

Fieldwork in the Postcommunity

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SUMMARY This article considers the place of fieldwork in the anthropology of the United States on several levels. First, it traces how I decided to use my high school graduating class in Newark, New Jersey as the ethnographic population for an ethnohistorical research project. The article considers the time/space trajectory of the group—that is, the fact that the group had been part of an actual on-the-ground community in the past, and is spread all over the United States in the present. This mobile formation seemed more true to the shape of the contemporary world, as represented in earlier discussions of modernity and more recent discussions of postmodernity. The article goes on to show how this radically delocalized fieldwork produced what seemed to be a perverse effect—a strong sense of the endurance of “community” among the members of the group, albeit in fascinatingly altered forms.

This article considers the place of fieldwork in the contemporary United States. “Place” here is meant to invoke the question of both the *relationship* between local ethnographic studies and mass society/culture, and the question of actual geographic location, the *sites* of ethnography. I use ethnography here in a strict sense—that is to say, in the sense of long-term participant observation with a particular group. Whatever else an ethnographic study may include—archival research, questionnaires, interviews, textual investigations (from comic books to sacred books), and more—long-term participant observation is its irreducible minimum. Or so we have thought, taught, and (for the most part) practiced until recently.

My interest in the problem of doing ethnography in America derives from attempting to start a research project on the cultural construction of “class” in this society. Where should one go to participate in/observe this process? Where does class “happen,” as it were—where is it enacted, reproduced, and possibly changed? The answer of course is everywhere, yet that does not solve the practical problem of constructing an ethnographic research design. One obvious solution would be to study some sort of workplace, yet workplace ethnographies seem to beg one of the central questions in the study of American culture—the split between home and work, public and private.¹

Another solution would be to do an ethnography of a relatively small community, in which something like the totality of relations of the society—of class and family and work and play and all the rest—are enacted within a single place. The early great ethnographies in America, *Middletown* (Lynd and Lynd 1929) and the Yankee City series (starting with Warner and Lunt 1941), were organized around issues of class relations. The Lynds specifically compared the lifestyles of what they called the business class and the working class in “Middletown,” while Warner and Lunt—with enduring effect on the social sciences over much of the 20th century—translated class as a major structural contradiction into finely-graded status rankings, from “upper-upper” to “lower-lower,” as perceived

from the native point of view. The idea of doing a restudy in one or the other of these communities was very tempting, in part because of the length of the ethnographic and now ethnohistorical record. In many ways I still think these would be interesting and valuable studies. At the same time, the fate of "communities" is precisely one of the issues at stake in contemporary American society. Most Americans live in a condition in which the totality of their relations is precisely not played out within a single geographic location and a single universe of known others, both at a given point in time and across time.

As I continued casting about for a fieldwork form for the project, I received an invitation to the 30th reunion of my high school graduating class, the Class of '58 of Weequahic (pronounced Week-wake or Wee-quay-ic) High School in Newark, New Jersey. The proverbial light bulb lit up in my head. I had a strong retrospective sense of unrecognized class dynamics in the high school, deriving from my own experience as a middle-class girl ("girl" being the correct native term for my age and gender at the time) dating a working-class boy, and hanging out with both crowds, middle-class and working-class, throughout most of my high school career. I went to the reunion—the first I ever attended—with the idea of the project in the back of my head.

The reunion turned out to be more interesting (and less terrifying) than I had expected, and I tentatively decided to make the Class of '58 the ethnographic population for the project. Purely at a practical level, there seemed to be a number of good reasons to start in this place, with these people. For one thing, Newark, our collective point of origin, is a reasonably representative American city (if anything can be said to be representative). For another, my research access to this group would presumably be good. And of course I would have a peculiar kind of ethnohistorical depth, having been a long-term participant in the community in the early part of my life.

In addition, I was both excited and challenged by the time/space trajectory of the group—that is, the fact that the group had been part of an actual on-the-ground community in the past, and was spread all over the United States in the present. This formation seemed more true to the shape of the contemporary world, as represented in earlier discussions of modernity and more recent discussions of postmodernity. The breakdown of communities and increasing geographical mobility were virtual hallmarks of modernity (Friedland and Boden 1994; Pred and Watts 1992); the increasing fragmentation of lives and identities, and the even more radical delocalization of economy and culture under globalization, are central to the idea of the postmodern (Hannerz 1992; Harvey 1989). Recent arguments for changes in fieldwork practices, from highly localized studies (in villages, on islands, and in "communities") to delocalized, "multisited" work, have been built on the point that anthropology was excessively localistic in the past; given the changes in the real world just mentioned, such localism in the present is even more problematic (Appadurai 1991; Clifford 1992; Gupta and Ferguson n.d. a and b; Marcus 1995).

This project took the form of tracking down the members of the Class of '58 (and later, their grown children) wherever they happened to be in the United States, and interviewing them. It provoked some anxieties, which will not be discussed in this article: the identity anxieties of the native ethnographer who left and came back with complicated feelings; the anxieties about writing for an audience that will read what I write almost before it hits this journal (see Brettell 1993) and that, moreover, includes 23 lawyers; and, as I spent so much time driving unfamiliar cars over unfamiliar roads, the ever-present terror of dying in an automobile accident, one of the most common causes of fieldwork fatalities (Howell 1990).

For purposes of this article, however, the relevant point is that this radically delocalized fieldwork produced what seemed to be a perverse effect: a strong sense of the endurance of community among these people, albeit in fascinatingly altered forms. This article will document the ethnographic tracking of this community, including the variety of forms it takes, its underlying "structure of feeling," and its possible roots. The larger point of the article is to contribute to a rethinking of the ways in which anthropology and other forms of cultural and interpretive studies can remain (or become) ethnographically grounded, even while acknowledging the radical delocalization of life in the late 20th century, and even while recognizing the theoretical complexity of the idea of "the local."

