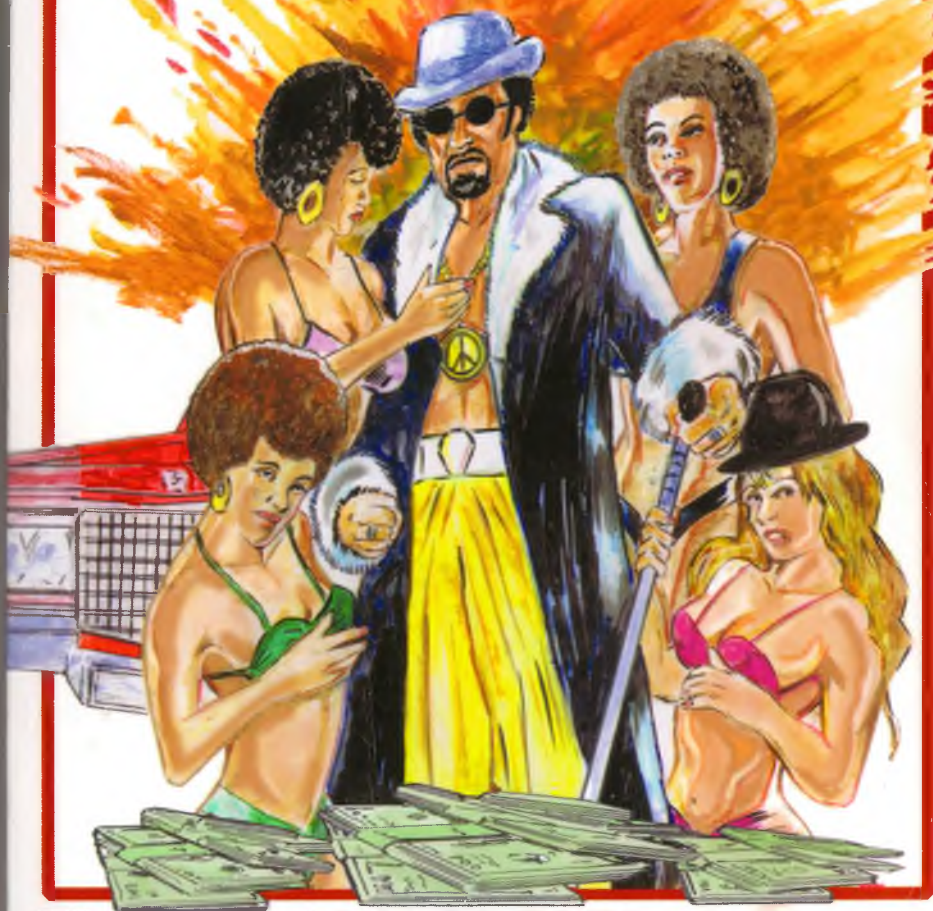


# BLACK PLAYERS



## The Secret World Of Black Pimps

By

Christina and Richard Milner

Foreword by Tariq "Elite" Nasheed

# **BLACK PLAYERS**

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# Foreword

For over ten years I have written books about dating, social commentary, and man-woman relationships. During that time, I have always tried to pay homage to those in "the life" -the street players, pimps and other underworld hustlers. I have always given props to the street players because they have always had an undeniable influence on not only my ideology, but on modern urban culture as a whole. A lot of today's lingo, street slang and hip-hop vernacular can be traced back to the old school pimps and players. And this tradition goes as far back as the 1920's and 30's.

I first read *Black Players* about ten years ago, and I was impressed to see that this was the first book ever to go into the whole psychology of the pimp lifestyle. The problem with most books about the pimp game is that they are usually written by former (or current) pimps who end up writing self congratulatory autobiographies. Instead of focusing on the guidelines and mechanisms of the game, these guys usually go into overly exaggerated rants about how great they were as pimps. Since *Black Players* was written by two "outsiders" of the life, they were able to objectively capture the true fundamentals of the pimp culture.

The thing I respect about the *Black Players* book is that it had an unbiased approach to the people and the lifestyle associated with pimping. The participants were allowed to tell their story from their perspective, without the authors trying to place a racist or negative slant on the subject matter. In my opinion, this is one of the reasons why *Black Players* has been considered as being controversial (Richard Milner was actually kicked out of the UC Berkeley doctoral program in

anthropology for writing *Black Players*). Most literature and other forms of media that covers the taboo topic of the pimp lifestyle usually stay in the realm of non-threatening stereotypes.

*Black Players* was the first book to show the honest, and suffice to say humane aspect of the pimp game. Some might think that authors like Iceberg Slim (who was interviewed in *Black Players*) and Donald Goines were the first writers to expose the true side of the pimp game, but you have to remember that these gentlemen's books- although gritty and realistic- were fictional novels. So this gave them the leeway to exaggerate and embellish on much of the material. As a matter of fact, Iceberg Slim's real street name when he was pimping was not even Iceberg Slim (his street name was Cavanaugh Slim). He started using the name Iceberg Slim in the late 1960's as his pen name when he began writing books.

So *Black Players* was the first book to cover the pimp game from every angle. It discussed the configurations of a stable. It discussed the different types of pimps. It went into the unwritten rule book of pimping. It discussed the relationship between pimps and madams, etc. What I found most interesting about the book *Black Players*, is that even though many of the pimps did not have any formal academic credentials, they were able to articulate the psychology and basic dynamics of man-woman relationships with the intelligence and precision of any PhD scholars. And the game in the book has stood the test of time. Although *Black Players* was written over 40 years ago, the information, the game, and the ideology (and even some of the lingo) is still applicable to this day.

*- Tariq "Elite" Nasheed  
October 2010. Los Angeles*

# Preface

It has taken almost five years to create this book. During that time our lives were enriched by contacts and friendships with a wide spectrum of people. Looking back at the parade which has passed through our lives, we see pimps and professors, millionaires and paupers, newspapermen, junkies, hustlers, graduate students, bartenders, dancers, musicians, politicians, players, lovers, anthropologists and hippies, policemen, dope dealers, yogis, linguists, acid heads, barflies, boosters, sociologists, entertainers, street cats, winos, speed freaks, artists, Black militants, suburbanites, streetwalkers, revolutionaries, call girls, writers, tough guys, homosexuals, photographers, publishers, lawyers, those going up, those going down, and those treading water.

Many of these people helped us in various ways – some of them unknowingly – in the creation of this book, and we would like to single out a few to express our appreciation.

The present work is a revised and expanded version of Christina's doctoral dissertation, "Black Pimps and Their Prostitutes; Social Organization and Value System of a Ghetto Occupational Subculture," which was accepted by the Graduate Division of the University of California at Berkeley in the winter of 1970. Our thanks to the members of the doctoral committee at Berkeley: Drs. Alan Dundes, Robert Blauner, and Gerald Berreman. They often had to

stick their necks out to assist what was then considered a highly unorthodox project, to say the least.

Special thanks to Dr. Sherwood L. Washburn and Dean Sanford Elberg of U.C. Berkely, who released Richard from his responsibilities to the Physical Anthropology program so that he could devote his full time and energies to the present work.

We are also grateful to the Anthropology Department of the University of California at Berkeley for the small but crucial grant for tapes used in the interviews, and for the monumental assistance given us by the "Race, Manhood, and Culture in America" project headed by Dr. Blauner of the Sociology Department at Berkeley. The help of that project's secretarial staff in transcribing the tapes was sorely needed and greatly facilitated the progress of the study.

Thanks also to Dr. Neil Eddington, formerly of Harvard University, for his advice and encouragement, to Mr. Peter Tammony of San Francisco for his helpful criticisms of the linguistic material, and to Professor Charles Seeger, Mr. Al Sutter, Dr. Michael Rosenbaum, Mr. Steve Maurer, and Mr. Paul Shearer for helpful advice, criticism, and discussion.

Special thanks to Dr. Eddington for permission to include the wonderful "pimp toast" he collected in Hunter's Point, and to Ali Akbar and Soulful Spider for their original creative contributions. We wish also to thank Mr. Billy Franklin Lee, the late Dr. Allan Coult, Dr. Michael and Barbara MacRoberts, Mr. Sidney Rudy, Dr. Jack H. Prost, Dr. Earl Count, Mr. Gary Howard, and Hendra for reasons best known to themselves and to us.

We cannot omit grateful mention of our loyal and meticulous typists, Nikki Brockway Fiske, who typed many of the tape transcripts, and especially the indefatigable Mrs. Jackie Gensburer, who typed two versions of the entire manuscript.

Mr. Enrico Banducci, restaurateur, concert violinist, amateur anthropologist, and the patron saint of all creative people in North Beach, has earned our gratitude for many favors large and small – and mainly just for being Enrico.

We wish also to thank our publishers, particularly Mr. Arthur H. Thornhill Jr., who brought this book to Little, Brown when the manuscript was still in embryonic form, and our gifted editors Mr. Eliot Fremont-Smith and Mr. William D. Phillips, both of whom helped breathe life into it.

Of course, our greatest debt is to the subjects of this book, the Black Players and their ladies, who “gave up some of their game” willingly in the interests of “telling it like it is.” We hope we have justified their faith and goodwill, and regret that circumstances make it impossible to thank them by name.

In fact, we have disguised their names, as well as any details which might make them identifiable to police or to the community at large. We have also disguised the places in which the fieldwork was carried out. We do not believe, however, that these necessary fictionalizations at all detract from the true and honest depiction of their world we have worked to present. Non of the materials from the tapes has been fictionalized or distorted; they remain the real thoughts of real people in their own words.

—Richard and Christina Milner



My son, when you get married, do make an idol of the woman you marry; do not worship her. If you worship a woman she will insist upon greater and greater worship as time goes on. This is what the old people used to say. They always preached against those men who hearken too strongly to the words of women; who are the slaves of women. Now it may happen that a man has received many warnings as to his behavior in this regard and that he pays no attention to them. It may go so far that when he is asked to attend a war-bundle feast he will refuse to go. . . . After a while he will not be allowed to go to any feast; his wife will not let him. He will listen to the voice of his wife. His relatives will scold him, his sisters will think nothing of him. . . . Finally when he has become a real slave of his wife he will even hit his relatives if she asks him to. It is for these reasons that I warn you not to listen to women.

— *Crashing Thunder, a Winnebago Indian*

(From Paul Radin, ed.,

*Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of an American Indian*)

Now, I don't think [mentions a senator] knows anything about that phrase, "Trick Whitey, fuck up boss Charley." . . . Will he be ready? Will he understand the language? Will he understand that huge block of —

BLACKS: Look here, [Senator], tell us what's happening. Don't shuck us, you dig? SENATOR: What was that? What are they talking about This a trick or something? BLACK: Now don't jive us, tell us what's happening, be straight. SENATOR: What is this, a trick? What are they . . . what does that mean, "Be straight"? BLACK: You jive, motherfucker, you jive! AIDE: Now, Senator, please, before you make any decisions, that term may a term of endearment with these people. It doesn't always relate to hostility.

Which is the truth.

BLACK: Hey, motherfucker, you're something else, Jim! That's it! How about that? I mean we piss away a million dollars on Radio Free Europe, and don't know anything about the country within the country — don't know anything about these people.

— *Lenny Bruce*  
(From *John Cohen, ed., The Essential Lenny Bruce*)

Perhaps anthropology can give a more insightful picture of this human side of the ghetto condition than other social sciences do. . . . I will try to draw on this tradition here. . . . It is necessarily one anthropologist's view rather than the anthropological view. As Clyde Kluckhohn once said, no two anthropologists will ever see life in a community in identical terms any more than one can step twice into the same river. They will be exposed to different events, and they will go about the problem of making an orderly interpretation of the slightly disorderly complexities of human life in different ways — unless they are willing to become fettered by certain rigidities of method which will blind them to much of the human experience.

— Ulf Hannerz

*(From Soulside: Inquiries into Ghetto Culture and Community)*

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# **BLACK PLAYERS**

## Chapter One

# The Player's World

### Urban Ecology

Brock, the pimp philosopher, tied his horse to a tree and climbed a small hill. Before him lay the panorama of the Bay, and beyond that, the city of San Francisco. He picked a spot where he could be sure he would not soil his custom-made slacks, and sat down to enjoy the view.

Suddenly he spied a squirrel, which scampered down the side of the tree carrying an acorn. As Brock watched, it began to bury the acorn in the ground, storing food for the coming winter. The squirrel was helping itself, but by for-



getting where some of the acorns were buried, it would also help the tree to spread its seed.

Brock thought about the meaning of ecology, which was much in the news. The squirrel helps the tree and the tree helps the squirrel, although neither of them know what they are doing. But wasn't there more to that peculiar word, ecology, than that? He looked back at the tree. High up among the branches many kinds of birds made their homes. Sparrows, finches, jays. Near him lay a fallen branch; idly, he peeled off a piece of bark. Beetles lived inside. At the roots of the tree, near where his horse was tethered, he noticed a small hole; perhaps the burrow of a field mouse. Brock understood that each life-form seeks only its own survival, but that in doing so each contributes to the survival of other forms of life. "Each animal," he thought, "uses a different part of this tree. Each has its own territory. Each has its own particular part of the tree to exploit."

He looked out across the Bay to The City, gleaming in the clear sunshine. Out there in the busy streets, he knew, people were scurrying back and forth, "taking care of business." From where he sat, they reminded him of the bark beetles. The City, he thought, is just like the tree. It has its own different life-forms too -the politician, the legitimate businessman, the dope dealer, the whore, the pimp, the policeman. And each of them has his or her own needs, each takes from and gives to the other, each dwells within his own little world which is only a portion of the whole, a niche in the urban ecology.

Brock didn't know too much about the exchanges among the creatures of the tree, but he knew plenty about the exchanges in The City. He thought of the businessman who sells Cadillac's giving money to a prostitute in exchange for sex. She gives the money to her pimp in exchange, perhaps, for the dream of love and security. The pimp in turn (he knew too well) gives the money back to the businessman in exchange for a car, and so it goes. The night before, one of Brock's women had been arrested and he had had to pay a lawyer and a bail bondsman; today he had to get over to the courthouse to pay her fine. He wondered what would happen to the money he paid out? Would the lawyer give his share to another whore who would give it to another pimp, or would he give it to the Cadillac dealer? Would the money from the fine be used to pay the salary of the policeman who "busted" his woman?

Police, politicians, businessmen, lawyers, dope dealers, prostitutes, pimps — all are dependent on one another, yet all prey on one another. In modern urban life, none of us is immune to this kind of social network; the very life of the city is made up of such networks. Sociologists and pimp philosophers agree: it is like a gigantic game in which individual players may enter, leave, or change sides, but the game goes on, the structure persists, the pattern remains, and the cash flows back and forth as a symbol of the exchanges which are constantly taking place.

Money flows from lawbreaker to law enforcer, from illegitimate business to legitimate business and back again.

Each has its place and its function in the city's ecosystem; each plays its part in the overall pattern of interrelationships. It is farcical to pretend that only the "legitimate" recipients of money constitute the economy of a city.

But niches in the network of urban life are determined not only by economic exchanges; there is a "psychic" ecology as well, a network of mental games and emotional exchanges. When the pimp takes the money from the whore, he gets important emotional satisfactions along with the cash, just as the policeman gets special satisfaction from his job, and the car dealer from his. Each player or actor is drawn to his particular role according to the needs of his personality, as well as to the circumstances in which he finds himself.

Why do people exploit different parts of the "tree"? Why do some go up to the high branches while others burrow under the bark? An astute observer of the drug scene recently pointed out that most dope dealers make very little money compared to the enormous risks they take. If it were only money they were after, dope dealers could probably find better-paying hustles at no greater risk. However, many go into dealing because they enjoy the satisfaction of being "revolutionaries" or "outlaws"; others are attracted by the secrecy and cunning involved; while still others believe they have a "holy mission" to "turn on the world."

Brock gets psychic satisfaction out of being a pimp. He enjoys the sex games, the outrageousness, the domination of women, the aristocratic "front," the racial one-

upmanship, the battle of wits with his women and police, as well as the money. And he knows and understands his needs and satisfactions, for he is also a philosopher.

A dropout from the Black middle class, Brock is married to his White bottom woman, Katherine, and enjoys being a father to her three young sons. They live in luxury and anonymous respectability in a good suburban neighborhood in the East Bay. Brock runs his household formally, like a "king's castle," and the children and Katherine dote on his attentions and obey him with good humor. Brock's other White lady lives in an apartment in The City, where he keeps another whole wardrobe for his convenience. Any third lady he might have and does have from time to time also lives separately, and Brock considers the commuting well worth the trouble.

