from the outsiders . . . when the oppressed group

is running around and [conducting] a mob murder? . . . something in the mind-set that has gone terribly awry . . . this is disgusting man.”

A third man made this simple statement on his YouTube presentation: “I hate and am ashamed of our kids, I mean hate.” Two students attending Fenger High School who were in the middle of the mob stated that “this type of incident makes white people think that this is who we are. This is stupid.” A final comment provides a critical analysis of the event: “Until we begin discussing solutions, nothing will change. Self-hate is a huge issue in most disenfranchised communities. There are serious psychological issues that are the result of an American legacy of violence and dehumanization. It affects all . . . but the dynamics will vary from group to group. One will never take responsibility if he does not believe a problem exists nor will he care if he hates his own people and himself.”

### CONCLUSION

After viewing the video of the beating of Derrion Albert, the prominent themes of sadness, parental responsibility, anger, frustration, moral judgment, and embarrassment were present among the commentators. After personally viewing the video, we too were left sad and frustrated. We were left questioning whether Derrion’s death will make a difference because it received national attention. The recently published book *Brainwashed: Challenging the Myth of Black Inferiority* provides a statement on the positive effects of the video. The author, Tom Burrell, wrote: “Each year, thousands of Black children die violent deaths in this country. The reaction to Derrion’s death was mostly because millions watched the murder on the Internet. Overwhelming silence is the standard reaction to such senseless deaths” (Burrell 2010: 87). We agree with Burrell, founder and retired CEO of Burrell Communications, one of the nation’s oldest and largest African American advertising firms, that “community violence and the death of Black children are handled with sensational news coverage for the moment followed by silence” (ibid.: 117).

We wanted to learn more about follow-up activities associated with the Derrion Albert death, so we interviewed Phillip Jackson, a Chicago community activist and founder of the Black Star Project. On April 9, 2010, his organization held a community “call to action” meeting in which more than fifteen hundred people were in attendance. When asked, “Do you think the response to your call to action is a result of Derrion’s Albert murder?” Jackson responded: “No, it did not stop the violence.” He proceeded to provide more insight on the day of the beating. “On that day of

the [Derrion Albert] beating, there were at least ten other mob fights on that did not get any coverage, and since the well-publicized beating, there has [*sic*] been hundreds of mob fights in the city of Chicago. Nothing has changed!”<sup>2</sup>

Jackson offered that there is “a lot of despair in the Black community, and that we are shortchanging these students.” He reported that Fenger High School has a range of 2 to 7 percent of the entire student body performing at grade level. He hypothesized that the problem is that these students know that their life chances are limited. Therefore, there is no hope for a bright future. This contention, especially for African American males, is supported by a number of recent studies, including work by Howard University professor Ivory Toldson (2008); the Schott Foundation (2008); authors Marcus Littles, Ryan Bowers, and Micah Gilmer (2008); T. S. Jenkins (2006); Jelani Mandara (2006); and Ann Arnett Ferguson (2000). In a 2008 PBS report, economist Hernando Soto, in discussing the issues confronting poor people, stated: “Don’t be fooled. . . . People don’t get violent because they’re poor. Poor people are pretty meek and humble. People get angry and violent and terrorism grows when people feel excluded.” We infer from his statement, and those of Philip Jackson, that current and future social and economic exclusion contributes to the violent behavior.

Roseland community activist Diane Latiker has become so incensed by the violence in her community, and what she views as the city’s seeming “indifference” to it, that she has turned her Roseland home into an after-school community center for teenagers. On Friday afternoon (after the beating of Derrion Albert) dozens of area teens gathered there to cry about the death of a schoolmate and voice concerns that they might be next. But after an hour they went about their business of planning a Thanksgiving dinner for hungry families in the Roseland area. “First they cry,” she said. “But then they shake their heads and continue with their day, because it’s become so commonplace to them. It’s like, ‘Oh well, another bump on the road.’ They go on because it’s the only way they can deal with it.” Latiker wonders how she can possibly make room for Derrion’s headstone. She created a memorial two years ago to honor the young people killed in Chicago. Each time a child is shot, stabbed, or beaten to death, she adds a stone to the memorial wall. “We have 163 stones right now, but we are 20, now 21, behind,” she said. “I thought, well, I hoped, I dreamed that there’d be more space on the wall than kids being killed.”

We have offered this conceptual frame as a lens through which readers might examine the circumstances that led to Derrion Albert’s brutal death. We contend that while Silvonus Shannon, Eric Carson, and Eugene Riley

allegedly landed the physical blows that mortally wounded Albert, the community context resulting from the public policies, economic decline, and the community violence in which these four young males navigate daily also bears some responsibility for the chain of events that unfolded that fateful autumn afternoon. It is plausible that some of these young men—even Shannon, Carson, and Riley—may have engaged in various forms of community violence as a means of self-defense, peremptorily attacking individuals who they perceived to be more vulnerable than themselves. In the moment of escalating mob violence on that autumn afternoon, the victim may have been viewed as more vulnerable, a “punk”—as he was audibly described by one onlooker—who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

We seek to complicate what seems on the surface to be no more than violence between two rival gangs, because neither Derrion nor his attackers have ever been confirmed to be gang members. We suggest instead that Albert’s violent death reflects the interplay of a number of factors, both individual and structural. By simply punishing the four young accused men, we may exact justice but will not end the cycle of community violence that encroaches on the lives of all residents of communities like Altgeld Gardens. Integrated, systemic approaches to eradicating community violence are required.

## NOTES

1. “Document analysis” refers to an integrated and conceptually informed method, procedure, and technique for locating, identifying, retrieving, and analyzing documents for their relevance, significance, and meaning. Broadly conceived, all research materials are potentially documents within the researcher’s framework. The use of this method and a combination of methods are not paradigms or disciplines in their own right; rather, they are analytic strategies that reflect and respect the complexity of social organization, the forms of social action, and the conventions of social representation (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 836).

2. Flash mobs are a new phenomenon that is defined as a large group of people who organize on the Internet and quickly assemble in a public place. Jackson referred to these mob fights as a flash mob and hypothesized that young people have developed a new set of community rules that may be a result of the flash mob mentality because of what he sees as underlying anger and despair about their future.

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