Ethnography and "Community"

There is a long history of community studies in both sociology and anthropology, and in—for a time at least—the exchanges between the two.² The early period of such work was characterized by continuous exchange between the two fields. The first community study generally recognized as such seems to be *Middletown*, the still stunningly good study of Muncie, Indiana done by Robert and Helen Lynd in 1924 (published in 1929). The Lynds were sociologists, the study was carried out in America, and the book was subtitled *A Study in Modern American Culture*. Nonetheless, the Lynds explicitly state in their introduction that their methodology was inspired by the methodology of social anthropology. Citing W. H. R. Rivers and Clark Wissler among others (Wissler wrote the foreword to the book), the authors embrace the anthropological method for qualities that may sound surprising today, particularly coming from sociologists: exemplary objectivity and orderliness (1929:3–5).³

Although the Lynds studied in a particular town, and named their monograph after the town, they did not reify the notion of community, nor did they romanticize it.⁴ This move to both reify and romanticize essentially took shape in anthropology. The epicenter of that move—later seen as a problem—seems to be located in the work of Robert Redfield, starting with *The Folk Culture of Yucatan* in 1941, and culminating in his 1955 book, *The Little Community*, subtitled *Viewpoints for the Study of a Human Whole*. It was Redfield who established the community study as the central form of fieldwork practice, particularly for American anthropology, from about the end of World War II until the radical questioning of the 1970s.

The problems with Redfield's construction of community were immediately criticized by Oscar Lewis. In his 1951 book, *Life in a Mexican Village: Tepotzlán Restudied*, Lewis raised questions about Redfield's depiction of the community as "a relatively homogeneous, isolated, smoothly functioning and well-integrated society made up of a contented and well-adjusted people" (1951:428). He went on with some passion:

[Redfield's] picture of the village has a Rousseauan quality which glosses lightly over evidence of violence, disruption, cruelty, disease, suffering, and maladjustment. We are told little of poverty, economic problems or political schisms. Throughout his study we find an emphasis upon co-operation and unifying factors in Tepotztotecan society. [1951:428]

Lewis' critique could have been written today, and much of contemporary anthropology would second his points. The issue then becomes whether, and if so, how, to resurrect any concept of community at all. I suggest here that community is well worth keeping, so long as we do not identify the concept with harmony and cohesion, nor imagine that the sole form of community is a group

of people in one place. The importance of community studies, in turn, is this: such studies have the virtue of treating people as contextualized social beings. They portray the thickness of people's lives, the fact that people live in a world of relationships as well as a world of abstract forces and disembodied images. As Clifford Geertz once put it, "The focus in anthropology on . . . communities, groups of people engaged with one another in multiple ways, makes it possible to turn what looks like a mere collection of heterogeneous material into a mutually reinforcing network of social understandings" (1983:156).

The Class of '58 of Weequahic High School

For purposes of this project, the Class of '58 of Weequahic High School consisted of the 304 people whose pictures appeared in the yearbook. One could emphasize the strong homogeneities: the class was 93 percent white, 80 percent Jewish. Or one could emphasize the differences: the 13 percent who were white and non-Jewish, and the 7 percent who were African Americans, were at the very least marked as different within, and at most relatively excluded from, the school as a community.

Crosscutting these racial and ethnic categories in turn was the virtually unmarked, though never completely invisible, divider of class. I have begun elsewhere to engage the theoretical literature on class in America (Ortner 1991; n.d.) and expect to treat it more fully in other contexts. Here I will simply say that the project focuses on various fractions and transformations of "the middle class," and I will employ the standard American folk categories to label them. Thus Weequahic High School in the fifties covered the segment in the class spectrum that includes the "(middle-)middle class" and the "lower-middle" (or "upper-working") class. The better-off families of the "upper-middle class" tended to move away to the suburbs, while the lower end of the working class, and anything below that, was largely located in other neighborhoods.⁵

Class differences can be tracked retrospectively in a variety of ways: by parents' occupations, by whether the parents owned or rented their houses, and by the elementary school attended (which in turn indexes the microneighborhood the person grew up in within the larger Weequahic neighborhood). The elementary school attended, and its corresponding neighborhood, tended to be the marker most consciously noticed among the kids. While in a general way there were probably more Jews in the upper half of this basically two-tier system, and more non-Jews (both white and African American) in the lower half, in fact there were divisions *within* all the groups, including—although in some ways more hidden—among the Jews. People in the lower tier, I came to realize, were often acutely aware of where they were, and the largely casual exclusions and snobberies exercised by those in the upper tier were still—years later—intensely felt.

Class in turn underlies, though never fully exhausts, the two major social structural formations found in most American high schools at least since the fifties. The first is the categorical division between the kids who were considered respectable citizens of the school and the kids who were considered relatively alienated troublemakers. In the midwestern high school studied by Penelope Eckert, the respectables were called the "jocks," while the alienated were called the "burnouts" (1989). In Weequahic there was no general name for the respectables, who I think tended to be equated with the Jews. Troublemakers, or people who adopted a certain oppositional style, were called "hoods"; in practice, these were largely drawn from the white, non-Jewish ethnic groups. Regardless of the labels, Eckert argues persuasively that these are basically class categories. Not all

of the lower-middle/working-class students participate in the practices of the hoods or burnouts, to be sure, but hoods and burnouts tend to be overwhelmingly drawn from the lower end of the class structure represented in any given school. The ethnicizing of these categories in Weequahic did not negate their strong, although unmarked, class alignments either.