Not all pimps are philosophers — far from it. But every human group, every tribe, every urban subculture has one or two men who are more aware of themselves than the others. Brock is such a man. Anthropologists seek out men like Brock when they study other cultures; they call them "key informants." They provide the key to the secrets locked in the culture, these men who move within a social milieu yet can see above and beyond it. Men who can articulate the motivations, dreams, and strivings of their group, who epitomize its ethic, yet can see the whole clearly enough to help guide the inquiring stranger towards understanding.

## The Subculture of The Life

We were inquiring strangers, anthropologists. When Christina's temporary job as a dancer in San Francisco's topless bars brought us into contact with Black pimps and their prostitutes, we decided to study their subculture in a way which had not been tried before: old-fashioned participant observation.

Books on pimps and prostitutes were full of moral judgments, clinical interviews, and breast-beating confessions, but no anthropologist had entered their subculture as if it were a village in New Guinea — to settle down and live with the people for a year or two, to observe their daily behavior and talk with their wise men, to laugh with them at their jokes and foibles, to gossip with their women, to join the men in their men's house, to attend their celebrations and play with their children. To seek to learn from them; to see if they had anything to offer which could enrich our lives and our understanding.

At the time we were both graduate students in the Department of Anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley, and were well aware in those days of social protest that the study of man begins at home. We had always thought it somewhat strange that many anthropologists who are experts in the culture of East African or Southeast Asian peoples are distinctly at a disadvantage in understanding life as it is lived in their home cities.

Perhaps people in foreign lands seem more "exotic" than the mundane nitty-gritty of American cities, but we

found the subculture of Black pimps and their prostitutes or “hos” (rhymes with “rose”) to be as fascinating as any which could exist on distant shores. In their unique up-side-down world polygamy (one man with several women) is the rule, men are extremely dominant but women are the economic providers, and the ideal union is between a Black man and a White woman. Among these people, a man may spend hours a day on his hair, clothes, and toilette, while his women are out working to support the household. Almost every night, many of the men gather in special houses to partake of a rare drug. At gatherings or celebrations, the sexes rigidly separate, and the men talk only to other men while the women talk only among themselves. Yet, almost every night, these same women spend hours in intimate sexual contact with other men, most of them strangers — and towards these their own men show no jealousy. In this subculture, the paternity of children is often from “outside” the group, men are expected to show great style and creativity in their dress, the norm is to sleep in the daytime and to work at night, money and material objects are the idols, conspicuous consumption is more important than future security or provision for old age, and the selling of sex and fantasy is the major industry.

American urban subcultures are not fixed to a given spot, like the villages which anthropologists used to study among tribal peoples. When they turned their attention to cities, anthropologists were likely to choose a particular neighborhood, an ethnic enclave, which was similar to a village except that it happened to be attached to a city.

But most urban subcultures are niches in the mind, in the psyche of a city. Social scientists have defined "subculture" as "a set of conduct norms which cluster together in such a way that they can be differentiated from the broader culture of which they are a part.... Note that no people are involved in subcultures. The components of a subculture are rules of conduct . . . that define what is proper or improper for whom and under what conditions" (Cressey and Ward: 634-635). In other words, a subculture is a set of rules of behavior and the philosophy or world view back of these rules. The people themselves may be widely scattered throughout the city, yet they find each other, they know each other, they identify with each other, and they frequently gather together for parties and other social events.

It should be understood at the outset that a pimp is not, as the dictionary would have it, "a pander, a go-between in intrigues of love." He does not usually solicit customers for his ho, nor does he generally stay too close to the vicinity where she is working. Rather, the pimp is simply one who lives off the proceeds of a prostitute's activities. He is her man and is content to be the "manager" of his "star" of the street.

Pimps often call themselves "the players" and their profession "The Game," although the special subculture which surrounds The Game is also known as "The Life," an abbreviation of "The Sportin' Life" and "The Night Life." "Sportin' Life" is an old term derived from the ironic designation of pimps as "sportsmen" or aristocratic men of

leisure. In many cities across the nation one finds bars and nightclubs which cater to them with such names as "Player's Inn" and "Sportsman's Paradise."

The world of the players is quite self-contained. Players will ask a new acquaintance: "How long have you been in The Life?" — meaning, at what age did you leave the "square" or "straight" world of low-paying jobs and working family and friends to join their society. Often they speak about what is done "in The Life" as ways of behaving and believing which they know are not acceptable outside of their subculture. For all practical purposes, a player recognizes only six categories of people: players (pimps), "hos" (the pronunciation of whores) or bitches, square bitches (women outside "The Life"), cops or "rollers" (police), "tricks" or straight Johns (the prostitute's customers), and hippies and hustlers who are not "straight" and with whom the players have certain areas of commonality (for example, drugs) but who are outside The Life. There are few people except other players with whom the pimp can feel at ease and with whom he can openly discuss his life and his profession. In addition, other players support and reinforce his value system and world view.

Many of our informants were from other cities or had traveled extensively, and they reported that in every major city in the United States they were able to quickly locate other players. On several occasions during the study we

observed new players arriving on the scene from out-of-town successfully attempting to make contact with those in



The Life, and becoming fully accepted by their local fellows within a few days.

The pimp is an aristocrat among hustlers in the Black ghetto. He is admired as a “bad” culture hero (meaning “good”) because his profession incorporates all of the attributes of lower-class ghetto manhood, without its attendant poverty. He is recognized as among the best talkers or “rappers” in the hustling world, with the greatest psychological skill in “gaming off” women. He holds the reputation of a great lover, pursued by and controlling women who pay for his favors, providing him with luxuries and leisure time to drink and get high with his “partners.”

In the ghetto, the very word “pimp” does not have the stigma bestowed on it by the White middle class. Of course, most middle-class Black people are doubly horrified by the Black pimp’s existence! When Christina presented a paper on pimps a few years ago at the American Anthropological Association meetings in San Diego, one Black professor walked out of the room saying he was “sick to his stomach.” Another Black academic, a young lady, took a militant stance and argued that the study should never have been made. “White people have been telling Black people for years that they’re nothing but a bunch of pimps and prostitutes,” she said, “and we don’t need a study like this. Why don’t you study some of your disgusting White suburban wife-swappers?” We related these incidents to some of the pimps on our return from the anthropology meetings. “We know those Boojies

[bourgeois Negroes] don't want to hear about us," was their reaction, "but that's too bad: we exist!"

The Black pimp's fame and high status among lower-class Black males is assured by the fact that his income from his hos, both Black and White, originates largely from the pockets of Whitey. If "rapping," "gaming," sex, male dominance, and money to spend aren't enough, getting Whitey to foot the bill, often through the pimp's White prostitutes, is the capstone to the player's prestige.

As the profession is practiced among those players we studied and interviewed, pimping is a unique ghetto adaptation to the universal American desire for material success, without "selling out" to a "square job" for "chump change" or a way of life away from the familiar streets. Of course, there are and always have been pimps of all colors and backgrounds. But the style of Black pimps, their traditions, and the relationship of their subculture to the Black ghetto culture gives their world a special flavor. During the study we only met three White pimps, and all of them mimicked the Black style in their speech, dress, and in their adherence to "The Book," the unwritten pimp's code.

A player may have anywhere from one to twenty "ladies," although two or three is most common. While the woman is walking the streets (most prostitutes in our study were streetwalkers rather than call girls), hanging out in bars, or patrolling hotel lobbies, the player is out "on the set," moving through the "scene" of the city's night life.

Usually, whether in a friend's house or a bar, his lady knows a telephone number where he can be contacted.

Late at night, players often congregate at a "jam house," a private home or apartment where players and hustlers gather to snort cocaine ("jam"). Cocaine is prestigious to use because it is so expensive; they call it the "rich man's drug." A tiny capsule sells for twenty dollars (a "twenty-cent bag"). It is not unusual for a player who is enjoying some prosperity to snort one hundred dollars' worth of "jam" in a single night, and to treat his "partners" (friends) as well. There are elaborate rituals for snorting jam. Some players carry special little gold or silver pocket knives or spoons with which to carry the powder to their noses. Often it is carried in and served on new hundred dollar bills folded in a special way, which reinforces the luxury of the drug. One night we attended a "jam party" at which six thousand dollars' worth of cocaine went up the guests' noses.

The position of this subculture with regard to both the larger Black subculture and the still larger American culture enables one to learn much about the larger systems which may not at first be apparent. For the player's world is based on the elaboration of certain American values and certain ghetto values at the expense of other strong values of both. Thus, their preoccupation with manhood and the symbols of upward mobility (a strong ghetto characteristic) and their absorption with money and power (a strong American characteristic) are pursued at the expense of sexual and other behavioral norms held sacred by the larger

groups. Yet the very existence of *The Life* is based entirely on failures of the larger cultural entity. At the juncture between “real” and “ideal” behavior in Black and White America thrives *The Life*, the subculture of Black pimps and their prostitutes. As we explored their world we also glimpsed these larger cultures in sharp and some times unexpected focus. What began as a study of “prostitution” led us to inquire into Black ghetto hustling culture, into the nature of man and woman, and into larger questions about race, sex, and money in contemporary America.

Given the nature of the interlocking networks which make up modern urban life, it is not surprising that the study of a part should illuminate the whole. If one studied the beetles on the tree long enough, he would soon learn about the birds, and if he watched the birds’ nesting habits, he would soon find out something about the squirrel.

Brock, the pimp philosopher, rode his horse back through the Berkeley hills to the stable from which he had rented it. As he dismounted, he remembered that when he was a boy in Oklahoma he had sold rides on his pony to the local kids.

The family had moved to San Francisco when he was ten. Now twenty-four, Brock was a hard-working square salesman with a wife and child before he entered *The Life* at the age of twenty-one. He was also a junior college student, a varsity baseball star, boy scout, and Sunday School teacher. But that was before.

Brock paid the stable manager, got in his Cadillac, and drove across the bridge to The City. There was much to do this afternoon; he had to pay his bottom woman's fine and then prepare her for her long night's work. Then he would have to attend to his other woman. But after he had taken care of business and changed into his evening clothes, he thought he might drop over to "The Player's Inn" for a drink.

## Chapter Two

# The Setting: Bar Life

### **“Take A Free Peek”: “The Player’s Inn”**

In the foggy night air, Harry the barker shifted from one foot to the other in an attempt to keep warm and awake. “Right this way, folks,” he chanted. “No door charge, no minimum, just good drinks at low prices and the prettiest topless girls on the Street. Come on, take a free peek.” He

waved his flashlight grandly towards the entrance in a well-worn gesture of welcome.

The businessman from Phoenix stepped inside to check it out. A dingy, low-down kind of place. In a muted red spotlight, a lithe young woman with very few clothes on was dancing on a small platform which could almost pass for a stage. Gracefully and energetically she moved to the overwhelming jukebox music, an insistent, driving soul song:

*I'm gonna do all the things for you  
A man wants a girl to do, baby.  
I'd sacrifice for you  
I'd even do wrong for you, baby ...  
I'm gonna make you love me  
Yes I will, yes I will  
I'm gonna make you love me  
Yes I will, yes I will ... \**

A pretty young waitress in brief costume came up to him, holding a bar tray. "Would you like a table, sir?" He nodded and followed her towards the stage. As his eyes adjusted to the dim light, he perceived that there were eight or ten girls, many of them Black, standing around the bar. One or two were dancing in place to the music; others were quietly nursing their drinks or talking with White men in business suits; some were laughing and joking with one another. It also seemed that there were a number of sharply dressed Black men clustered at the far end of the bar, but it was too dim to see clearly.

Mr. Phoenix sat down at a table near the stage and his attention returned to the undulating body of the dancer, only to be distracted by the waitress asking what he wanted to drink. With his eyes fixed on the dancer and his ears battered by the jukebox, he ignored her

for the moment. What did he want to drink? "Oh, sorry," he mumbled. "Make it Scotch on the rocks."

As he waited for the drink, he surveyed the dancer more carefully, and his mind drifted to vague, sexy thoughts. He didn't see the theatrical-looking Black man who had just entered the bar until the man began to approach the stage.

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His hair had been straightened and styled, and his powder-blue Edwardian suit was set off by alligator shoes and a beautiful but absolutely outrageous blue silk scarf. Half dancing, the Black man gracefully eased his way to the stage and began talking loudly to the dancer, so that she could hear him over the music:

"Hey, Momma, comere and lemme talk some shit to you. You lookin' good up there, girl. Say, what chu doin' here, a fine fox like you? You could be makin' plenty money 'steada shakin' yo' ass for chump change! You got an old man? Oh yeah? Well, that ain't nothin'. Is he Black?"

The girl smiled and laughed, but acted as though she had heard that approach a hundred times, as indeed she had.

Mr. Phoenix watched the man go past the stage to the far end of the bar, where he appeared to discover some friends of his. They laughed and slapped his hand, and the newcomer settled down on a barstool and began talking with the Black men and a bearded young White man he had not noticed before.

When the dancer took her break, Mr. Phoenix decided to leave "The Player's Inn" in order to sample some of the other night spots. He left without the slightest clue that he had just witnessed an anthropological study in progress. How could he know that the woman on the stage was preparing her doctoral thesis for the University of California at Berkeley and that the young man he had noticed at the end of the bar was her anthropologist husband?



“The Player’s Inn” is a composite of many bars in the Tenderloin and North Beach areas of San Francisco which provided ideal field situations for the kind of urban research we wanted to do. Sooner or later virtually every Black pimp in the Bay Area passed through these places, and contacts made there fanned out into Oakland, the Fillmore, the Tenderloin, and suburban San Francisco. Players who were new in town quickly found their way to these hangouts, and were accepted as “regulars” within a few weeks. “The Player’s Inn” was owned and operated by a “soulful” young White man named Eddie, a tall, handsome, powerfully muscled enigma of quick temper and infectious humor. He was a “tough guy,” a loner who broke everybody’s rules and laughed at their opinions of him. He was the last frontiersman without a frontier, a Western badman who was born too late to hijack the stage from Dodge. He had therefore decided to work hard and full-time at his own self-destruction, with the help of increasing doses of heroin and cocaine.

He loved the flash, style, and humor of the Black players and valued them highly as “running partners” and customers. In his speech, dress, and body movements Eddie imitated the Black manner and was good enough at it to be accepted by the players as a “crazy dude,” a “bad motherfucker” who had “plenty, plenty, plenty soul.” He ran the place as he damn well pleased, which invariably led to trouble with the police.

Eddie was committed to partying and “acting crazy” as a way of life. Attempts by other club owners to get him to “clean up his place” (translation: “get rid of the niggers”)

were greeted by him with total contempt. He antagonized police, other club owners, and anyone else he considered "square," and reveled in his own defiant stance. After two

in the morning, when bars are supposed to be clear of patrons, he would lock the door, draw the curtains, and party with the players, laughing, loud-talking, snorting cocaine, and serving drinks after hours. When he particularly felt like letting off steam he would take out one of two pistols he kept for the purpose and blast a few holes in the wall. After a few years, the wall panels were thoroughly perforated.

One of his favorite targets was the clock, which he destroyed and replaced several times. We mentioned to him once that he couldn't stop time and keep his youth forever by shooting the clock, and he agreed that his method of "killing time" had profound psychological symbolism for him.