Class also underlies, but does not fully determine, those other ubiquitous groupings in American high schools, the "clicks" (cliques, but always pronounced "click"). Clicks are subsets of groups of friends predicated on other markers of success in America—physical attractiveness, money, "popularity," athletic ability, leadership/political savvy, and so on.⁶ Clicks are not the same as ordinary friendship groups, which form among all the students based on various kinds of common interests. Clicks are specifically sets of the self-styled coolest (I cannot really think of a better word) kids, those with the largest amounts of these various forms of cultural and material capital. Weequahic, like probably every high school in America, certainly had its share of clicks along precisely these lines.⁷

High schools are peculiar in forcing all of these socially differentiated people to be together in one place and to more or less deal with one another on a daily basis. But the various divisions of ethnicity, race, class, and class subsets like clicks and hoods lay down lines that will define the dispersal patterns of this community, once people are liberated from coresidence.⁸ The processes of maintaining relationships and forms of community after high school will be structured by these lines of cleavage, at once deepening the divisions, homogenizing the internal compositions of the groups, yet allowing for certain crossovers once the patterns of success and failure of individuals in the larger society become clear.

Before going on, I must deal briefly with the question of the "representativeness" of Weequahic High School. Most readers balk at the idea that a school that is (or was) 80 percent Jewish could be representative of anything beyond the Jewish ethnic group. There are clearly ways in which the Jewishness of the Weequahic community makes a difference to the study, and some of them will come through in this article. However, it is my position that the effects of class and race in this community are just as strong as the effects of ethnicity. I discuss the relationship between ethnicity and class more fully in another paper (Ortner 1996). Here I must simply assert that the Class of '58 of Weequahic High School tells us as much about what has happened to the American middle class in the second half of the 20th century as it tells us about what has happened to the Jews or other racial and ethnic groups.

Finding People

In a study like this, which begins with a known list of persons, the first job is to find them. About a year after the 30th reunion in 1988, I called one of the organizers, and she was kind enough to copy and send me her list.⁹ There were about 150 names and addresses, and I sent out a questionnaire to those people, including a request for additional addresses for a long list of "unknowns" enclosed with the questionnaire. About 50 of the questionnaires were returned by the post office, generating new unknowns, but at the same time many unknowns were found through the people who received the questionnaire and the list.

The number stayed at about 150 until I was contacted by classmate Judith Epstein Rothbard. Judy is married to another classmate, George Rothbard, and their son Gary was a student at the University of Michigan where I was teaching.¹⁰ Judy and George were coming out from New Jersey, where they still live, to see

Gary, and we went out for dinner in Ann Arbor. We talked about the project, and I was impressed by the extent to which both of them were still in touch with many members of the class, and had at least some kind of information or rumor about almost all the rest. After they went home, Judy began sending me additional addresses and getting into the game of locating people. She began putting a lot of time into the work, and eventually I put her on the payroll of the project (at graduate student wages!) as a consultant. She earned every penny of it. All in all she probably produced another 100 addresses.

I cannot detail all of her methods here. She has agreed to write an appendix about her various strategies for the eventual monograph. But just to give some indication of both her methods and my appreciation, here is a field note from January 1992:

Judy Rothbard's been an absolute wizard at getting addresses. . . . She was enormously creative and tenacious about the whole thing. She talked some lady at the Board of Education into giving her birth dates for everyone [in the class], thinking she would need more than names [to locate people]. And she was right. . . . Armed with this information she approached [an acquaintance of a friend who worked in the Department of Motor Vehicles of New Jersey]. . . . She talked him into going into the DMV computer and looking for addresses, and came up with a huge number of them. She also went to the library and got the reference librarian to help her out, and made a lot of progress through that. [This and all quotes not otherwise referenced are from my field notes.]

At the best moment in the project, we had the following situation in terms of locating people: Of the 304 people pictured in the yearbook, 14 were known to be deceased at the beginning of the project. Of the 290 living, we had addresses for approximately 250 of them, or 86 percent. The 40 or so lost people seem to represent an irreducible number, plus or minus one or two. It is almost certain that some of them are deceased as well, but none have been confirmed. Occasionally we did find one of the unknowns, but then someone else would disappear—the letter would come back, the phone would be disconnected, and they would be gone.

I did not realize how obsessed I had become with finding people until I had a dream. There was one Asian American person in our class, Tina Nandy. As I will discuss in another context, ethnicity and race were very differently culturally organized, and very differently politicized, in the fifties. But for the anthropologist now accustomed to late-20th-century American identity politics, Tina became fetishized in my mind as *the only Asian American in the Class of '58*, and it seemed imperative that I find her for the project. Yet it also seemed very unlikely that we would succeed in finding her—among other things, it was harder to find women because most of the women in my generation changed their names when they got married. Thus in this dream I was going around from door to door in some New Jersey-ish-looking neighborhood, with a poster with Tina Nandy's picture on it, asking people if they knew how to find her. And they all shook their heads, and I felt overwhelmed in the dream with a hopelessness and futility quite out of proportion to the situation. Eventually Judy talked to somebody who knew somebody who was in touch with Tina, and she was found; she lives in a town near Newark and teaches in a local public school.

It is difficult to generalize about the difference between the found and the lost, especially since we know almost nothing about the lost. We do know that more women than men are lost, presumably because of name changes (in my current unknown list of 38 names, there are 24 women and only 14 men). Beyond that, however, the assumption among the found is that the lost people are in some

way or other the less successful, and do not want to be found. If this is true, and it seems at least plausible, then the study is probably biased toward the relatively successful in the Class of '58. But there is still an enormously wide range of social types among the people whom I reached.

Fieldwork on the Road and in the Mind

The fieldwork consisted of traveling all over the country and interviewing people wherever they happened to be, at any site of their choosing. (For a preliminary discussion of the fieldwork, see Ortner 1994.) Although the interviews were the dominant form of "data" for the project—and I will say more about that in a moment—I want first to note the variety of forms of participant-observation, however truncated, that constituted at least a part of this project, not even counting the fact that I have lived in this culture all my life, and grew up, from age 10 to 16, in the original community of the study in the first place. I will simply list here the sites of interviewing and other fieldwork encounters, in no particular order: homes, with and without other family members around; restaurants (from the very expensive to the very cheap, including many of those great East Coast institutions, "diners"); bars; shopping malls; brokerage houses; law offices; medical offices; business offices; a schoolteachers' lounge; a principal's office; a country club; a nightclub where a classmate was performing; an examining room in a hospital; a law library; a social worker's office; the Newark Police Department; reunions (2) in catering establishments; synagogues; hotel lobbies; and a Hollywood television studio.¹¹ When I interviewed grown children of the Class of '58 members (whom I will not for the most part discuss in this article; see Ortner n.d.), the list grew: college dormitories; college campuses; my own faculty offices; and lunchrooms and offices of large corporations (including some stunning buildings like the Saarinen-designed ATT/Bell Laboratories building in Red Bank, New Jersey).

I interviewed altogether in about 80 cities and towns of the United States, and drove over several thousand miles of American freeways. The project was conducted intermittently over a four-year period (roughly, 1990–1994), with the most intensive work done in the period 1992–94, when I did a trip for about a week every month.¹² While none of this adds up to classic participant observation—living in a village for a year or two and participating in all its rhythms—nonetheless one can learn a good deal about "America" with this sort of exposure, particularly if one keeps one's eyes, ears, and brain tuned to the ethnography frequency.¹³

Yet again, the core of the project was the interviews themselves, about two hours of talk, plus or minus, into a tape recorder. As I first developed this project, I experienced one of the "methodological anxieties" so well noted by George Marcus (1995) for people engaged in multisited fieldwork: I was very uncomfortable with the fact that the project was so heavily dependent on interviewing, and involved so little participant observation. Not only does one lose much of the deep context participant observation provides—the multiple forms of background that allow one to understand and interpret what is represented to the anthropologist over a tape recorder—one loses, or so I feared, a sense of people's social embeddedness, causing them to appear in one's study as those classic American subjects/objects, decontextualized individuals. Yet as it turned out, one of the things people love to talk about, especially to someone who shares or has shared a social universe with them, is *other people*, past and present, far and near. It was precisely this fact that allowed me to discover, rather than presume, the (transformed) persistence of various kinds of "community" among the

dispersed Class of '58, and also to see with particular vividness the practices of inclusion and exclusion that make and remake them. Had I been sitting in one local "community," the local ties would have seemed a lot more "natural" to me than they came to appear through this project, while the more dispersed and delocalized forms of relationship might have been ignored altogether.

Four Types of Postcommunity

Probably the most obvious mechanism of the maintenance of a high school graduating class as a community is the reunion, which actually brings people back together in a highly ritualized way, usually every ten years. Reunions are major cultural events in America; there is a reunion industry that specializes in producing them, starting with finding the dispersed classmates, and culminating in the staging of the events themselves. I attended two reunions of the Class of '58: the 30th in 1988, and the 35th in 1993, and I will return to some aspects of the experiences of these events later in the article.¹⁴ The point about reunions for now, however, is that they must be seen as tips of much larger icebergs, the networks of underlying diasporic relations that obtain among a group like this. It is these to which we now turn.

Neocommunity: Circum-Newark

At one level it is important to note that *every person in the Class of '58* has moved away from the address she or he lived at during high school; in this sense there is 100 percent geographic mobility. This of course conforms to images of modernity and postmodernity—the end of "community," the "fragmentation" of relationships.

But other statistics tell a different story. If we look at Table 1, we see that over half of the class still resides in New Jersey, and if one adds New York to New Jersey, one gets 60 percent of the class.¹⁵

Calculating a bit differently, one could take a compass, put the point down at Weequahic High School in the southwest corner of Newark, and draw a circle with a radius of about 16 miles. This would then include places like Montclair to the north; the popular Millburn, Short Hills, and Livingston areas to the northwest; Edison (which has a large number of classmates, and was used to define the 16-mile limit) to the southwest; a good part of Manhattan to the east; and

Table 1
Geographic Distribution of the Class of '58 as of July 1996 (including last residence of deceased members, if known).

New Jersey	160	(53%)
New York	22	(7%)
Florida	21	(7%)
California	17	(6%)
CT, MA, and RI	10	(3%)
DC, MD, and VA	7	(2%)
Pennsylvania	5	(2%)
Texas	4	(1%)
All others ^a	17	(6%)
Unknown	41	(13%)
Totals	304	(100%)

^a Seventeen dispersed states with three or less classmates.

parts of Brooklyn and Queens east of Manhattan. This area contains perhaps two-thirds of the New Jersey-New York classmates; in other words, about 40 percent of the Class of '58 still lives within a 16-mile radius of Weequahic High School.

Many of the Class of '58 members in this region form a "community," in a sense close to one of its original meanings: while people do not all live in a single localized neighborhood, there are nonetheless multiple connections among many of them. There is a density of contact, and a relatively up-to-date maintenance of awareness of each other's lives, that are characteristic of people in a relationship of community with one another. For example:

- People's kids go to the same schools and the parents keep up an interest in each others' kids:
Linda said that Louise has two kids who went to _____ High School with her kids—very active, all-around kids.
- People belong to the same country clubs:
There was a suspicion at the club that Laura was having an affair with another woman's husband. Things were very tense and hostile between the two women.
- And to the same synagogues:
She said she talks regularly to Louis Feuerman. . . . She said I'll probably see him in B'nai Abraham on the High Holidays.
- Lawyers from the class do legal work for other classmates:
Ken Oster is Charlie's lawyer. He said, "He's the best, the best". . . . Vic Weiss [another lawyer] told many such stories.
- Doctors from the class do medical work for other classmates:
Sandy Jacobs delivered Tina Nandy's second baby. Now that's community for you. Lana Irwin told the story of her first birth . . . she knew Sandy was an ob-gyn resident in the hospital and [feeling that the relationship was too close for comfort] she told her doctor she didn't want him assisting at her delivery. But she was given an anaesthetic and fell asleep, and later when she was waking up Sandy Jacobs passed by and said, "Congratulations" or "Lovely baby" or something, and she had a suspicion that he had participated in the delivery.
- Classmates are invited to attend other classmates' special events:
I reached Vicki Nelson, who it turns out is going with some others [who turned out to be mostly classmates] tonight to hear Nancy Irving sing at some club. . . . I invited myself.
- People visit each other when they are sick and go to funerals of classmates who have died:
He talked about getting close with Diane Tromberg before she died. . . . In the last three weeks before she died she would call him several times a day, wherever he was, because she was so depressed. . . . He talked to her only 3 hours before she died.