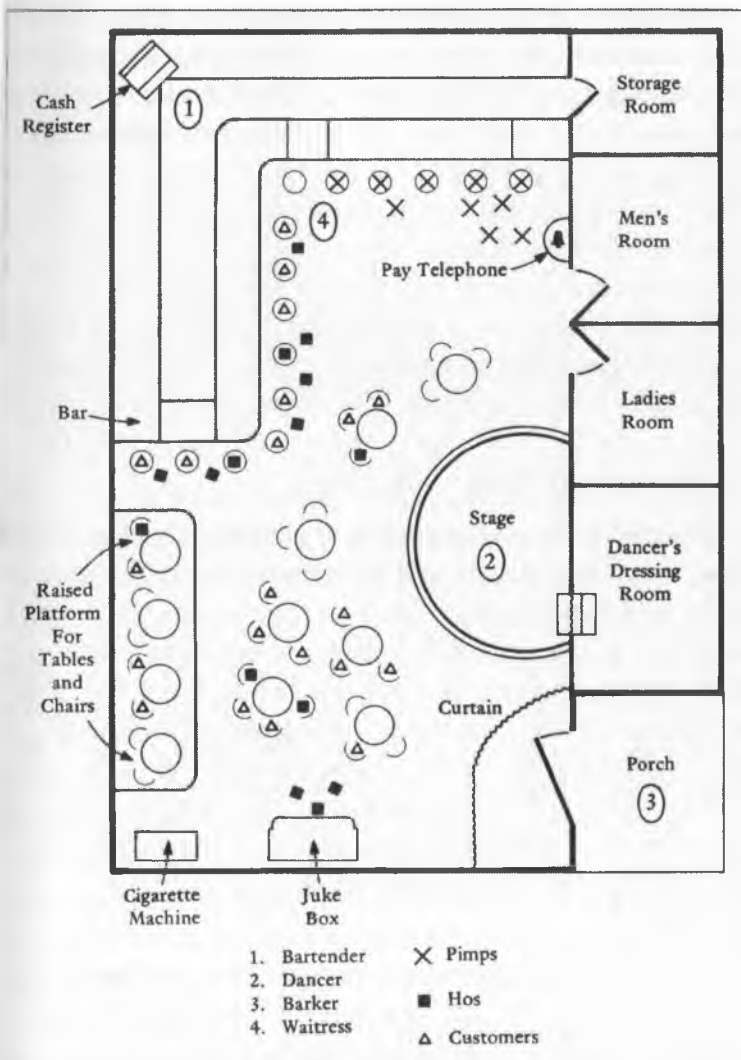
"Ready Eddie," as he was known, presided over what he proudly dubbed "the Toilet of the Street." He had no intention of running a square or respectable joint and was furious at the predictable official attempts to force him into compliance. "They just want to get my friends out of here," he would bellow, "they don't want no niggers on their street. Well, fuck them punks in the asshole!" This attitude was well appreciated and respected by the players, who are periodically forced to move from one hangout to the next by official pressure on bar owners. During our study some of the bars were subjected to increasing scrutiny by the police, some were closed, and several received many citations against their liquor licenses.

In their heyday, the bars were ideal for our purposes because they were not only hangouts for Black pimps, but for their Black and White prostitutes as well. Many of the men spend from one third to one half of their day drinking in bars and socializing while the women hustle the straight customers or "tricks." Pimps and hos are supposed to have no contact with one another in the bars or anywhere that a ho is "on the walk" or "stroll" (working), and will walk by each other without any sign of recognition. If a ho is addressed by a pimp (not her own) in violation of this code she may safely ignore him as he is "out of line."

In many bars, one finds only the men or the women, since men don't usually frequent the same bar where their ladies are working. The reasons for this rule are that the trick is not supposed to be given any indication that the ho even has a pimp, and also that if one's woman should get "busted" (arrested), her man does not want to be implicated. Pimping is a felony whereas soliciting is only a misdemeanor. In certain cases, if the pimp were to get busted with his ho there might be no one to post bail, for some neglect their traditional obligation of placing a large sum of money into the hands of a bail bondsman beforehand.

Since pandering is virtually unheard of in this society of pimps and streetwalkers, there is no contact between pimps and the potential clients of their women. The prostitutes are entirely on their own with their "tricks" (clients). It would be impossible legally to arrest a pimp for merely being on the premises where a prostitute was soliciting unless either he were observed receiving money from her (that is, receiving the proceeds from prostitution, which they are

careful to avoid) , or unless she pointed him out to the arresting officer as her pimp and “signed a paper” to that effect in return for leniency, which rarely happens. Nevertheless, most pimps purposely don’t follow their women around, not only to keep on the safe side, but also because they can’t be bothered with the details of her working life. Their job is to prepare the woman for her nightly adventures; in the street she is on her own. It was difficult, therefore, to ascertain who belonged to whom at the beginning of the study.



The Player's Inn

When both pimps and hos were present in a bar, the sexes would divide the room into territories (see page 22). Prostitutes gathered in the section of the bar nearest the door, where they could be easily seen by the tricks, while the pimps sat at the back of the bar. Only when members of one group were absent would members of the other group sit outside their usual areas. Once a ho whom we knew from elsewhere came to visit at a bar and she sat on the wrong side. Immediately she was approached by two pimps who didn't know her and assumed that she was fair game. She quickly analyzed the social division of the room and moved to the "ho side" where she was fair game only for the tricks and off limits to the pimps.

Streetwalkers, who comprise almost all of the hos we knew, make their contacts by doing just that, walking the streets, and they spend less of their time in bars. Often they are simply refused admittance because bar owners who allow them on the premises are watched by the police and are loath to put their businesses in jeopardy. Because of Eddie's fondness for players, "The Player's Inn" was an exception, and it was possible to observe many hours of interaction between pimps, hos, and tricks there and in other places where pimps and hos were permitted to congregate.

Hos are continually nervous about the possibility of arrest, and need each other's support to withstand the strain. Christina, at times, functioned quite naturally as that support after she had struck up acquaintanceships with many of the women. Most of them were friendly to her, and chatted openly about their pimps, their children, and their

various problems and triumphs. Often they asked her if she had spotted any plainclothesmen in the bar, which customers were spending money and tipping well, and who had been in and out that night.

At the back of the room, where the pimps gathered, the conversation often revolved around fine points of The Game, how much cocaine had been snorted the night before, men's fashions, or playful expressions of masculinity and camaraderie. Men would boast and toast and lie and goad each other into gales of laughter and rounds of hand-slapping. Sometimes one would be selling or merely "holding" jam (cocaine) or weed (marijuana), and would invite a few of his fellows into one of the back rooms for "a taste." One's status or standing with the men was clearly revealed by such an invitation — or the lack of one.

Pimps are often hated and feared, and there are few public places in which they can relax, "let it all hang out," and talk "pimp talk" loudly and without fear of censure. The freedom to do that was one of the chief attractions of their regular hangouts. In addition, they picked up the latest gossip and news, attempted to "catch" the dancers and waitresses, showed off their new outfits, made dope scores, and sometimes bought "hot" (stolen) items from itinerant fences who occasionally wandered in to peddle their wares, usually items of clothing, watches, or men's accessories.

Richard often sat with the men and invited some of them to our apartment after closing time for tape sessions. Many accepted readily, often explaining that they wanted to give it to us "straight," since other people's versions of The Life couldn't be trusted. Given each man's belief that

he was the only one who really knew what the subculture was about, the degree of consistency, repetition, and agreement between many informants is quite remarkable. During the two years of our study, we came to know and inter view about sixty men and women in The Life.

## **Field Strategy and Methodology**

Initially, Christina went to work as a dancer to help support us through graduate school. Within a few weeks, however, we realized the unique possibilities for research that the setting offered. The company of pimps and prostitutes would have been impossible to cultivate if we had presented ourselves as anthropological researchers. Anyone who asks questions is suspect as a police informer and anyone who presents himself in an Establishment role is in addition disliked for being "straight." It was therefore an ideal opportunity to test the participant-observer method in an American urban situation. Christina's non-straight, semi-hustling role as a barmaid was marginally acceptable to the players. After all, she was supporting her "old man," which is identical to the economic structure of their lives. It was also entirely acceptable to have a dancer's "old man" hanging around the place with no obvious business to attend to.

Still, it took about six months before we had learned to talk enough "game" to earn their respect as non-squares, and for suspicions that we might be "police" to evaporate. To be a participant-observer in an illegal occupational subculture is fraught with the hazard of being caught in the middle between the police and the study subjects, and so



we had to tread a fine line in our personal behavior in order to maintain our safety as well as our objectivity.

The field situation included primarily bars and secondarily other social gathering places such as restaurants where pimps and hos gather after work, jam houses where mainly men "snort" cocaine and smoke marijuana, private fried chicken parties in homes attended by twenty to thirty people, and public parties advertised (sometimes over the radio on a "soul" station) as "Player's Night" and held at large nightclubs. We also encountered and observed pimps and hos at soul music performances, in Black night spots, during informal visits to our apartment or their apartments, hotel or motel rooms, at the city jail, and joyriding at night in fancy Cadillacs.

Almost all of these contacts were made after 2 A.M. and meant that we too had to sleep a good part of the day and stay awake all night. To facilitate social contact and for our own convenience, we moved from Berkeley to an apartment in North Beach, a section of San Francisco clustered with bars and nightclubs. This strategy worked quite efficiently although it sometimes meant we would be awakened at 4 A.M. for a "rap session," and had to be in condition to work a tape recorder, and perhaps serve breakfast.

Once the confidence of a few respected individuals had been gained, word spread that we were "cool" (trustworthy) and introductions to others were easy. Occasionally pimps and hos whom Christina didn't know surprised her by calling her by name; the length of her employment as a

dancer began to make us well-known fixtures of the local scene. As suspicions gradually faded, we often served as a directory and message service; individuals would ask if so-and-so had been in that night, when the cops had been in last, or whether there were any tricks around. When business was slow, we would sit with either the women or the men, listen to the latest news and, whenever it was appropriate, steer the conversation to particular data which we wanted to collect. We became friendly with people and would then tell them about the research, saying always that we were writing a book about *The Life*. Since most pimps and hos have no idea what an anthropologist is, it was simpler and more direct to present ourselves as "writers."

We would then invite people to our nearby apartment to tape interviews. Usually we took care to keep the microphone on a table at some distance from the informant so that conversation flowed freely, but we never used a hidden mike. In this fashion we collected one hundred and forty-eight hours of taped interviews. But since the real cultural rules are those which are acted out — not just talked about — interviews are less important than observations of people interacting with one another under the normal circumstances of their lives. Observation of actual behavior must be compared with what informants say they do.

We did not pay informant's fees, although we were often told that this would be appropriate based on the informant's high valuation of his own vast knowledge. Each male would usually begin by stating that he "wasn't gonna give up no game," presuming that we wished him to initiate us into *The Life*. But then, enamored of his own position as

a teacher, he would give forth hours and hours of pimp philosophy. This was usually done with the idea in the back of his mind that if he could sufficiently impress Christina she would leave her husband "who ain't no pimp" (said either flatly or derogatorily) and choose to work for him. Given the fact that she is an attractive young woman, this basis for interaction was inevitable and despite her firm protestations to the contrary, each interview she conducted would usually end with the pimp reminding her that "if you ever feel like choosing a real man and switching over to the Black side, I'm available." Because she sought them out and engaged them in lengthy conversations, often when her man was not present, they assumed that she was making herself available. Since the rule in their subculture is that unavailable women do not put themselves in that position, it would not be reasonable to expect the men to act otherwise.

## **Overcoming Obstacles to Research**

In terms of "game," we were pimping off the pimps, as do all anthropologists, which some of the players were quick to point out. But with their characteristic honesty about such matters, they found our objectives understandable and even admirable in terms of their own world view.

Some refused to give us any biographical information, claiming that their life stories were worth a million dollars and that they weren't going to sell themselves cheap. Furthermore, some insisted that they, like Iceberg Slim, were going to write their own autobiographies someday. The promise of anonymity and the assurance that we weren't

going to tell anyone person's story, but rather that every one's life was going to be generalized about, did not dissuade them. Nevertheless, we gained sufficient biographical data even from these gamesters during informal conversation. Several informants stated that if we were really going to tell the world about the "Sportin' Life" we had better tell it like it is and that they were going to help us so that it would be accurate. Almost all understood the significance of the study in terms of race and sex in America, and a few were eager to explain the pimp world view as their contribution to social understanding. All of them, it seemed, enjoyed instructing a well-educated but naive White couple about the nitty-gritty of The Life.

The problem of verification was never completely solved (although all statements are data), but self-serving statements or outright lies could be cross-checked by questioning others. For instance, when we first met Craig, he sought to impress us by stating in answer to a question that he had three hos and all of them were White. We subsequently asked one of the girls in the bar which hos were with this pimp and she told us that he formerly had two hos but that the White one had left him, and that his main lady was a light-skinned Black woman whom we already knew. From another pimp we learned that this lady had been with the man for nine years and that many other girls had come and gone in that time, some of them White and some of them Black. Craig was then confronted with this contradiction of his boast, and he was more careful in his future statements. In a similar manner it was possible to check most statements about the present life situations of

our informants, and about biographical information in the few cases where pimps had known each other for several years or in other cities.

Our taped interviews with the women are limited as few of them were willing to come to the apartment when they could either be working or spending time with their men. Also, their schedules were planned on a day-to-day and even hour-by-hour basis, so that making a date that wasn't business was almost impossible. Although virtually all invitations were accepted, many didn't show up because "something else was happening." However, we were able to overcome even this deficiency to a large extent by direct observations of the women in many social contexts and by making notes on untapped conversations from memory.

Probably the only way we could have obtained as much taped data on the women as on the men would have been by paying them informant's fees, which we were unable to do. This would have gotten them off the hook with their pimps, who frown on their women socializing when they should be out earning money. Another obstacle to getting the women alone was the pimp's fear that we would subvert their minds. To overcome this problem would have meant conducting the interview without the pimp's knowledge. There would probably have been nights when a ho wasn't making any money or the "heat was on" (police were making arrests) and she couldn't go home broke, when conditions would have been ideal for such paid confidential interviews. Unfortunately or fortunately, funds were lacking for putting this strategy into operation.

Despite these problems, Christina's interactions with Black and White prostitutes produced some of the best and most honest data in the study because they were not gaming on her for anything as the men invariably were. Since Richard rarely spoke at length with the women, they had few opportunities to "game off" him. It was therefore ideal that we were able to work as a team, since many sex games were thereby eliminated and we were able to develop warm and mutually respectful relationships with members of our respective sexes.

### Chapter Three

# Talking Game and Slapping Hands

Anthropologists who go off to study a culture in some distant part of the world are usually prepared to learn a whole new language. We expected no such problem in studying an American urban subculture; after all, both we and the players speak American English. Surely, any American could understand the following:

The Black woman is so strong to signification and so jive to society.

She was stopping everything but the telephone poles, but her stable sister broke luck before she did.

After the git-down time, me and my partner goin' to the jam house for a little blow.

For those who do not understand, we will translate these examples in a moment. They are phrased in Black Ghetto English, a variant of American English which is virtually unknown to most White Americans, and which has only recently come under the scrutiny of linguists. The specialized vocabulary of the Black players is used, of course, by individuals speaking Black Ghetto English.

When we first heard the cacophony of sounds in "The Player's Inn" -the wide tonal ranges of voices, the tinkle of glasses, the blaring jukebox, the slapping of hands, the raucous high-pitched laughter, and especially the stream of unfamiliar words, phrases, and sentence constructions

— we knew we were going to have to learn a new "language" after all. During the first few weeks we could barely understand a word of barroom conversation.

In his autobiography, Malcolm X speaks with scorn of "downtown [Negro] leaders" who claimed to speak for the ghetto, but who could not even understand ghetto language. Once Malcolm was in Harlem with one of these Black politicians, when a ghetto hustler approached them and began to address them in "street talk." Malcolm understood the man perfectly, and adds he "never would have given it another thought, except that this downtown 'leader' was standing, staring at that hustler, looking as if he'd just heard Sanskrit" (Malcolm X: 310). Malcolm went on to



provide his companion with a translation into Standard English; as promised, it is time for our own translation of the brief examples given above.

The first sentence expresses the sentiment that Black women are troublemakers and delight in putting on airs. To signify means to instigate or stir up trouble, and jive is

phoniness or pretentiousness. In the second example, we are told about a prostitute who was walking the streets soliciting or stopping passersby, but could not find any customers. One of her pimp's other whores, her stable sister, found her first customer of the night (broke luck) before our hapless heroine. The final example is a pimp's statement that after his woman has gotten out in the street on time to begin her evening's work (the git-down time), he and his good friend intend to snort some cocaine at a private apartment where pimps gather to buy cocaine (jam or blow), and to sniff the drug in a convivial social atmosphere.

Black Ghetto English is a complex variant of American English, containing local terms of "down-home" or Southern rural origin, and terms, constructions, and pronunciations peculiar to the urban ghettos, all unified in a cohesive and recognizable style, and accompanied by characteristic kinesics signals ("body language"). Some of the ghetto language is deliberately obscure so that conversations may be made unintelligible to White people. "Pimp talk" is even more restricted, so that even a "square soul brother" will not catch the gist of certain conversations.