More generally and routinely, people in this area have each other to dinner and parties, or go out to dinner together. They run into each other at restaurants, in malls, and in movies. Classmates work for and employ other classmates. Classmates are in business together. Several classmates in this area are particularly close friends, and showed up together for their interviews with me. All of this is the classic stuff of community: multiple kinds of face-to-face contact, mutual awareness of relatively intimate aspects of each other's lives, mutual caring, and of course its flip side, mutual judgment.

Yet the community-ness of this area, like the community-ness of Weequahic High School itself, is not achieved "naturally"—instead it is constructed out of a range of selections, exclusions, and boundary-maintaining mechanisms that follow the lines of cleavage of class and race/ethnicity discussed earlier. With respect to race, first, the circle I have drawn includes towns and neighborhoods that are largely black as well as those that are largely white, yet the white and black classmates within this circle do not form part of one "community"—there is virtually no contact between them, and they are largely unaware of each other's lives. Moreover, there is a checkerboard effect of all-black and all-white towns and neighborhoods that exist side by side, and that raises suspicions of more than accidental practices of real estate fixing.

In addition, there are issues of class, or at least of gradations of wealth that participate in the logic of class, even if they do not represent actual class differences.¹⁶ Many of these focus on a small area within the region I have been discussing, a cluster of towns west and northwest of Newark (but still within Essex County), including parts of Springfield, Millburn, Maplewood, South Orange, Livingston, and Short Hills. Some of the most expensive real estate in the region is in these towns, and the significant number of classmates who live in them are (presumably) among the most successful (which in local parlance always centrally includes monetary success) in the class. The effect of this concentration is to reproduce what appears to those not included as a grown-up version of a clique, based now on economic as well as cultural capital. While those who live in these areas do not perceive themselves to be snobs—far from it; the group probably includes some of the most politically liberal graduates of the class of '58—nonetheless many others have strong negative feelings about it. On the one hand, some feel excluded; even if they can afford to live there, they feel (or are made to feel) that they do not belong:

At one point he and his wife lived in a big house in Springfield, but he never felt comfortable there. Now he lives in a blue-collar neighborhood in _____ and feels much more at home.

On the other hand, there is an aspect of the fractionation of the upper-middle class at work, in which some people (who could both afford to live there and would be perfectly comfortable in terms of cultural capital as well) simply reject what they feel to be the bourgeois/illiberal values embodied in a community like this:

[One of the many successful professional men in the class] said how bourgeois it all was, how people who stayed in [that part of] New Jersey had just given up on climbing out of that world. How could they take it? Look at all the vulgarity.

And:

At that time [another successful professional man in the class] discovered [the town he and his wife chose to live in], about which he is a big booster. It is very ethnically mixed. . . . He said he didn't want to go to Short Hills, be with other Weequahic people, reproduce Weequahic High School.

Invented Community: Florida

The other location where some of the members of the Class of '58 maintain a community somewhat like circum-Newark is in Florida. Only about 20 classmates live down there, and they are much more spread out across the state, but many of them maintain some form of contact with one another, both intentionally,

and by way of turning up from time to time in the same restaurants, movies, shopping malls, and so forth. In addition, the elderly parents and some siblings of these people have moved to Florida, reinforcing a sense of naturalness about the community. In some cases, there are several Weequahic people in a single development of homes or condos.

In addition, there is an intentional maintenance of a sort of greater post-Weequahic community. Thus although there are only 20 or so members of the Class of '58 in Florida, there are actually a large number of Weequahic graduates from other years scattered across the state, and aware of one another's existence. One person told me that there is a reunion in South Florida every February for all people from Weequahic High School, "from Year One." She also reported that in Kendall, Florida, they hold a Weequahic-Hillside football game—the annual classic when we were in high school—every Thanksgiving. One of the '58 classmates told me that one of our old gym teachers lived in the same private community that she lives in, and in fact is on the governing board of the community.

At the same time, the racial and class exclusions that mark the scene in New Jersey are even more pronounced in Florida. For one thing, a good number of the classmates I visited in Florida live in so-called gated communities. This was my first experience with them; I had not yet read Mike Davis's *City of Quartz* (1990) and did not even know that they existed. The appearance of walls, gates, and uniformed guards was somewhat shocking to me at first, although in retrospect I am not sure it is any more (or less) significant than an apartment house with a uniformed doorman. Another classmate also commented on this scene:

Her husband wanted to buy a house in Florida and she was dead set against it. . . . She just can't stand the place, it's like a Nazi community, with gates and guards in quasi-military uniforms.

Along with stronger markers of boundary and exclusion seems to come greater internal homogenization. The gated communities are more like private clubs than normal towns, and the membership is highly selected for sameness. As part of the same conversation just quoted,

She said [the social pattern] had been intensified by pulling together exactly the same kinds of people from New Jersey and Long Island and Westchester so they all together perfected the original pattern [of fifties New Jersey culture].¹⁷

Not all the classmates in Florida live in highly-homogenized gated clubs, just as not all the classmates in circum-Newark live in Short Hills and Livingston. But these places take on a certain charged significance in the landscape, epitomizing both the material success and the social exclusion of the "community" in its most visible form.

Translocal Community: Networks of Contact

Even among widely dispersed members of the Class of '58, many people have maintained or reactivated contacts with one another. Many people who have moved away still have relatives in New Jersey and return to see them; for example:

[Richard Morris's wife] was a real Newark booster, missed being there. She and Richard go out [to New Jersey] at least once a year because they still have lots of family there.