Of course, the language of the pimp's special world and that of the ghetto overlap, as does the language of the ghetto and the American language of the majority. Words and phrases constantly "filter up" from ghetto speech to the more affluent levels of society, and recent events have accelerated this process. Even during the brief period of the study, many "ghettoisms" became dispersed through the mass media, mostly via the entertainment world and the writings and speeches of Black militants. At the time of this writing, phrases such as "right on," "soul sister," "sock it to me," and "rap" have become common coin in the American language.

**pimps and hos** Pimps are called pimps, Mack men, or players. Pimp has ambivalent connotations, whereas in Standard usage the connotations are entirely pejorative. Some pimps are obviously embarrassed by the term and prefer the euphemism player. Others are delighted by the honesty and outrageousness of pimp.

In a predominantly White bar (not among the main locations of the study), a young, stylishly dressed Black man stood with some White businessmen. A young woman sitting on one of the barstools asked a White man what he did for a living. "I'm in real estate," was the reply. "And what do you do?" the young Black man was asked. He replied very loudly and with great good humor, "I'm a PIMP!" which caused glasses to clink and heads to turn throughout the bar.

Another example of this exuberant and purposely outrageous use of the term was the Broadway hustler who wore a lapel pin proclaiming PIMP POWER! A ghetto clothing store displayed a hand-lettered sign in the window: PIMP SOCKS \$1.50. And paraphrasing the James Brown "Black Is Beautiful" song, some Black men in a nightclub audience sang, "Say it loud - I'm a pimp and I'm proud!"

From these examples of usage it is clear that pimp has different connotations in Ghetto English than in Standard English. In Standard English, it generally means one who solicits for his woman and connotes sleaziness and degradation. Black pimps never solicit for their women if they are "true pimps," and call a man who does a cigarette pimp, popcorn pimp, or chile pimp. These terms are contemptuous; the latter is also derogatory of Chicanos. A simple pimp is one who is not successful, a loser who will never rise economically above day-to-day survival. In the ghetto, positive connotations to the word pimp include images of glamour, fine clothes, big cars, nightclubs, and flashy "good times."

Pimpin' as a verb also means the broader activity of using human emotions to get money. Thus it is good Ghetto English to say that a child who cajoles his mother out of extra allowance money is pimpin' off his mother. A woman who has been abused by several pimps in succession is said to be pimp-crazy. As an adjective, pimpin' may be applied to various items of dress favored by pimps (for example, pimp shades — dark sunglasses) or to certain styles, such as pimpin' socks, pimpin' shoes, etc: A few years ago, pimpin' shoes meant expensive alligator shoes with a long and narrow cut. More recently the term has been applied to pastel-colored loafers in many hues and to multicolored boots.

The idea of a player is unclear without the accompanying term and concept of game, about which we will have much more to say in later chapters. A player is playing a game, or more commonly, running a game. Sometimes game is used as a verb with a preposition: Thus, "he was gaming off the bitch" or "don't run no game on me." Here the meaning is similar to that of "con game," but these usages also refer to the conception of life as a series of games, the most basic of which is the survival game. The selling of

sexual favors by women is often called the pussy game (or sometimes just The Game) and is conceived to be of several levels. The more psychological adroitness employed, the higher the game. For example, a pimp who takes his pimping money and opens a legitimate real estate office is said to have gone on to higher game.

He is then no longer a pimp but a player, perhaps even a boss (excellent, tops) player. According to Iceberg Slim, a famous old-time pimp whom we interviewed, our informant's usage of player as a euphemistic synonym for pimp is a recent development. During the thirties in Chicago, he said, a player was a man who could move in rich circles, cross the color line, and gain his money by wit, guile, and charm – an elegant con man. But the term can also be used to describe anyone (a political figure, for example) who plays his game well and wins.

During the course of the study, several public “parties” were held in a large San Francisco nightclub. These were advertised as “Player’s Night” in local newspapers and radio advertisements, and were well attended by pimps and lovers of the nightlife, as well as by prominent Black businessmen and even a few political leaders. One of the disc jockeys on an Oakland radio soul station called himself “Doug the Player” – a pun on the fact that he plays records for his listeners.

Mack man is short for Mackerel man; the shortened form is in most common use. The term is synonymous with pimp, but connotes more of the “working side” of pimping. The initial line a pimp uses in recruiting a girl is often referred to as Mack or Mack talk, for example, “He sure can Mack ‘em down in five minutes.” Thomas Kochman, who explores the meaning of many general street terms in his article “Rapping in the Ghetto,” has written about the pimp’s reputation as the best rapper on the street. A pimp who uses a great deal of charm and little violence or fear is

called a sweet Mack or sugar pimp. One who uses brutality and threats is a gorilla pimp or hard Mack.

It is something of a mystery how "mackerel" ever be came associated with pimps. A few informants referred to the odor of the female sexual parts as bearing some resemblance to that of fish. One informant even told a joke about how a man's wife was stolen by a pimp, and the man was delayed in discovering his loss by a few mackerel the pimp had left in the wife's place. A similar story tells of the blind man who, in passing by a fish market, tipped his hat and said, "Good evening, ladies." This is curiously reminiscent of Australian rhyming slang: "Fish and shrimp, that's a pimp." It seems likely that the term originated from the French maquereau, a pimp. Probably the evolution of this term occurred in New Orleans, one of the origin cities of Black pimping in America, where French language influences remain strong.

The most common terms for women in *The Life* are bitches, ladies, and hos. Bitch involves many connotations. It is, of course, allied to White middle-class usage, but is far from synonymous with it. Sometimes it is used insultingly or as a curse, but often it is used casually and without malice as some Whites matter-of-factly use "nigger" when speaking of Black people. Thus used, it simply implies that the woman is the member of a servile class and that this is the natural order of things, for example, "He's a boss player, got six bitches in his stable." Once in a bar a strange woman came up to Christina, watched her dance, and smilingly announced, "You're a bad bitch." It took her a moment's reflection to realize that this was a high compliment.

Recently, several of the younger players have substituted the euphemism witch. This is probably a local and recent development linked to the renewed popularity of the occult. When one young man was asked if there was any difference between the two he

replied, "It takes a dog to catch a bitch; but it takes a warlock to catch a witch."

Ho is a Southern rural pronunciation of "whore," but is assiduously used even by Black men whose English is close to Standard American. One night the Black comedian, Redd Foxx, who has many fans from the pimp's world (he sometimes announces during his act that he was once a pimp himself) did the following routine in a local nightclub:

In the South people say things a little differently than they do up here. For instance, they say "do'," D-O. That's what you open. They say "flo'," that's F-L-O, means what you walk on. They say "sto'," S-T-o, that means where you buy something. They say "mo'," spelled M-O, means you ain't had enough. And they say "ho'," H-O, and that means -just the same as it means up here.

During another part of his act, a girl in the front row laughed loudly. "Listen to her laugh," he said, " 'ho, ho, ho.' I didn't ask what you did for a living, dear."

Ladies is the polite form, and carries the connotations of "ladies of the evening" and sportin' lady, that is, a kind of gallant euphemism. "This is Sheila, one of my ladies." A common variant is old lady, as in "she's my old lady," a term of endearment implying family ties even if not recognized by law. This latter usage has been recently adopted by White "hip" couples to refer to mates they live with but to whom they are not legally married. The term, of course, is an old one which antedates these current usages.

**game terms** As part of the discussion of the term player it was necessary to define game and some of its usages. To talk game is to discuss various aspects of pimping and whoring such as how to

maintain control over a woman, how to get more money out of a trick, how to steer clear of arrests, and so on. Many players who have been busted have told us that "the joint [prison] is the best place to learn game. That's all I heard in there, game, game, game." Talkin' game generally refers to shoptalk between pimps. When an older or more experienced player instructs or advises a younger man, he is running down game to him.

To get your game together usually involves the presentation of self in a particular way which requires certain props. For the pimp these may consist of flashy clothes, an expensive car, a roll of money. Although he often desires these things for their own sake or as symbols of "success," he is also aware that they constitute his front, the props he needs to make the proper impression. Erecting this front is known as getting your game together, getting it together, or getting your front uptight.

Tricking is performing a sex act for money. The trick is the customer, often called the John by White call girls. A common term in old-fashioned whorehouses is johnwalker, meaning a man who stands by ready to "handle" Johns if they give the girls any trouble. Trick is used both as a verb and a noun and also in the phrase to turn a trick, which means the same as tricking. The polite form is to have a date, to turn a date, or dating. It is interesting that the word trick should be used for the act of prostitution when one reflects on the more common Standard meaning. By implication, one is literally tricking a man by taking money for doing what women should do for free.

Working from a book means that the ho has a supply of tricks' names, addresses, and telephone numbers written in a book, and therefore does not walk the streets in search of business. These books are gradually built up by women and come to be of value in themselves. If a girl is leaving town,

for example, the pimp might sell her book to one of his colleagues for several thousand dollars. Working from a book should not be confused with The Book, which refers to an oral tradition containing the rules and techniques of the pussy game. Pimp in ' by The Book means following closely the traditions and techniques which have been transmitted orally until a few years ago when they were recorded for the first time in 1967 by Iceberg Slim, the pseudonymous author of *Pimp: The Story of My Life*. This book, which sets forth a good deal of The Book, was read by the majority of pimps we met.

The Game sometimes refers to prostitution and pimping; at other times it is taken to mean all of life. Similarly, the world of pimps, prostitutes, and hustlers is often called The Life, which is short for The Sportin' Life or The Night Life. In all major cities one finds bars with names like The Nitelife, The Players, Sportsman's Paradise, etc. A prostitute would not say, "I've been playing The Game for ten years," but rather, "I've been in The Life ten years." A man would usually say, "I've been gaming all my life," or "I've been a player for ten years." A woman who has the makings of a good prostitute will elicit the compliment, "She's got game in her." Gaming is usually on or off someone, for example, "Don't be gaming on me, go game off the tricks." To play past something in The Game is to get beyond or around an obstacle. Thus, if someone attempts phony excuses one should "play past that shit" and find out the real reasons behind their actions. If there is a serious psychological obstacle (guilt, recriminations), you can try to brush off the matter by claiming that "I can play



past that bullshit because my thoughts are bigger than that.” Strong game or heavy game is well thought out and masterfully executed. Reverse game means turning the tables on someone.

Many players have several ladies, who constitute their stable. Usually the player relies on one to help him recruit new additions, known as stable sisters. This, his key lady, is called the bottom woman. It is her responsibility to help instruct the new recruits, smooth over squabbles, and generally keep things running smoothly. Often the pimp has a special relationship with the bottom woman, and they stay together for years while transient additions come and go. (Without her, the “bottom” would fall out of things.) The process of taking a square broad (one who is not a prostitute) and teaching her game is called turning her out. This term is also used as a noun, as in “she was my second turn-out.” Apparently the expression derives from turning someone out into the street or the bricks.

A particularly interesting use of language is involved in the game terms taking care of business, taking an application, to qualify and to fire. Hustlers often speak of taking care of business, which is frequently abbreviated as TCB. This can mean anything from selling some marijuana to having to slap a woman who is “out of line,” and is a recognition that the “illegitimate” world involves necessary “business,” just like the “legit” world which excludes them. In this vein, a pimp says he “took a bitch’s application to see if she was qualified,” meaning he questioned her thoroughly to determine whether she was a bona fide whore. Getting rid of a woman is often expressed: “I had to fire that

bitch.” These “business” terms borrowed from the straight world are sometimes used with a tone of ironic humor.

**male-female encounters** In addition to hos, ladies, and bitches, women are also called working broads, professional women, hookers, stallions (if tall), and foxes. The last two are common in Ghetto English and do not apply specifically to hos. If used properly, none of these would be taken as insults by those in The Life.

Insults or derogatory terms include bitch (this is entirely dependent on tone and context), tramp, and outlaw. A nothin ‘ass bitch is a woman who will not make any money or, if she does, will not give it to a pimp. One night an attractive Black girl came into a bar in evening clothes and began flirting with some of the handsome young pimps. She sought only sexual adventure; they flirted back but were firm in their demands for money. Soon she became offended and left. As she did, one of them called out after her — “nothin’ ass bitch!” — to the laughter of his fellows. As this insult was uttered, the girl seemed suddenly filled with anger and rage, attesting to the strength of the insult.

A tramp is a girl who will have intercourse “with any body,” perhaps even without getting paid for it. An outlaw is a ho without a proper pimp. A humorous designation for a woman who cares more for sex than for money is come-freak (also used as a verb), a term sometimes also applied to men.

To pull or to catch a woman is to capture her and make her your own, for example, “I’m gonna pull [or catch] that fine bitch.”

The verb to cop is also used in this context, generalized from its meaning to cop anything, to take. Cop can mean anything from "buy it" to "steal it"; the basic idea is "to gain possession of." Making the pitch to a girl is also called hitting on her. If a pimp finds he is hitting on a bitch successfully he announces to her that he is ready to be chosen, and asks that she present him with her choosing money, that is, money that she will give him for the honor of

joining his stable. A frequent type of verbal encounter using these terms follows:

HE: You gon' choose me? SHE: I might. HE: Then get your choosin' money ready 'cause I don't chippy around. [In this context, chippy means to have intercourse without getting paid.] SHE: I don't have too much bread right now, but ... HE: Well, you come around when you get some, and it better be right, to show me you're qualified.

Once the woman has joined the pimp's stable, he establishes a routine for her. The time she is supposed to be down on the street trying to catch tricks is known as the git-down time. A woman who makes her money by simply having intercourse with as many men as possible is known as a flat-backer. She does not attempt to become involved with tricks in any way, will not go out to dinner or socialize with them, and will not play the role of a trick's analyst or girlfriend. Women who make all their money flat-backing are said to be deficient in game. Women who have lesbian tendencies or who cater to lesbians are called freaks. Pimping "hard" on a woman or using violence to keep her in line is called shoving a foot up her ass. Often a pimp knows in advance that the woman will only stay with

him for a comparatively short time, so he tries to get as much money out of her as he can before she blows (leaves him). This technique is known as short money or cop and blow.

Terms for sexual attraction include to have one's nose open, a reference to the dilated nostrils which accompany passion. Sometimes the image is related directly to an aroused bull, as in "She had his nose so wide open he was pawing at the ground." Good storytellers build fantastic hyperboles on such verbal images, for example, "This bitch had my nose so wide open you could drive two freight trains and a aircraft carrier through it."

An important part of "hitting on" a woman is a particular style of verbal encounter called talking shit, talking that talk, or talking trash. This manner of publicly accosting a woman and attempting to interest her with a fast-talking line of patter is by no means restricted to pimps, but is a common mode of ghetto encounter. A young man or several of them, on passing one or more attractive young women on the street, might begin by announcing: "Hey there, you fine fox! Come here, come on over here, let me talk some trash to you." If the girl is interested she will stop and listen to the "rap" or she might merely slow down her walk. "Young lady," the man might call out, "if beauty was a minute, you'd be a hour. Mmm-mmm. Ain't you as sweet as mother's love." If she is not interested she will continue to look straight ahead and not slacken her pace. It is not uncommon for the man to follow her for a little distance, shouting after her to stop and listen or, if the battle seems lost before it has begun, to loose a volley of insults, such as, "Next time I see you, you gonna have to pay if you want to talk to me." This type of encounter is often accompanied with great good humor on both sides.

Some girls have developed a series of quick comebacks or

insulting answers. If a pretty girl is "slick" in this manner she wins the grudging respect of the man by outtalking him. A humorous example of this type of encounter follows:

A pretty young girl was walking along Broadway Street when a man began to follow her slowly in his automobile.

"Hey, li'l Mamma," he shouted. "Come here and let me talk some trash to you." The girl continued walking. The man followed her a little distance. "You sure do have a fine body," he said. "I'd like to take that body home with me and fuck it all night long." "No, you wouldn't," she called over her shoulder. "I wouldn't? What do you mean I wouldn't? How do you know that?" "Because," the girl replied, "it would drive you insane and I'd have to shoot you to get you off of it." Defeated, the man drove away.

It should also be noted, however, that this type of encounter is more often concerned with the fun of the interaction itself or with impressing one's male friends than with the serious business of "catching." A pimp who "plays by The Book" would never "lower" himself in this manner by putting himself in a position to be insulted or rejected. The pimp who is "taking care of business" often prefers less flamboyant one-to-one situations for "hitting on" women and leaves the stylin' (strutting and showing off) to what he calls "half-ass pimps" and "would-be pimps."