Often the New Jersey relatives have contact with former classmates, keeping the moved-away people up-to-date on the activities of those who have stayed, and vice versa. My father is still in business in New Jersey and runs into my classmates all the time. He was providing me with ethnographic data on the Class of '58 long before I began this project. From my notes:

Daddy ran into Linda Mendelson a few months ago. Her husband took over his father's business—making plumbing supplies. The husband then set up several other companies, making her the president of one of them, which makes batteries. Her daughter is a manager at a classy clothing store.

But networks of relations among the Class of '58 also persist in other parts of the country, and across long distances.

Hot news on the lost-classmate front—I got a letter from Zack Weissman in California. Actually, it's a copy of a letter to another classmate in California, Leonard Riesberg, with whom he keeps in touch.

Or this one:

Gloria Heller called [me in Ann Arbor] from New York, having heard from Ira Martin in California that I was looking for her.

Dispersed Weequahic connections are often activated for the benefit of the next generation. One Weequahic graduate from an adjacent class is now a successful real estate broker in California. He is still friendly with one of my classmates, and fixed up the classmate's daughter with a celebrity whom he was representing in a real estate deal. In another case,

Peter Tannenbaum [in California] told me he is still in touch with many classmates. He sent his son off to Florida for a vacation, and put him in touch with an old classmate who took the son all around and showed him a great time.

As this story suggests, there is an almost kinship-like sense to many of these contacts, a sense that one can ask old Weequahic classmates for favors, even if one rarely sees them. Several people contacted me about providing some kind of support or advice for their kids at the University of Michigan, while I in turn took advantage of an old Weequahic friendship for some backup for my teenage daughter when she was away from home.¹⁸ More generally, I took advantage of these connections for all the extraordinary hospitality that allowed me to do this project.

Yet once again there is a sorting process that goes into the maintenance of some ties and not others, or the creation of ties that were not really there before. In some cases there are structurally generated "accidents" that put Weequahic people together, even in distant cities. For example, they may wind up in the same temple congregations:

Sheila Yurick mentioned on the phone when I called her [in Boston] that at one point Lisa Markowitz and Paul Gold had both belonged to her synagogue [in Washington, D.C.].

Similarly, Weequahic people may wind up in the same fraternities or sororities:

Harriet Nunberg called yesterday [from Florida]. . . . The message said that her husband went to a fraternity reunion [in Virginia] recently and met Paul Gold, who was in the same fraternity.

Children of Weequahic graduates may also wind up in the same fraternities and sororities: At one point, three daughters of Weequahic parents (two from the Class of '58, one from the Class of '56) belonged to the same sorority at the University of Michigan. One came from Indiana, one from South Jersey, and one from a different part of New Jersey. None of them knew each other before they came.

One of the factors at work in clustering people accidentally like this is obviously common Jewishness. But class is also at work; both temple congregations and, even more so, fraternities and sororities, are stratified by both material and cultural capital.

Beyond the kind of factors that regroup people accidentally, people may intentionally seek out other Weequahic graduates in distant places expecting, and usually finding, a warm welcome and common interests.

[One of the doctors in the class] said that when he travels to new places, he looks for three things: a temple, other doctors in his specialty, and Weequahic graduates. He went to Texas and looked up David Grossman from our class. David had married someone from another Weequahic class—he's a doctor and she's a lawyer.

In some cases, there is a process of intentionally remaking social networks on the basis of common careers and success levels. Sometimes this works very well. One of the men in the class who had been in the lower level of the class/ethnic spectrum but is now a successful stockbroker, invited one of the lawyers in the class with whom he had not previously been friendly to a social dinner with their spouses. The lawyer had some doubts about how well it would work, but all the parties hit it off very well and are now good friends.

On the other hand, sometimes it does not work. I cannot quote the relevant story in detail because it is too revealing of identities, but suffice it to say that some people still feel much too burned by class prejudice in high school to make friends with people who ignored them before they were successful and well known. This leads directly into the next and final category of community.

Community of the Mind: Memory

Underlying all the forms of relationship, including hostility, persisting among the members of the Class of '58, are sets of quite powerful memories about the high school experience and about individual people and relationships in high school. I have been impressed and fascinated by the intensity of many people's retrospective feelings including, I confess, my own.

Negative memories are often the basis of continuing distance and disconnection from the class-as-community; for example:

We looked at the yearbook and there were Roberta Rosenberg and Joan Edelman, and Harriet said they were really "ditzzy broads" and she couldn't stand them—that was one reason she didn't go to the reunion.

As in the example at the end of the last section, negative memories are often memories of social exclusion:

I called Daniel Parker this morning and left a message and he was kind enough to call me back, but said he emphatically does not want to participate in the project, he feels no connection to Weequahic, he went to a reunion and it was "all the same bullshit," all the clicks making him feel uncomfortable, he doesn't want to have anything to do with it.

Indeed, many of the “lost” classmates were presumed to have hated Weequahic and, as it was usually put, did not want to be found.

But many more people had intensely positive memories of this period of their lives. These memories often focus on individuals, on good friendships that had waned with time and distance:

She was thrilled when I said I had found Tina Nandy, she said they were friends in grammar school. She asked how Tina had felt about Weequahic and I said that she said she had a very good experience. She said, “That’s Tina! No matter how hard life was for her, everything was wonderful. . . . She was just so wonderful!”

Positive memories often focus on unfinished (or even unstarted) romantic relationships:

He asked if I had found Sheila Yurick. He said they had been very close friends, virtually in love, but the relationship never jelled as a romantic relationship. Among other things, her parents heard some very bad stories about him and forbade her to date him. He wasn’t planning on coming to the reunion but if she were coming he might be tempted.

Several people had warm memories of Grace Lewis, an African American classmate whom I was unable to find. I particularly mention these memories here because, as far as I can tell, these memories involve the very few examples of cross-racial friendships, and even the *possibility* of cross-racial dating, in the Class of ‘58:

[One of the white Jewish men] Larry Farber said he was asked out by Grace Lewis—they used to walk home from school together and talk about race relations—but then they both figured it wouldn’t work, neither of their parents would accept it, so they gave up.

A woman, also white, asked about her too:

Like Larry Farber, she asked about Grace Lewis. Grace must have been very special. I wish I could find her.

Positive memories also encompass the Weequahic experience as a whole—the school, the neighborhood, the era:

Peter Tannenbaum went on and on about how great it was to grow up in the Weequahic section of Newark at that time: “We grew up in the best time in the best place.” He said he’s been telling his 14-year-old son about our life in Newark and his son is fascinated with it.

Passing on these positive memories to one’s children is not at all unusual. Here is another example, from an interview with one of the children of the Class of ‘58:

He was another Weequahic High School freak, like [another child of the Class of ‘58]. His mother talked about it all the time. He grew up looking through the *Legend* [yearbook] as a picture book on the table in the living room. Wow.

The positive memories are the obvious basis of a continuing community even in diaspora. These are the sorts of feeling reunions build upon and, at a less organized level, they are the basis for individuals maintaining or reestablishing contact with one another. Yet even people with negative memories often find themselves drawn back into contact with the community, wondering what happened to particular individuals, and experiencing an unexpected nostalgia later in life for the larger experience:

Gloria Myers told a similar story—that she viewed much of her life as an escape from Weequahic and New Jersey, but more recently has begun to feel more affection for it. She said ironically, “Maybe there’s a nostalgia gene that kicks in at age 50.”

In sum, the fieldwork has revealed the Class of ‘58 to exist as a kind of postcommunity in at least four distinguishable forms: (1) the neocommunity of circum-Newark; (2) the invented post-all-Weequahic community of Florida; (3) the translocal community of periodically maintained, reactivated, and reworked networks; and (4) the mind-community of memory, drawn upon by the other three forms, as well as by the rituals that briefly pull them all together—reunions.

Again, not every individual is a part of the postcommunity in any of these forms. Where it exists, however, it is quite powerful. It is questionable whether even kinship has the power to provoke such intense memories, or such large numbers of social ties, in contemporary late- or postmodern American society. How can we think about this process?

High School As Habitus

The answer must be sought largely in the nature of the American high school experience. It is in high schools that many Americans have their first, most fully realized experience of “community,” in the specific sense of a dense, intense, and often highly charged set of face-to-face social relations that persist over a long period of time. At the same time, it is in high schools, unlike almost anyplace else one can think of, that most of the structures of difference in American society—class, gender, race, ethnicity, generational conflict—are enacted and reenacted on an almost daily basis.¹⁹ Younger children in the grammar schools have a good bit of community, in the sense of dense, enduring social relations, too, but the grammar schools tend to be more socially homogeneous. Public high schools, however (and this is still the standard form of secondary education for the vast majority of Americans) pull in young people from a much wider social range, and allow for—indeed thrive on—this kind of living theater of American social difference.²⁰

It may be suggested in turn that the forms of social difference, asymmetry, and solidarity practiced in the high school community persist as habitus, in Bourdieu’s (1990) sense. This is another dimension of what I called the community of the mind. That is, it is likely that the forms of community established in high school, when people were forced to work out their categories and practices with respect to the opposite sex, other races, and other classes, establish much of the basis of the ways in which these categories are thought, and these practices are lived, in adult life.

But these points in themselves would not be enough to account for the intensity of memory/feelings and the durability of multiple forms of community in the group, without—I suggest—one additional factor: the degree to which the high school experience is eroticized. Although I have not emphasized this in the choice of quotations in this article, questions of sexual attractiveness, availability, dangers (the big issue in the fifties was pregnancy), and last but not least, (some level of) actual sexual activity, were high on the list of what the high school experience was (and is) all about for most informants. And like everything else in high school, sexual life is structured by a variety of forms of cultural capital and social “distinction,” including, of course, the class/race/ethnic categories discussed throughout this article. But the point must also be turned around: class, race, and ethnic differences are themselves heavily eroticized (or counter-eroticized) in this context, both in the general sense that everything in high school is to some degree saturated with sex, and in the more specific sense that every form of sameness

or difference is evaluated with respect to its charge of sexuality. Categories like "nerd" or "hood," for example, are not just categories of social ineptness or social deviance; they are categories of relative sexual attractiveness as well.²¹ The social habitus generated in the practices of high school as community is thus not simply a series of conceptual categories, grids, and rankings, but an emotionally and even erotically saturated framework of both solidarity and difference.

The endurance of this erotic saturation may be seen at reunions, where the level of flirting among several hundred middle-aged people is noteworthy. Among other things, people confess to one another about high school crushes and desires, thereby playfully invoking sex in the present in the guise of describing the past. The 30th reunion of the Class of '58 excluded spouses, something that annoyed some people but was enjoyed by many others. As far as I know, little if any in the way of actual sex took place among classmates as a result of reunion flirtation. My point is rather to suggest, following an old lead of Victor Turner's (1969), that one of the functions of reunions as rituals is precisely to renew the erotic charge as well as the social form of the "community," in all its solidarities and divisions.²²

Opening Up Space and Time in Fieldwork

Let me briefly summarize what I take to be some of the key points of this article. I have argued for the continuing importance of the study of "communities." At a time when scholars in many fields are latching onto "culture" as a kind of ungrounded set of images, it is essential to keep those images attached to real lives, practices, and systems of relations; I have used the idea of "communities" in this article as a shorthand for this point. But I have argued as well that we can no longer take communities to be localized, on-the-ground entities, or at least that their local, on-the-ground form is only one moment and site of their existence. I have thus tried to chart the rather significant variety of forms in which a once-local community continues to exist.²³

One point that has emerged from this discussion, and that is worth emphasizing here, is the importance of recognizing changes in the temporal as well as spatial practices of fieldwork. The delocalized character of this study gives it certain qualities, but so too does the extreme time depth. Moreover, patterns of location are always products of time; diasporas, concentrations, groupings, and regroupings have histories as well as formations. As a side note I would add that the "historic turn" (McDonald 1996) in anthropology had its own forms of radicalness, and needs to be integrated with other radical shifts concerning both modes of ethnographic writing and practices of fieldwork.