**male-male encounters** In addition to the terms pimp, player, and Mack man, men in *The Life* are also known by more common Ghetto designations such as cats, dudes, old men, and sometimes suckers. This last is often used respectfully, but usually of someone the speaker does not know well, as in, "Why he so bad, that sucker'll waste [kill] you in a minute."

A crucial Ghetto concept which finds expression in many ways

is manhood, a term which one finds in very frequent use among the men. By now, it is well known that one of the major frustrations of Black men in America has been their relegation to positions subordinate to White men in the social and economic spheres. The abhorred term boy is a fighting word. We are all familiar in White linguistic usage with the phenomena of sixty-year-old "boys" and "colored girls" who have been working for a family for forty years. Several blues songs, such as Big Bill Broonzy's "Lord, Lord, How Long Will It Take Me to Be a Man," make the point that the Black male is never allowed to take possession of his manhood by the White society. In his autobiography, *Nigger*, Dick Gregory writes: When you're a little kid you can press your nose against a plate-glass window and tell yourself you are going to grow up some day and be able to go inside. You can tell yourself you are going to grow up some day and be a man, and do all the things a man can do. These are nice dreams for kids. But when you walk down the street and see your track team friends on the other side of that plate-glass window, where you can't go, you can't even tell yourself to wait until you grow up. You are already a man, and knowing that there is no dream just strips your manhood away and brings you all the way back down to the gutter. (Gregory: 88-89.)

To be a man means to have the respect of others. Black soul singer Aretha Franklin's record of the song "Respect" was enormously successful with Black audiences. In the White society, respect is to a large degree institutionalized. You must respect a man because he is a judge or a professor or a corporate executive. In the ghetto, without the institutionalization of respect, a man must earn respect by his own personal qualities, including the ability to defend himself physically. In informal gatherings in a bar or on the

street corner the men will constantly be testing each member of the group. A man will be bluffed to see if he is a coward, teased to see if he has humor and stability, jostled with to see if he has wit and humor, trapped to see if he is a policeman or informer. In addition to boy (which is so terrible it is almost never used), the worst verbal insults to manhood are punk, fruit, and trick, in approximately that order. The ubiquitous term motherfucker, once a serious curse, is now an all-purpose word whose meaning is entirely dependent on tone and context, as in, "I love that motherfucker." Popcorn is a humorous insult which may be translated as "lightweight."

To call a man a trick is to say that he can be controlled by women, and that he pays for what a real man should get for free. The term is bantered with, though, since most players realize that there is a "trick" side in everyone. They talk of boss players (top-notch pimps) who had the weakness of giving some money away to women. Fruit is the label applied to homosexuals. Although it impugns a man's virility and is generally abhorred, it is still not quite so bad as punk. Punk is a prison word which has a very definite meaning. When a young man arrives in prison he is challenged personally and often brutalized physically by the inmates who want to have anal intercourse with him. If he cannot fend off these men by fighting or other means, he becomes a punk, defined as "someone who takes it in the ass." Any man of standing will be ready to fight another who calls him by this name, unless they are playing the "Dozens," in which case the reply might be:

*Punk? You call me a . . . ? Lookie here, Jack  
I'm a punk's brother,*

*And if you don't believe me  
Ask your mother.*

One aspect of manhood is to be bad, which is really to be good. That is, a bad nigger is one who is defined as "bad" by the values of White society and is therefore good, because he is asserting his manhood. If he refuses to bow before the Man in any way, if he is ready to "beat on" anyone who insults him, he is plenty bad or a bad mother fucker, or he is said to have heart (courage of a lion).

Where fruit, boy, and punk are insults held in common with other ghetto men, trick is strictly a player's insult. To be able to control a woman is their source of livelihood and self-esteem; the highest value is placed on this ability. For "to control a woman," they tell you, "a man has to learn to control himself, and that takes discipline." By this is meant that he has to exercise great control over his sexual impulses and his behavior with women. A man who can control his emotions, sexual and otherwise, is said to be cold or cold-blooded. The term is frequently used also to describe someone who is indifferent to the feelings of others.

**how to talk black and influence people with your jive self** It is not possible to explore ghetto language fully in one chapter – the subject deserves a book all its own – but here are a few more miscellaneous examples which occurred frequently in the speech of our informants.

A poop-butt is a lazy person, a "drag-ass." Git-go is the start or beginning of something, for example, "I knew you was a poop-butt from the git-go."

The fast track is the tough, fast-paced hustling world of the big cities back East, such as New York or Chicago. California pimpin' is the relaxed style of pimping peculiar to the



Golden State, also known as the slow track. It is sometimes said that "they pimp hard in the East," but that California is the home of soft pimpin'. It is well to bear this in mind, by the way, in reading this book. The people we studied have their own local version of The Life which may vary from the customs in other regions of the country.

Cookies are the prizes to be won in a game, and the term usually refers to money. The phrase to get behind means an involvement or commitment, while behind may refer to the cause of something. Thus,

I got busted behind some reefer.  
(I was arrested for possession of marijuana.)

BUT

I could get behind some partying tonight. (I wish someone would invite me to a party because I'm in a party mood.)

Something that is off the wall is cheap or second-rate. The expression comes from the mass-production of clothing, ready to wear off the rack. With the addition of these miscellaneous terms to his knowledge of Black Ghetto English, the reader ought to be able to understand the following perfectly:

I been out here on the slow track since I got busted behind some broad back East. She brought me plenty cookies, but I shoulda dug she was trouble from the git-go. Now I got me a poop-butt hippie chick who can't get behind turning tricks; and she's always got some off the wall excuse why not.

The term nigger is often used by the men in many con -

texts, from affection to insult. Its use as an insult is often associated with poverty, as in, "Don't talk to me, I got diamonds on my finger, nigger."

**slip-slappin' and talkin' shit** Some of the more interesting communications between men are more concerned with gesture, hand-slapping, and the style of discourse than with what is "said" in words. One gains the impression that Black people in this country are more finely tuned to "body language" than are most Whites. It is possible that the Black man has been lied to so often that he has had to learn to "play past" words very quickly in order to arrive at the truth of a situation. A White American college student on entering a room full of socializing professors might concentrate his energies on trying to understand words and phrases which are unfamiliar to him. A young ghetto Black man in the same situation would be more likely to try to unravel quickly the games and human interactions behind the words. He wants to know what is going on in the room in terms of the people in it and their objectives rather than in merely "understanding" the semantic content of what is being said. The ability to do this successfully is called "street knowledge."

That is why, when Black men gather at parties or in bars, what they say may make very little "sense." They call it talking shit, which is a linguistic recognition that words are worthless excrement compared to more significant aspects of communicative encounters. They may be telling elaborate lies ("And if I'm lyin', I'm flyin'") or repeating current phrases at each other ("Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud!") or coarsely insulting one another

("You ain't Black, you just a kind of shit-color"). But the real communication is through the emotional tone, the feelings of hostility, challenge, respect, or affection. Very often, much affection is engendered in these sessions and some of the foulest insult matches are covers for a kind of public love making between friends.

This emotional communication is bolstered and partially conveyed through physical contact, particularly the slapping of hands, sometimes called slip-slappin'. You slap a man's hand when you greet him and when you part. You slap it to express agreement with something he has said or pleasure at a joke or witticism, or unity as a brother. If a man extends his hand palm up and you won't slap it, you either disagree strongly with something he has just said or you really dislike that man (except, of course, when this takes place between close friends who can break such rules with impunity) . To some, slip-slappin' is definitely "low-class." One night in the bar one player of that opinion was offered a hand to slap. He took the other player's hand in the conventional (that is, "White") manner. "I won't slap your hand," he said, "but I'll shake it like a gentleman." "Oh you will, huh?" was the reply. "Then I ain't gone slap with you no mo'."

## Chapter Four

# Playing by The Book: Man on Top

In any game, there must be rules and guidelines for the players. The Book is a body of tradition which contains the rules of The Game. Passed on to each new generation by word of mouth, it is the pimp's unwritten Bible. If The Book were ever written down and reduced to "commandments," the first five might look like this:

- I. Man is the Lord God. He shall have dominion over women and control them; also, he shall stand with his fellow men against any bitch who puts herself before man.

II. Thou shalt have no other gods before money; for money buys affection, respect, and acceptance.

III. Thou shalt never fornicate in vain, without getting paid; for fair trade is no robbery.

Thou shalt seek to avoid direct confrontation with thine enemy, and shalt trick or outwit him before resorting to violence.

Thou shalt not steal from thy friends. But thou shalt rob thine enemies blind. A man can't fool with the Golden Rule in a crowd that don't play fair.

It is not always possible to play The Game strictly by The Book, nor is The Book completely consistent, which, as in any social system, makes for ambiguity and stress. When the real culture strays too often from the ideal, gradual change occurs in the ideal. Nevertheless, it was possible to collect from every informant the essential rules of behavior which could then be compared and contrasted with the actual behavior as we observed it. Essentially, The Book provides a blueprint for a male-dominated society and a rationale for wresting all control over males from women. Ironically, this condition is achieved by making woman's full-time occupation the control of men who are outside the subculture. In addition, The Book contains the basic techniques for establishing and maintaining male control, and an ideology which provides a model of the world which is compatible with The Life. Let us explore The Book's major features along with the points of stress and change.

## Male Dominance: "Men Have to Control"

**respect, rituals, and conspicuous control** First and foremost, the pimp must be in complete control of his women; this control is made conspicuous to others by a series of little rituals which express symbolically his woman's attitude. When in the company of others she must take special pains to treat him with absolute deference and respect. She must light his cigarettes, respond to his every whim immediately, and never, never contradict him. In fact, a ho is strictly not supposed to speak in the company of pimps unless spoken to.

Although the last point was rarely verbalized, it was almost always observed by us to be the case. If she is asked for a comment, she is supposed cheerfully and graciously to agree exactly with the opinions and philosophy of her man. He will praise her on such occasions as his model student and treat her in turn with respect as a fine example of womanhood. When at the suburban house of a pimp with an exceptional grasp of The Game who is also a fine photographer, the following taped comment was made in the presence of his White lady.

JAMES: Notice how quiet she is? You know why she's quiet, huh? Cause I'm talking, that's why she's quiet. That's why she's quiet, not because she has nothing to say. She could probably come in and start talking and mystify you-all for days' cause I think the girl's fantastic; she got two degrees and she's an excellent photographer, better than I am.

She's as smart as I am or smarter, but she's a quiet, humble beautiful woman because she knows the position of her place, she likes it. If she didn't like it she'd rebel and go someplace else. And she can rebel when she wants to. [To his woman] You go on and rebel, go on, because that's my insurance. Because I can walk away, you understand.

James is a seasoned player and philosopher of The Game who was raised in Harlem and, like Brock, came to San Francisco with his mother and stepfather when he was ten years old. He is self-educated far beyond his formal schooling (high school), and owns a successful photography supply store. Suave, thoughtful, and well read, he is a highly articulate and perceptive observer of people, but tends to be somewhat impatient and egotistic in his manner. He and his main lady, Letitia, a petite and unusual beauty with dark auburn hair and a porcelain complexion, live in a wood-paneled house overlooking the Bay in Sausalito.

Later on in the morning James did ask Letitia to expound on some subject, and she obliged with an educated and articulate reply which, in this case, was more than a mouthing of his ideas and showed that she was a creative thinker as well. Often the education and family background of a player's ho is inflated by him to increase his prestige. In this instance, however, no such inflation was necessary. Yet her main function during our visit was to listen attentively, support her man, and serve us heated apple turnovers whenever he asked her. Opportunities for males to demonstrate their control in this manner usually occur among new acquaintances or in the presence

of one or more strangers. A more relaxed atmosphere prevails at informal gatherings of friends, and a woman may sometimes joke about her man's demands – but she never refuses to fulfill them. “Empty the ashtrays” or “Get some more potato chips” become deliberate ritualistic exhibitions, and a ho would be in big trouble if she embarrassed her man by either ignoring his requests or making excuses (“I’m tired, honey,” or worse still, “You’re closer, baby, can’t you get it?”). No matter who is really controlling whom in their private lives, in public the pimp must maintain a front of complete control.

He is the host and his woman does his bidding; only in doing so is she considered a perfect hostess. These petty social rituals are intended to symbolize that the woman would do anything asked of her by her man, at any time, any place.

**male solidarity: man is for man is for man** Other pimps are watchful of the degree of control that each of them demonstrates and will publicly object to any breach of this etiquette with comments such as, “That bitch better watch her ass or she gonna get beat [whupped, fired, etc.],” or perhaps merely a raised eyebrow. The pimp whose control is in question is equally tuned in to subtle clues from his fellows, and will respond by giving his woman a more forceful threat or glance she cannot ignore.

This support of another pimp by his peers is both a signal that he is in danger of losing respect, and a show of male solidarity which the ho is not strong enough to with stand. Her loyalty to her man and her fear of his joining with other pimps against her are both evoked. Male dominance is therefore reinforced by every pimp backing up every other pimp. Such outside assistance is unnecessary, however, if a pimp has his ho properly under control, if they “got their shit together at home.”



The following incident from our field notes illustrates an extreme example of male solidarity. It concerns Eldorado Eddie, so named because of his penchant for El Dorado Cadillacs. Eldorado was born and raised in Chicago and turned out there when he was sixteen. He is a leader and can be the essence of dignity, but is not above outrageous burlesque and playing the bar clown when he is high. He wears his hair in the popular loose curly process and looks ten years younger than his thirty-five years, although his maturity and ruthlessness as a pimp show when he is challenged.

A highly respected player, Eldorado Eddie, took his White ho into the dancer's dressing room and began to shout at her and slap her around. This was loud enough to be heard by me [C.M.] up on the stage in the middle of the club. As I danced, the six pimps sitting at the back of the bar near the dressing room began to clap and whistle loudly, seemingly at me, but in reality to cover the noise of the beating from the ears of the straight customers. This is a perfect example of male solidarity among the pimps.

When Eddie emerged and joined the others they joked, after a brief moment of nervous expectation of his first words, which were some version of, "Well, I took care of that bitch." In contrast, when his ho emerged a little later she walked straight out the door of the club, avoiding eye contact with any of the hos present. They silently watched her leave; some didn't even watch. Not one of them felt it proper to comfort her in any way. Perhaps none of them dared to approach her with her pimp present and some of theirs as well. This also illustrates the secondary position that female solidarity takes to that of males.

While the above example illustrates a type of behavior which frequently occurs, male solidarity is much more commonly expressed by verbal approval of a man's "rap" to a woman by the

other men who happen to be present. Even if they are in competition for the same girl they will back each other up in putting the girl down, telling her how much money she could make in *The Life*, not allowing her to disrespect one of them in the presence of the others, and backing one another up on questions of the player's world view.

Sometimes the anthropologist learns the rules of a society by making social blunders. Here is one from our field notes:

Last night James invited me [R.M.] for a late ride in his Cadillac with a new ho he was on the verge of turning out to work for him. I wondered why he wanted me along; it soon became clear he sought some male solidarity. He asked me various questions for the girl's benefit in an attempt to build himself up. Trying to be helpful, I said that if she were looking for a worthy man to help support and "do his thing," she couldn't choose better than James. I could tell from James's attitude and expression that I had said the wrong thing. Rather than talk about how she could help him, I had been expected to tell her how very lucky she was that James was even considering being her man.

Another incident illustrates how male solidarity is used to correct deviations from the norm. This story involves Silk, a friendly-looking, light-skinned player who gets his way with sweetness, romance, and beguiling ways. He was born and raised in Oakland by a respectable, religious, middle-class Black family much like Brock's, and is in his early twenties. Silk doesn't say much, but he laughs, flirts, and jokes a lot when he has had a few drinks. Mainly, he just sits there lookin' good in his white silk cowboy shirts with red hearts on the pockets, which he wears with Western hat and boots. Silk had his "white on white" Cadillac EI

Dorado decorated with red leather appliquéd hearts on the white leather upholstery. Here is the incident from our field notes.

After closing time in the bar, Christina was engaged in conversation with a man, and I [R.M.] called her to tell her something. "Christina!" She didn't hear me or postponed answering while continuing her conversation. Again I interrupted. "Christina!" She looked at me and gestured to say, "Just a minute, I'm almost through." After a few more seconds she turned to me and said, "Yes?"

Shortly thereafter I was approached by Silk, who, unbeknownst to me, had been carefully scrutinizing the interaction. He whispered in my ear in a tone of genuine helpfulness, "The bitch is supposed to answer you the first time even if she talkin' to the President. If you let her get away with that shit, you gon' blow [lose her]."

**deference to males, subservient females** A pimp should be a god to his ladies, according to *The Book*. "When we pimped," said Iceberg Slim, "there really was a difference: from the HEART, from the absolute heart! . . . Every morning for thirty years I'm looking in the mirror. I never made a mistake, never got 'Georgiaed' [taken advantage of sexually without receiving money]. I'm looking in the mirror. 'No mistakes! Clear day! Oh, you slick pimp motherfucker.' Used to talk to myself, like a psychotic. You're a psychotic when you're a good pimp. You gotta be. And as I said, it projects, man. Who can stand, I mean what lowly little whore can stand, who can resist GOD? For Chrissake!"

An old-style pimp in the Chicago ghetto during the 1930's, Iceberg lived a hard-and-fast life which was almost cut short by seven years in the penitentiary. Now middle-aged and still good-

looking, he lives a quiet, sequestered life in Los Angeles with his wife and young children. He is a sensitive and perceptive observer of the world from which he came, and his autobiography *Pimp: The Story of My Life* is a paperback best-seller which is widely read by people in *The Life*. Iceberg is delighted that the joys of square family life are now his, with his pimping career long behind him and a continuing career as a writer ahead. His comments often serve as a baseline against which we may view the remarks of younger informants still in *The Life*. Today, as in Iceberg's day, although *The Book* has undergone some change and relaxation of the rules, it is still said that a pimp is supposed to be a god to his woman:

JAMES: Each one thinks their man is God, do you understand? How beautiful that is? I told you about this cat who had ... this is what starts leaning my mind in that direction. I started seeing things anew. He went horse back riding with two of his ladies and the horse reared up at him. The horse said [makes a horse sound] and they were explaining this whole scene to me, you know, at the Fairfield restaurant. They say, "Can you imagine, a horse ran after my man, wasn't that something? He might have killed that horse."

Now here they are thinking their man is so great he can just take a blow in his hand and kill a horse and knock him down and "How dare you harass me, horse, I'm a MAN!" That's how much they respect and love and dug him as a man at that time.

The same girl one year and a half later said to me just two weeks ago, "I hate his mouth, he's ugly, he's horrible, how could I have liked him at all?" But the time she loved him, baby, she would even put a horse against her man. A powerful, muscled, symmetrically beautifully constructed horse with all the power in the world against a single, nobody, pip-squeak man who ain't

nothing. But that was her god, her man.

And that's what they got over some women. . . isn't that true? That's the pimp game. It's a good foundation. Now what you do with the foundation is where you are as people. People get hung up and they start to evolve into animals and gangsters and so-called slick people and all that, and destroying each other. But the pimp game has a foundation that everybody should learn about.

Godlike male control is not exclusively a front for others to see. It is a reality in daily life, as the following report by a female informant suggests.

TANYA: When my brother [who is a pimp] wakes up in the morning he can't stand to see her look ugly. In the first place they don't sleep together, they got twin beds. She sleep in one bed and he sleep in the other bed, you know, and when he, before he gets up in the morning she better have on her makeup cause he can't stand her without no makeup, you know. She gets up in the morning now putting on her shit, you know, getting all dressed up just for him to wake up. And the first thing he say is "Where's my breakfast?" or "Where's my money?" or something, you know, and if she don't have it, then that's an ass-kicking.

**male self-control: reversing the pussy game** One of the basic mechanisms of control which the pimp must master in order to manage women is the discipline of his own libido. A retired pimp who was once very successful described the training required to become a pimp, that is, a "real man," in the following allegory: "Man goes out on the streets, some bitch comes up, rubs against him, he turns away.

He goes out the second night some bitch rubs against him, he turns away. He goes out the third night and some bitch rubs against him and he turns away. He goes out the fourth night, he's a MAN."

A man is partially defined as one who can control a woman by mental dominance and also by physical force, if necessary, and one of the ways of gaining this control is to control one's own sexual desires. The following incident occurred when a pimp was in a bar and, as is typical, was "interviewing" women (trying to "catch" or "pull" a new ho). Of course, this is the man's own version of the conversation and should be taken with a grain of salt, but we commonly observed interactions of the type he describes.

The speaker is Steve, a handsome ex-GI with a deceptively warm smile and a clean-cut natural who is new at The Game, but is a fast learner. His early marriage dissolved when Steve returned from overseas duty to find his wife living with another man on his Army paycheck. At that time he resolved never to be a trick again, and entered The Game soon after. His dream is to become a blues guitarist, "but it takes bread to do it in the style I enjoy; I ain't gonna starve in no garret in the meantime, that's for sure," says Steve.

STEVE: See, you got so many squares out there trying to pimp, it's pathetic. Would-be pimps. You know what I mean? Simple pimp, that's what we call them. Simple pimp. And they let that one thing, they let that sex hang them up. Like I say, when you get in bed with that woman, you on her level. But there has to come some stability from within man to know when he has pleased her enough, but only after he has been pleased. You see what I mean? Number one is always him; most women, they can't understand this. They feel that they should be number one. "My Momma said that you're supposed to do blip-de-bloop

for me and blip-de-blop for you. . .” And I say, “Well, young lady, you and your Momma should live together, there’s nothing I can do with you.”

And then she’ll give me, “Well, I ain’t never gonna support a man like this, and I ain’t never done a man like this.” I say, “Well, you know what you have to do – you don’t have to support me. You don’t even have to be around me. I don’t dance, I’m just sitting here, having a nice drink of wine. It was nice meeting you, what is your name? My name is Steve. Thank you. Good-bye.”

I don’t even go through no changes, you see. Because she don’t even want to hear me, that label is on me. I’m clean, I look good, you know what I mean? Uh, she sees men, she like me, she wants me for sex. She’d

rather shoot me right to the bed. “Come on, let’s go right to the bed.” I know I could make it good for her, but I say, “Hey, if I make it good for you, then what are you getting? You’re getting me, but what am I getting from you?” She said, “Well, you’re getting my pussy.”

I said, “My God, do you think that’s enough? Do you really think that’s enough? I can go in the shower, baby, get me some soap and get me the same thing and watch a picture of anybody. Now what are you truly giving me? Nothing! So I’m not going to give myself up just because you said you got a good pussy. I’ve got a good fist, for that matter, you know, or a good arm, if I could put it up there. [Laughter]

“Now if we gonna go to bed, we gonna go to bed because this is what we both want to do, you know. But I’ve explained to you, you’ve already asked me do I or don’t I work, “What do you do for a living?” I say, “Young lady, young lady,” I say, “now I’m a small businessman. I’m a body salesman.” She say, “Oh, you work for a car firm?” [Laughter] I say, “Oh yes, I do, I work for a car firm.”

And after you tell them what you are, after you tell, oh wow, you'd be surprised at the conversation. If I could possibly take a tape recorder somewhere. . . But see, all men are not alike. And a pimp, as far as the pimps are concerned, those who are really pimping, have considered sex as something that a broad is supposed to do to him; that is what the ordinary man cannot do.

In other words, "A pimp keeps his dick in his pocket," which is a double entendre meaning (1) he controls his sexual desire, and (2) his dick is where the money is. The pimp has completely reversed the man-pursuing-woman game, which is characterized by the woman questioning the man to see if he has anything to offer her. As one lady described the standard interaction:

"What do you do for a living?" "I'm a banker." "Fine, here's some pussy. Now give me your name, security, and ALL your money!"

In *The Game*, the man interviews the ladies to see if they are willing to give him their money. "I don't give up no dick unless I get PAID" is one of the most common pimp phrases.

**pimping is a "skull" game** As Iceberg Slim put it, "pimping isn't a sex game; it's a skull game. A good pimp doesn't get paid for screwing," he writes in his autobiography, "he gets his payoff for always having the right thing to say to a whore right on lightning tap." While the pimps agree with his statement, they also point out that man's ultimate basis for controlling women is his superior physical strength, which must also be used on occasion:

J AMES: It stems from the biological aspect, now doesn't it? I mean I'm bigger than you, I can beat your ass, can't I? And I can beat her ass, he can beat your ass. If you can't beat your own woman,



you're in pretty bad shape. [Laughs] Can you imagine your wife beating you up every day? A woman is always looking for a real man to

control her life-force, and she go from there, and she be consistent also, mental, spiritual, and physical. She is happy because she knows her role. The strongest-headed woman will bow before a man who really knows what he is doing, but it's a responsibility.

James told the following story to show the interplay between mental and physical dominance; it has all the earmarks of a player's classic:

JAMES: A little pimp – hey, I saw this when I was a kid – a pimp on 112th Street and Fifth – five foot four, had a woman – wife, old lady, whore – that was five foot nine and weighed about two hundred and fifty pounds, and he weighed about a hundred forty-five pounds, soaking wet, baby. So they all stood on the corner mouthing off their masculinity and what they could make their women do, and what they could get out of her, and what they could do tonight [in terms of money that they expected to get that night] and all this. And this big lady comes by going on the set and he says, “Hey, bitch, did you make any money?” She said, “Naw, I didn't make you no money, man, I'm tired. I'm beat.”

And he said, “Look, bitch” – his friends are watchin' – he said, “Go out and make me some money!” She said, “Fuck you, I ain't goin' nowhere.” He slaps her. She knocks him down. [Loud laughter] Knocks him down on the ground. His friends say [falsetto], “You ain't no man, ha ha. Your old lady knocked you down.” He gets up off the ground, looks at his friends and says, “I'll be back, fellas.” Say, “Come on home,

I'm sorry, honey," and "Come on," she jerks him off on home.

CHRISTINA: Oh, that was the end of him?

JAMES: No, wait a minute. That's the way it got started. We can define what manliness is. Now in this case he lost biologically; the bitch had him beat two to one.

CHRISTINA: That's basic.

JAMES: He went home with her and told her he was sorry, apologized to her, got very humble, kissed her ass. They started drinking some alcohol and got fucked up [drunk]. They got fucked up so bad she passed out. He tied her legs to the goddamn bedposts top and bottom. Put her arms here and her legs there, you know, and woke her up. He said, "Wake up, honey." [Giggles] She woke up "What's wrong?" He said, "Bitch, you slapped me in front of my friends. You hurt my feelings, you make me look small. I'm gonna beat your ass with this hanger, your pussy with this hanger." Took a hanger and beat her in the pussy with it. Beat her until she cried, "Daddy, I won't do it again, I swear, Daddy, I'll never do it again." [Laughs with delight at the trick while telling it. ] He made her promise she would never hurt him like

that again in front of his friends. He said, "I'm not going to unstrap you until you promise you're not going to retaliate against me no more. No eye for an eye shit. I'm your man, that's all there is to it, and I let you up and you act like you supposed to act, woman!" And she said, "Please let me up, Daddy. You got me where you want me, you beat my pussy red with the hanger."

He let her up and went back down to the corner and slapped her in front of his friends, knocked her down, and said, "Get out there, bitch!" She went out there and went to work and they lived happily ever after. Regained his status among his friends and everything else. It's a very beautiful story. RICHARD: That was a great story.

JAMES: He knew what it was. It wasn't necessarily ... it didn't have to be physical. RICHARD: Where did that story come from? JAMES: In Chicago. I saw it, I saw her. RICHARD: Well, you didn't see him beat her pussy with a hanger.

JAMES: I followed them home and watched him. I was a peep freak. I ain't bullshittin'. They lived in the god-damn, down in the basement and a window was open [mumbles] fascinated the shit out of me. I couldn't get over it. I say, "Wow, now what he gonna do?" I wanted to find out what he was going to do so I followed him home. I was just a little kid. The classic elements of the story are, first, the moral of

the victory of male mental dominance wherein the man tricked a woman who was physically stronger than he into a vulnerable position; second the beating of the female genitals or buttocks with a wire clothes hanger, which is still heard of in gossip and is mentioned prominently in Iceberg Slim's books; and third, the traditional insistence that the teller of the story was a witness to the incident, or, in other cases, was the author of a story which is really oral tradition. Pimps are supreme egotists; the truth comes from their mouths alone. Everyone else is "shucking and jiving," "ain't no pimp," is a "would-be," "half-ass," or "simple pimp" except the man you are talking to. This practice is not only a matter of ego, as it is also good business not to recommend your competitors.

**the pimp as trickster hero** Although the above story is about a physical beating, its main point is that the man outwitted his woman. He gained physical dominance only by tricking her into a situation in which she became vulnerable, and is thereby reminiscent of classic "trickster" tales. These abound in West Africa, as the stories of Anonsi the Spider and other supernatural beings, which were transmuted into the Br'er Rabbit tales of American Negro folklore. We are not trying to insist on cultural continuity from slave days since evidence is lacking, but it is well worth noting that the "trickster" has been and continues to be a much-admired theme in Black culture. Hustlers, con men, and pimps are certainly tricksters in the classic sense. One might argue that oppressed or colonialized peoples have always admired the trickster as one who gets his way while avoiding open and dangerous confrontations with his enemies.

The Black man has two "enemies" who are trying to control him: Whitey and woman. Whitey because he is Black, and woman because he is a man. How wonderful, then, to solve both problems by controlling a White woman! The trickster reverses both her games. He turns the tables on her Whiteness by appealing to her sympathy for the underdog or her passion for "forbidden fruit." He turns the tables on her "pussy power" by disavowing his sexual needs for her. Thus, a pimp who has turned out a White woman has broken the bank in a game rigged against him. Like Br'er Rabbit in the Tarbaby tale, he has gained his objective by using his wits to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

**mechanisms and spheres of male control sum-**

**marized** In summary, the mechanisms of male control over women among the players are mental, physical, and social structural. All mechanisms function to reverse the American man-woman game so that the female is put in the position of petitioner for the male's sexual favors. Male solidarity helps the pimp keep his game together. If the mental games fail, violence is an effective and ever-present threat in the fabric of this ideally male dominated culture, although it is seen as a last resort.

There are seven principal spheres of male control: the training and guidance which a pimp provides for his woman as she becomes increasingly proficient at her trade, including setting her minimum acceptable earning per night; the maintenance of her proper role as a submissive woman by insisting on money in return for sex and affection, by insisting that she be an attentive handmaiden to his every demand, and by requiring that she show conspicuous respect for him and his friends in social situations and that she never divulge private information or behave in any way which might embarrass or show disloyalty to him; the ability to keep the peace in a stable of two or more women; the complete control of how the money is spent, what the woman's allowance is, how much will be saved and for what purpose or future goal; the decisions regarding where they will live and with whom (adults and children) , and decisions about where and when his women might occasionally be sent to work outside The City (Las Vegas, Seattle, Denver, etc.) ; the decisions surrounding an arrest, such as which lawyer to use, which bail bondsman, how much money will be spent on the case, and

whether to leave the ho sitting in jail or not; and finally, the decision whether to hire or fire a ho.

## **Ambiguity, Stress, and Change: Act Like You S'pose to**

**male responsibility and female expectations** The Book is weak on defining the ho's rights, and it might be said that she hasn't any rights at all. However, she may legitimately have expectations that the pimp will efficiently discharge his responsibilities of control as defined

by The Book:

JAMES: When you get women with all responsibility, with all the goods in their names and controlling the money, they take over. Them motherfucking bitches take over. When they take over, they unhappy with themselves. Then they make you unhappy, then there's disaster. And that's stupid to get into that kinda shit.

Men have to control. But don't fuck up, man, because there's responsibility in controlling. This is the catch. The other men who have the tendency to want to control women and money, they go out gambling. Compulsive gamblers, habitual drinkers, dope freaks, accident prone. They fuck up.

Then the women are disillusioned. They say, "Where are the men at?" There aren't too many men out there, that's the catch, there aren't many. There aren't many who even want to assume responsibility of a total woman rather than a piece of pussy. They want just the pussy, that little round hole, and they reject the rest of the female. They don't want the rest of it. These men are really the tricks. They can't tolerate the rest. I like to control the whole

woman.

A ho may expect that her man will efficiently discharge his responsibilities of control by, first, having something to teach her about The Game and being able to advise her when she is confused; second, being a wise and just head of his kingdom, running it with consideration for the reasonable needs and desires of his women and, possibly, children; third, not "throwing away" the money, thereby lowering her motivation to earn it; fourth, protecting her from physical harm; and fifth, providing bail money for her if she gets arrested -provided she has been doing a good enough job to merit being "sprung from the joint." Her expectations are that he will "take care of business" (TCB) if she will only bring him the money and behave in the proper womanly fashion.