Finally, it is important to emphasize the triangulation in the relationship between ethnography, theory, and reality embodied in the discussions of this article. Ethnography and theory must stand at something of an angle to each other, and both must stand at a critical angle to "reality." With respect to the idea of community in particular, it was clearly important for anthropology to unravel the idealizations and myths of harmony and stability that became at least partially established both theoretically and ethnographically. But we must be equally critical about claims of fragmentation, dispersal, and conflict in the present moment, looking—perhaps perversely—for the ways in which people sustain relationships in the world of "postcommunity."

Notes

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1. On the public/private split, see especially Yanagisako 1979. For an excellent workplace ethnography that gets around this problem, see Halle 1984.

2. Two good places to start on this question are Bender 1978 and Bell and Newby 1974.

3. The concept of community has had roughly the status in sociology that the concept of culture has had in anthropology; it has been called "the most fundamental and far-reaching of sociology's unit-ideas" (Robert Nisbet, quoted in Bender 1978:5). The concept has behaved much as the culture concept did in anthropology: it existed as a key symbol, defined and redefined in every school of thought and in every generation, to the point where one scholar, attempting to nail it down (as Kroeber and Kluckhohn tried to do with the culture concept at roughly the same time in the 1950s), found "no fewer than 94 meanings given to the term" (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952:5). Commenting on the vast range of the use of the term in Bellah et al.'s important study of American culture, *Habits of the Heart* (1985), Frederic Jameson called it "an empty conceptual space" (Jameson 1988:98).

4. The pseudonym "Middletown" was used both to protect the privacy of the inhabitants and to emphasize the town's typicality.

5. I suppose I have to declare my own positionality in all this. I was probably at the upper end of the spectrum. My family's economic standing came up from time to time in the interviews, but (a) many people in the class have far surpassed me in income by now, and (b) if classmates harbored significant resentments and/or anxieties about my status, it seemed more from my Ph.D. than from my earlier local privilege.

6. Clicks based on being very smart, good in school, intellectual/artsy, or all of the above occupy a peculiar position, and their standing probably varies a good deal from high school to high school. In Weequahic, as probably in many predominantly Jewish schools, they had relatively high status, and were snobbish and exclusionary vis-à-vis others. But in many places they are "nerdy" and low on the status ladder.

7. I am not sure about the presence of these divisions in schools that are largely or wholly populated by minority students.

8. I omit gender from this list, because gender crosscuts all the rest and is not a basis for separate "community" formation later.

9. Many thanks to Sue Ellen Platnick Boff for the 1988 address list.

10. Judy, George, and Gary Rothbard are all real names, used by permission. The names of people in their capacity as interviewees, and the names of people talked about in interviews, have all been changed. Other aspects of identity have also been changed where necessary to protect confidentiality and privacy as much as possible.

11. In quite a few of the interviews with male classmates in their homes, their wives made a point of being present. People did not always ask whether it was alright for a spouse to be present, but if they did I always said it was completely up to them.

12. Thanks again to the MacArthur Foundation, with whose fellowship (1990-95) I bought all the released time that allowed me to do this project.

13. I say this with much hedging, as I have deep reservations about Jean Baudrillard's road book, *America* (1988). But it would be interesting to think about both my own project and Baudrillard's book in relation to the broader genre of "on-the-road" takes on America.

14. Reunions would not normally be held only five years apart, but Judy Rothbard and some others wanted to capitalize on the relative completeness of my address list, and so

went ahead and organized it. The reunion of 1993 was thus one of the several Heisenberg effects of my project, which will be discussed in another context.

15. Different parts of the country vary in the amount of geographic movement at different times. In a recent article on geographic mobility (covering the period 1985–90), the highest rates of movement were mostly in Florida and in the West, and the lowest rates were mostly in the Midwest. New Jersey was in the middle range (Doyle 1993).

16. See Bourdieu 1984 on gradations and fractions of classes. Bourdieu's approach to these is quite different from the Warner-Lunt scheme of graded status rankings mentioned earlier, and also the S.E.S. (Socio-Economic Status) rankings of social science surveys. But a discussion of these differences is beyond the scope of the present article.

17. Because of the extreme homogenization, I actually had stronger feelings of *déjà vu*, and more intense ambivalence about my own relationship to this community, in Florida than I had in New Jersey. At one point in my field notes I described the Florida experience positively, as "incredibly nostalgic," but at another point I described myself as "overwhelmed" by it.

18. Thanks to Margie Drubner!

19. Two excellent recent high school studies concerned with issues of class are Eckert 1989 and Willis 1977.

20. There is no doubt, however, that public high schooling for the middle class is declining, and private schooling is on the rise. It will be very important to chart the impact of this shift on the wider society.

21. The hidden sexuality of high school social categories, and the hidden class factors in sexual attraction, are precisely what Philip Roth exploited in *Goodbye Columbus* 1959 and *Portnoy's Complaint* 1969, both of which are set in the Weequahic neighborhood (where Roth grew up) and Weequahic High School (which Roth attended and graduated from about 7 years before I did). See Ortner 1991.

22. The 35th reunion included spouses. The feeling of renewal in this case was more like a family or kinship reunion, in some ways warmer, in others less intense.

23. The argument obviously links up with recent studies in migration that show how communities persist transnationally (e.g., Rouse 1991). My point would be that this sort of pattern is not just characteristic of "migration" as a special experience, but is probably characteristic of all communities.

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