How much is a ho entitled to expect from her man? That, say the pimps, is directly related to her own behavior. "The proper way to treat a ho," Brock explained, "depends on how she treats you, pure and simple."

**a point of disagreement: chipping** According to the women, The Book says a pimp must never "chippy" (make love to a woman for the pleasure of it) . Exchanging sex for money only was an ironclad rule of the earlier, orthodox version of The Book. By clinging to it the women are more conservative than the men in the face of cultural change. This is not surprising to the anthropologist, since conservatism among women is common in many societies undergoing change.

On this point the pimps are divided; some do chippy when the opportunity arises, and others never "give up any dick without being paid." Some pimps were even leery of being seen alone with Christina in a restaurant or of coming to our apartment for fear that

their women would accuse them of "being out of pocket" if they heard about it. Even if the woman believed that her pimp wasn't chipping, she might resent his spending the money on a meal for another woman who wasn't paying him anything. Of course, most players spend a good deal of their time partying while their women are "out there" working, and buy meals or drinks for anyone they please. Often they will treat six or seven of their fellows to a round of drinks in a bar. This is difficult for some of the women to accept, and they sometimes attempt to criticize such behavior.

The excuse the men use is that they aren't merely having fun, but are taking care of business. Men they are seen with are "partners" or "business associates," and women are potential "turn-outs" applying for the job of prostitute.

A business expense here and there in the line of interviewing prospects is seen as perfectly justifiable. Some hos will put up with it seen in this light, but many of them have no intention of helping their pimp expand his stable. They would prefer that he date a ho or square broad, get all her money that he can lay his hands on, and never see her again. Jealousy and possessiveness are not confined to square society, and even when the social structure is turned upside down it remains one of the biggest problems with which the pimp has to contend.

We were once regaled by Tenderloin Tim's account of how his desire to chippy brought disaster to his wallet. About twenty-two years old, Tim has a round baby face, a broad-shouldered muscular six-foot frame, and an elaborate conked hairdo. He seems very genial and personable, but is sadistic towards women in the classic manner of the old-style pimp. Sometimes he proclaims himself "a museum piece, like the dinosaurs" because of his strict adherence to a cold-hearted pimp's code which is regarded as *passé* by many people in The Life.



Tim had gone out of town for a few days, during which he had made love to a girl in Texas. "She had the claps," he said, "and those Texas claps got bigger, monster bugs." When he returned, he transmitted the disease to his three hos, who were compelled not to work for a few weeks while they were under treatment. "That chippy cost me damn near four thousand dollars," he moaned. "And that's how I found out that if you are true to The Game, The Game will be true to you."

Silk insisted that the women were justified in demanding fidelity to the rules of The Book: "It isn't fair to chippy with a square broad when my lady is out there working and bringing me the money." Brock once took Christina to breakfast after work at 2 A.M., and later expressed disdain for a pimp who accompanied them when the man spotted his woman streetwalking outside the restaurant and became nervous. Brock was also being observed, but he explained that his partner "should have his shit together at home" so that he would never be afraid of his women

regardless of what he did. The chipping rule is therefore an ambiguous one in the current Book, and a very definite point of male-female conflict.

**male dominance and the stable** Managing the stable is an important sphere of male control. This social situation is fraught with the double dangers of jealousy among the women and the formation of female coalitions against the pimp. A pimp who plays according to The Book always attempts to turn the tables, to "reverse game." Thus he manipulates the jealousy and competitiveness so that they are productive of money and good behavior. His general technique is to use a psychological arsenal of divisive ploys to prevent the formation of coalitions, and insure that each

ho needs his support more than she does that of her stable sisters. Then he attempts to reinforce existing competitiveness and channel jealousies into a contest. The winner of the contest, the “star,” will be the woman who brings in the most money and is the most obedient.

HOUSEHOLD	COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF PEOPLE
<i>Household #1</i>	0-2 transient hos bottom woman = pimp = bottom woman's blood + pimp's sister     sister who is number-     two lady child by   child another man	6-8
<i>Household #2</i>	bottom woman = pimp = number-two lady     + pimp's blood child   child brother	6
<i>Household #3</i>	bottom woman = pimp = number-two lady     (lives in separate 2 children   apartment) + bottom woman's blood brother	6
<i>Household #4</i>	bottom woman = pimp = number-two lady     + pimp's friend 3 children   child (a pimp without by different   a ho) men (2 "trick babies")	7
<i>Household #5</i>	bottom woman = pimp = 1-12 transient hos living apart under various arrangements, some with children	5-14

The cards are stacked against the women's chances of successfully combining in opposition to their pimp because

of the basic family structure, in which two or more women are attached to one male and are in competition for his favor. Sooner or later in their campaign he will be able to divide them by trading on the competitive nature of the

“harem” structure, whereas the pimps have nothing to lose and everything to gain by supporting each other.

The situation becomes more complex when the women are bisexual, and one ho is in competition with her pimp for the affection and sexual attentions of another ho. On the other hand, a number-one lady or bottom woman in a stable may be more valuable to her pimp if she is bisexual, and can use this talent to help keep the other women in line, all the while maintaining her strongest loyalty to the man. One can readily see why a pimp’s ability to keep a stable together is highly regarded by other pimps as the mark of a “boss” (top-notch) player and a real man.

**household composition** According to *The Book*, the pimp should establish separate residences for his hos, and maintain separate accommodations for himself. But this rule was most often honored in the breach. Many variations of household composition exist; some of them are represented in the chart on the facing page, which shows the basic arrangement of five pimp households.

As can be seen from the chart, many players could not afford the separate apartments which are prescribed by the orthodox rules of *The Game*. For example, Household #4 was living in a motel room occupied by the pimp, his number-two lady, his bottom woman, and her four children by various fathers. These children ranged in age from six months to twelve years, and all slept in a double bed in the same room as the adults. At one time Household #1 consisted of five adults and seven children living in a three-room apartment.

This is not as affluent a subculture as one might at first assume. Of course, there were other households which had achieved the luxurious living style of the upper middle class or better. But security is a sometime thing, and it was rare for an informant to be consistently well off during the two-year study period.

Iceberg Slim had nothing but disdain for the current trend in households, which he contrasted to the old days in Chicago when pimps and hos rigorously maintained separate apartments:

ICEBERG SLIM: Pimps had class, man. They had class! Some of them today, man, sleep with broads in . . . in communes! Like they got three girls, to save money they might have an apartment with three broads and . . . Man, you can't have class and pimp with class and have that sort of situation. That's not an elegant way to pimp. You can't have style – and grace – and surround yourself with an aura of godlike qualities. If you can touch God whenever you like, pretty soon you'll find out that he isn't God, he won't be a riddle any more.

In addition, problems of jealousy and competition among the women are intensified by living closely together and by allowing children to enter the picture. Several informants agree that “children are a hang-up” in The Life. There are really no rules or traditions about how they should be handled, and so each man makes up his own. Some openly raise their children in the rules of The Life, while others carefully shield their children from it. Often, children get passed around from relative to near-relative, and may only stay with their mothers for short periods.

The following is an example from our field notes of a household beset with problems of children, competition between women, jealousy, and cramped living conditions. The household is headed

by Mitchell, a tall, husky, and very dark man who left his native Louisiana when he was thirteen and began his pimping at the age of seventeen, when he met his main lady, Shannon. They turned out together; that is, they both decided simultaneously to enter The Life. He is a good trumpet player, and has spent more than five years seriously trying to get a foothold in the musical entertainment world, playing trumpet alone and with groups in various small soul music nightclubs. His clothing is in the mode of a Black stage performer: extremely colorful, flashy, and dramatic. Mitchell's two White ladies are blood sisters who are both utterly devoted to him, though not always to each other. From time to time there are one or two more women in the stable. He rules them all firmly, sometimes with generous helpings of physical punishment. They live communally, and always seem to be in financial difficulty. Nevertheless, the women's devotion to Mitchell and his musical goals is genuine, moving, and somewhat infectious.

Shannon, who is the "bottom bitch" of Mitchell's stable (Household #1), complained of her problems with Lana, who is their pimp's "number-two lady." She complained that her sister is taking advantage of their blood relationship, and is chipping with Mitchell while Shannon is out working.

Lana had produced him a son whom Shannon was taking care of, they were all taking care of. But since Shannon hadn't been able to have a child by Mitchell, she was put into a position of tension and competition with her blood sister, despite the fact that Shannon is supposed to be bottom woman. Her greatest sorrow is that she and Mitchell can't have a child (their Rh factors are incompatible) and she envies her sister who has "material security" by having borne their man's child.

Shannon had gotten into an argument with Mitchell after reading in Iceberg Slim's book how he kept two ladies together in one

place, two other ladies together in another place, and maintained a separate apartment for himself. She was trying to convince him that that was the way they should do it; that they shouldn't all be living together because it makes for too much friction. Shannon does not have a problem of jealousy or competitiveness with the other girls, who bow to her status, but it appears that her sister Lana refuses to recognize her as bottom woman because she has a child by Mitchell and Shannon doesn't.

A pimp has to weigh carefully the economic advantages of saving rent by living together against the psychological advantages of living separately. When the stable and the pimp dwell together, there is greater larceny and competitiveness for sex on the part of the women. These two problems are related, since by stealing money from each other to give to the man, they are really vying for the position of sexual favorite. In addition, there may be other sources of stress, such as Shannon's problem over motherhood of the baby. On the other hand, if he keeps the women apart, it is more difficult for the pimp to be sure he is getting all the money, and commuting may place additional burdens upon him.

**the bottom woman: her prospects and responsibilities** One of his hos, usually the bottom woman, may help the pimp to control the stable. If she has been with him long enough to have a vested interest in their mutual long-term goals, she may feel that if she helps him to "pull" new hos and build a stable, he will stick by her when the other women have gone. This is not entirely a pipe dream on her part, as the pimp's promises to save up and buy a legitimate business sometimes come true, although most often his plans for future security are lies. Pimps and hos who have been together for more than ten years sometimes begin to behave like

old married people. Some even get married. Couples and trios who had been together for many years and were establishing "straight" businesses for themselves were known to us and to every pimp and ho starting out.

A bottom woman knows of such success stories, and it is the dream that she works towards, even if she knows her man was never really serious when he promised her a beauty shop. The really good bottom woman has more faith in her man and his promises of their future together than he has, and in rare cases her faith and loyalty make the fantasies come true for both of them.

Madame X, a sixty-year-old former prostitute and madam, explained the women's perspective on male control. Originally from the Deep South, Madame X is a thin and aristocratic lady with silver-blue hair who is addicted to minks and diamonds. Although she easily passes for White, she is proud that she had a Black pimp father and a "righteous" White ho mother. She says that she has been in The Game all her life, and that her own longest relationship was with a Black pimp. With her blessings, her daughter went into The Game, which makes three generations in The Life. Madame X looks like a society matron on her way to church. She plays the stock market and loves to read books about ecology and wildlife. (During a Bay oil spill, she volunteered to help clean off the oily water birds.) Here she explains that male dominance does not at all preclude the woman from getting what she wants out of life:

MADAME X: Let me give you the woman's viewpoint of so-called game or prostitution. Few women today have had the advantage of coming from families with pimps for fathers and prostitutes for mothers. They may have been, but they never told their children as such, but there is instinct there within this woman to want to be a woman only. Now, when I was a little girl, I was taught by a Black pimp father and a

righteous mother, and they both told me the same thing, that a woman's place in life is to please her man and to reproduce his children and that is the answer to the whole thing . . . to please your man. As long as you please your man, your whole perspective is correct as a woman. You are not confused, you are not unhappy because the man has complete control of a thing. She is only a half. She is a woman, which is not a complete thing. She is only a half. A man is the only complete thing in the world. Therefore when it comes to any game, if a woman listens to her man and lets him control her, she sees that smile on his face when she has done the right thing. Then she knows that she is a completed unit, the way it is supposed to be.

Later in the interview, Madame X went more deeply into the woman's ability to manipulate within her submissive role, in order to help her man and herself.

MADAME X: When you can prove a point to these men and keep your woman thing out, you do it and let them think they have thought the idea up and not you. That is a woman's little, oh what would you call it, it was her finesse, you might say. She will plant a seed in the man's mind in her own little way after she knows him, and then all of a sudden he will come up with her idea and she will praise him for this. Now this is keeping the woman thing out of it, and this is the way she will build her man up and she will channel him into these things.

And hey, there is not a goddamn thing in the world that he won't do for that woman because he knows what she is doing, but as a man he will not assert that "hey, my woman did it," you know. And if she is a woman, she wants him. She wants that security that he will give her through her thoughts that she has conveyed to him in a very small way. And little by little, and a little "Gee, I am so happy, Daddy" business, eventually she is going to get what she wanted if



she is a smart girl.

A number of women have helped their men and themselves achieve financial security in this way, and many hos embark on The Life with Madame X's strategy in mind. But few attain this "whore's dream." (A "whore's dream" is defined as something that will never come true).

As bottom woman the ho gains the status of "number one favorite," and usually has seniority in addition. She is supposed to embody the pimp's conception of his ideal lady and is expected to set an example for every other ho in the stable to emulate. Part of her job as mainstay is to help the pimp pull new hos and to assist in turning them out. She and the new ho may work together at various hustles which require two to perform efficiently. In terms of game, the bottom woman has the role of intermediate pimp and identifies with her man, keeping his (their) goals in mind. She does not expect her pimp to keep this new ho forever, and so she thinks, "we might as well use her to our advantage."

The following account from field notes shows Shannon functioning as bottom woman vis-à-vis a square girl who had become attracted to her pimp, Mitchell. Shannon and the new girl and Lana, Shannon's sister, attended a soul music performance in which Mitchell was playing solo trumpet. It was an important event, as Mitchell was hoping to make a good impression on some Black talent scouts from Detroit.

Shannon is twenty-three years old, tall, and very good-looking, with red frizzy hair, freckles, and the face of an Irish colleen. Despite her tough adolescence spent in motorcycle gangs, she is a warm, loving, sentimental, and loyal woman who wants Mitchell to succeed in the music world and to marry her more than

anything else in the world. She has stuck by him for six years, and affects the Black manner in her behavior and speech. Although twenty-one-year-old Lana is Shannon's sister by blood, as well as her stable sister, the two do not resemble one another at all closely. Blonde Lana somewhat resembles Alice in Wonderland, but is as hard-boiled, bitchy, and unpredictable as Shannon is steady, reliable, and sweet. Lana is petite, attractive, and can be charming when she is willing to make the effort, which isn't often. She has been with Mitchell four years, has borne him a child, and constantly competes with Shannon to be his favorite.

As we sat in the nightclub for about three hours, from nine to twelve o'clock, Shannon was sitting next to us, waiting for him to go on, and Lana was at the next table with a Black girlfriend. Shannon was bemoaning the fact that Lana, her blood sister as well as her stable sister, was messing up again.

A new girl had been attracted to Mitchell, a square girl, and Lana was jealous of her and ruining the whole scene. Shannon seemed very much "in" with Mitchell that night; he seemed to be relying on her, and she was extremely concerned that he do well. She was particularly apprehensive that Lana's jealousy of this new girl would upset him and make him ruin his big chance.

Lana had made a small scene at the door when she had had to buy her own ticket, since Shannon's had already been purchased by Mitchell. Lana had whined to Mitchell, "I can't buy a ticket if you take all my money." Shannon explained to us that Lana was being deliberately petulant. She had been getting an allowance from Mitchell, but always spent it rashly. Because she could not be trusted with money, Mitchell had been taking all of it. Shannon praised the new girl to us, and when the girl joined the table Shannon greeted her warmly, and then began to talk some game to her.

"Well, if you like Mitchell and you're pulling for him to be a big success, then what else is there to do but go out and work and bring in

some money?" She didn't specify how, but it was obvious that this girl, who had been helping by taking tickets at the door, was aware of what Shannon had gone through to raise money for Mitchell's career. She was, however, square; she had never ho'd before and wasn't sure she wanted to begin.

Shannon remarked later on how stupid it was of Lana to start the petty jealous hassle over the ticket. Didn't Lana realize that Mitchell must not be upset before his performance? Didn't she know that a new girl could bring a hell of a lot of money into the household? If they pulled that girl into their stable and got her going, Shannon thought, she would be able to retire in three months with the money that the girl could make. Lana's antics were jeopardizing everything.

But during the evening Shannon did her best to submerge her annoyance and was the perfect model of a bottom woman in a stable: keeping the girls together (or trying to) and being Mitchell's right arm in pulling new hos. After Mitchell had played, Shannon and the new girl ran back to see him. As we left, we saw the threesome hugging and kissing, seemingly very happy. Lana, on the other hand, was still pouting at the table with the girlfriend who had come with her.

Ideally both women should be equally happy to pull a new stable sister, so in this case Lana was clearly out of line in her attitude. By her total identification with Mitchell's goals, Shannon is probably going to achieve her goal of being with him in the end. Lana is not behaving in the proper womanly fashion as defined by *The Book*, and will probably not last with Mitchell when he no longer needs her, despite the fact that she has his child and Shannon doesn't. According to Madame X's analysis, Shannon is going to get what she wants because she is a "smart girl and pleases her man," while Lana and the other hos who have come and gone in this stable will be left behind.

It is not always the case that an older pimp winds up with one

woman when he leaves The Life. We knew two retired pimps with two women apiece; the affection and respect between the women enabled this long-term relationship to persist. Perhaps a more common pattern is the pimp who does not find a compatible life partner in any of his hos and winds up with a “square” after spending his youth exploiting women; Iceberg Slim himself is an example of this pattern. According to Madame X, if a woman is left behind “it is her own goddamn fault: “

MADAME X: ‘Course if she is going to start getting on that dope shit and that pill shit out in the street and she gets herself beat up, it is her own goddamn fault. And then no pimp will want her. He couldn’t be bothered because she is nothing but trouble. But there are plenty of women today, highly educated women, who are in Game, and who have and are building empires with their men, right today. All women instinctively want security, because they know that their old age is going to get there. But then there are always those who can’t see any farther than prostitution.

RICHARD: Right, what happens to these women? What happens to an old ho who wasn’t taking care of business when she was young?

MADAME X: Go down to Woolworth’s and look behind the counters; look at the old ladies waiting on you, go to the hospital and look at the chambermaids scrubbing floors, that’s what happened to them. Or else go out to the mental institutions or go out to the cemetery and look at all the lonely people. That’s what happens to them.

CHRISTINA: Well, what happened to their security?

MADAME X: That was their own fault that they didn’t get their security, because they didn’t guide their men, the way I spoke to you about. By planting the little seed and being right and swaying the man over, because a woman can make or break a man. If that man goes out and does a hundred dollars jam a night, that is her fault. She has been on his back and he is doing it, that is not his fault. I myself, I have seen it

and I have lived too many years in it and rarely have I ever seen it was a man's faults. Any of his faults he ever had were brought on by a woman, and the first woman who would bring his faults on would be his mother, and the second faults would be brought on by his woman or the women he has had.

## **How Pimps and Hos Get Together; Copping, Choosing, and Turning Out**

**choosing** A girl may decide she wants to ho before she has a man, or they may decide to turn out together to help each other make it in the world. If they aren't together, how do they find each other? Here is where the "choosing" comes in. The pimp is supposed to put himself "in the position to be discovered" by the ho or square broad. This "position" is mental as well as geographic. Not only does the pimp circulate wherever women happen to be, but while making such forays he is continually conscious of his identity and image as a pimp. He reasons that he will attract the women he seeks by looking and acting like what he is, so that the women do the choosing, not he. It appears to us significant that the term "choosing" is used in this manner, which would seem to refute the popular notion that a pimp somehow coerces women against their will. Traditional use of the term "choosing" is a verbal recognition that it takes two to play The Game, and that male dominance goes into effect only after the woman has made her initial choice.

If he is successful in finding a girl who wants to choose him, the pimp cements the new relationship by demanding his "choosin' money," a lump sum the woman gives him "to prove she is qualified." When a square broad is involved, the matter of "choosin' money" is especially crucial; it serves as her first major

initiation ritual into The Life. Professional hos who are attracted to pimps know in advance that they cannot have sex with him unless their "money is right," and they sometimes banter about the size of the sum. "Choosin' money" is also a common topic of "high-sidin'" humor among the men, as in the following boasting session which took place in a bar:

ELDORADO EDDIE: This bitch come over talkin' about she gon' choose me. I say, "Bitch, what about those dead Presidents?" [Laughter] She say, "I got the money, Daddy, I got the money." I say, "Honey, your money is funny. I told you not even to talk to me until you got some long greens. I might even charge you for talkin' to me like this." [Laughter] She say, "No, Daddy, my money ain't short." "How much you got, bitch?" "Eighteen hunnert dollar." I say, "Eighteen hunnert dollar? You two hunnert short, bitch." [Laughter] I say, "Bitch, you two hunnert short!" [Laughter]

**taking an application** In his initial overtures to a new girl, a pimp must display absolute self-confidence and manly superiority, yet show enough interest in the girl that she doesn't think he is unattainable. The ideal pimp is a master conversationalist and psychologist who can analyze a woman's weaknesses and strengths in a short period of time, and can instantly devise a strategy tailor-made to "catch" or "cop" her.

Where do pimps find their future hos? Among our sample, several were "caught" while they were working as waitresses in restaurants and bars, two were department

store salesgirls, and one was a teller in a bank! Regardless of the variable setting, the pimp must be ready to invite the girl to join him for a drink, lunch, or a ride in his luxury car, whichever is appropriate to her psychology and the situation. Once she begins

to give him "action" (a certain look, a smile, or verbal response) the pimp goes into high gear; that opening is all he needs to begin "taking an application."

"Taking the application" serves two purposes: it enables the pimp to decide whether or not he wants the girl, and it provides him with the information he needs to formulate his strategy should he decide to add her to his stable. Here the proficient pimp demonstrates that he is no slouch as a behavioral scientist; his lengthy, in-depth interview must be complete and to the point. As Brock put it:

BROCK: I take an application on a broad when I talk to her that is worse than if she was going to go out and get a job in the Pentagon. I get a mental makeup on her Momma, her Daddy, who treated her bad, who she favored, who she disfavored, will she have any kids, whether she digs the kids, the whole bit. That, you know, is according to the traditional game. That's supposed to be what you're supposed to do, but I have hardly run across anybody that really does it. They don't want to go into all that shit, and so they lose.

"Applicants" are either square broads, women who have ho'd before, or hos who are considering leaving their present pimp. A pimp may either turn a square broad out himself, or call upon the help of his bottom woman. Catching a square broad has its advantages and disadvantages. Chief among the disadvantages are the time and trouble it takes to acculturate her to The Life. But the advantages are very great; you don't have to undo the training of another pimp and correct the mistakes he made.

BROCK: When you start with a turned-out ho you are taking somebody else's shit, somebody else's flaws. And you have to turn this over and

make it into something for yourself. Because a ho that's already been turned out and chooses you is a ho who has been disillusioned. The fella that turned her out lost her for a reason, and she's looking for a weakness. She's looking for this weakness in you. She's looking for something bad to start with, where a woman that you turn out and you make her a ho, prostitute, call girl, the only thing that she knows is you. Your weaknesses she knows, your strong points, and so forth. But if you're strong then you lend strength to this woman. But when you come behind somebody else, you're taking somebody else's shit, and no matter how you say it, this is exactly what it is. It's like the garbage man, you know. The garbage man is taking leftovers from what somebody else ate. They threw it in the garbage and he comes around to pick it up. And when a broad comes to you, nine chances out of ten, if she's already a ho, she's coming to you with the flaws that somebody else gave her.

**turning her out** In acculturating a square broad, the pimp has to remove her distaste for selling her body by increasing her desire for money and for his affection. A woman who enjoys having sex with many men is not necessarily the best ho. In fact, the skilled pimp looks for a monogamous personality who will be utterly devoted to him. A pimp does not want a promiscuous woman, a "come-freak," who "lives only on the physical plane."

STEVE: If you find a weak-minded woman who goes for the look of a man, the feel of a man, before she knows herself what she wants in a man, well then she's dead. Every Joe, or Donald, or Bob, or Frank, or Bill that comes along has got that broad, if it's only for a minute. She's like a piece of cake; everybody's had a slice off the cake, you know? And, uh, that to me is nothing. There's no progress there.

CHRISTINA: There's no profit either. STEVE: There's nothing, nothing. Nothing from nothing leaves nothing.



A woman whose body rules her mind has no mind. Contrary to what one might suppose, a pimp wants his woman's mind more than her body. It is love, loyalty, and obedience that he requires, as well as the capacity for self-discipline. This aspect of pimp philosophy is therefore akin to that of the sexual "swingers," the suburban wife swappers who tell their wives, "Go fuck Mr. So-and-so but don't get involved; remember who your man is." Pimps are even more puritanical, however. Most of them don't even want their women to enjoy themselves physically, since that would involve the mysterious spiritual mental phenomenon of the orgasm. Pimps have told us that they realize their women forget themselves and occasionally "bust their nut" (achieve orgasm) with a trick, but that this is contrary to *The Book*. Since orgasm in woman is often more dependent on her level of emotional receptivity than on sheer mechanical stimulation, her pimp is supposed to be the only man who can cause her to experience it.

Some hos prefer to "save" parts of their bodies for their man only; for example, some will only "flat-back" or "french" (fellatio). Most will not kiss their customers. Some who are particularly skilled have only to converse artfully to earn their pay, since many tricks desire nothing more than sympathetic feminine attention. At the other end of the spectrum are thieves, who simply rob their tricks. Both thieves and good "talkers" are prized for their ability to get the money without actually having to "give up" any sex, a further indication of Puritanism. Women who are able to satisfy "talk tricks" in particular, are considered masters of "high game."

JAMES: It takes the greatest skill to divert a need. That's a higher level than the others. To give ten cents worth for ten cents, you understand, that's fair, that's a good thing. But there are those who

know how to give one cent for ten cents and they get away clean, and the cat thought he got twenty-five cents. But that's a heavy game, that's very beautiful and it's respectable.

We asked James and Letitia to discuss this area of sexual philosophy:

CHRISTINA: Do you feel there's any part of a woman's body that you would prefer she reserve for you as opposed to her tricks?

JAMES: It's not a question of part, it's a question of how.

How much a woman gives of herself. CHRISTINA: I was just talking about the physical. JAMES: No, it's not a question of what part of the body,

**but how much, how often, how well. LETITIA: May I answer your question? For my man I**

would always save my mind, because in my mind I have my attitude and my direction and my feeling and my. . . CHRISTINA: The real you? LETITIA: Yes. So whatever else is physical, that is exactly what it is, only physical. But the mind is much more.

JAMES: Did you catch it, did you catch it? Because that's a very interesting point here. We say how much can you give? Don't give anything. When you say, "That's nothing, I'm turned off. I'm a machine, I'm working like I do a typewriter." Like you drive a car and the car's a mechanical pilot, automatic pilot. It's not even there. Just you, you are controlling it. Thinking partially, but you are not putting your actual self into it. But you got it down so well.

This is the essence of it. Does a priest, does a guy down in Buddhist have a hard-on every morning? Hell naw, he doesn't have a hard-on every morning, he's beyond that shit. It's just a matter of,

you got three powers. Spiritual, mental, and physical, the triangle. If the spiritual and mental are not there, the physical ain't shit but a piece of meat. You understand how simple this is? It is very simple if you got your head right.

Now if you are not skilled and attuned to what's going on and lose control, where your piece of meat controls your mind, controls your spirit, then you turn on. You enjoying what you're doing. Then you're not tricking, you are giving of yourself all you have. But you have restrained how much you can give by saying, "I'm only going to give this much," to keep yourself safe and secure. Some part wholesome, untouched, some tangible spot that isn't touched by other men, retain some virginity that does not exist in the first place? It's not there. You're looking in the wrong place for a honey, y'all in the wrong area.

In turning a woman out, the pimp must convey this attitude towards sex as the proper one for his women. At the same time he must give a picture of what she can achieve for both of them in terms of money and security. Steve describes the process of turning out a square broad so that she has the proper attitude towards sex and money. As one can surmise from his account, his job is often far from easy:

STEVE: I know a young lady that was working at the Bank of California. Italian, White, short, very good-looking little woman. And she had a tremendous hang-up of going out and turning a date with another man, because she felt that her body belonged to me. But now, see, I had to interpret that two different ways. She either thought that I was gonna go to work and contain my body just for her and not think of anyone else, or she could have been sincere in what she really meant.

Now, see, I didn't know, so then I had to break it down. When you finally get down to the basis of it, it stems right back to the older generation, what they have impounded in her mind. And after I broke it down to her she finally turned it off, and now she wouldn't have it any other way.

It's a different way of thinking. What she was doing on her job was making some money, but she finally woke up and saw that she was constantly keeping herself in the hole. So rather than stay there and go through that funky stuff, the husband and wife, I said, "Well you stay here and get yourself together and you see what you're gonna do. You know, until you do something for me to show me that you're qualified to be with me, then all we can do is say hello and good-bye."

Now, I meant this, I couldn't have it any other way, you know what I mean? She had a kid, she wanted to make money, but she was afraid. And her fears stemmed out of the bullshit, and so it took nine months to break her fears. But when her fears broke, they broke all the way. And she's a good bitch now, because she had so much money run through her hands one time that it really shocked her.

Turning out a square broad means that you must literally change her mind. To accomplish this feat, the pimp separates her from all previous ties of family and friends, gives her a whole new social milieu, and helps her adjust to it.

STEVE: She must cut all family ties, because, you see, she can't be with her family and ho too. You can't cope with bringing disgrace upon your mother or father, your sister, or whoever it is. You have to get away from them. There's nothing I could do with you over there because they're telling you one thing and I'm telling you something else. But what I'm telling you is going to help you out

down that street. What they're telling you is not going to do anything but confuse you, because they don't know a goddamn thing about what they're talking about. You see? It's a form of education.

Brock described it this way:

**BROCK:** It's like going into the Army where they take you away from all of your friends. You create a different environment. It's a brainwashing process; the whole thing is creativity. When you turn a chick out, you take away every set of values and morality she had previously and create a different environment. You give her different friends. You give her instead of squares or bookkeepers or secretaries, clerks, and so forth for friends, you give her professional hos.

Steve described the ho's education in terms of elementary school, junior high school, and high school.

**STEVE:** They put them down so they'll know who the bulls [police] are, who the snitches are, what to do with a trick, where to take him, what whorehouse to take him, what's the cut gonna be. It's just a form of education, it's elementary school really. Then after elementary school you go right into junior high. She is more upgraded, she knows how to pass paper [forged checks, credit cards], she knows the various houses to go to. But then after she finishes junior high school, it turns into the professional thing. Between the time she gets turned out and the time, if she keeps her man three years, or if the man keeps her three years his action for success is greater than it was when he first started. Even though when he first started and turned the bitch out his money came in small, she was more active because when she was out there, she was truly out there

for that thing, because it was a gas to her. It was something new, and pressure was coming onto her from his end. So she had to get that form of education, because he can't be out there with her and stand there like a fool, and tell her, "Well, this is a cop and that's a cop," you know what I mean?

Then you ready for high school. She might decide that she wants to be a booster [ thief]. You show her the booster, you show her the drag [a con game], then you show her the professions [madam, high-priced call girl]. Once you show her these, like I say, after three or four years internship, she's already there. But it takes that long because most women run into so many hang-ups when you're out there in the streets. You run into guys who dress nice, maybe cops, with alligator shoes and might be driving a Cadillac.

Then there are other kinds of dates. He could be an owner in a business somewhere, and he wants you to fly with him for, say, six weeks, and he'll give you a grand. And whatever you collect off his buddies is your money. But he wants to have you when he can have you, along with a few other exceptional friends as a business expense. But then the broad has got to sift all of this out, and think about, "Would my man have me do this to take care of his business?" You see? Now like I say, it's a hang-up.

'Course, the money's good if she went, but she faces so many nuts out there, it might not turn out as she expected. Maybe bad, maybe better. A woman's got so much to think of, to put on her mind when she goes out into the street. It takes a long time for her to get educated to all the bullshit that she's got to be ready for.

**keeping on his job** A pimp's task is by no means over when he turns a girl out. He must be "on his job" every day and night, advising and directing the ho. Before she goes to work each evening (the git-down time), he prepares her for her experiences,

discusses various problems which arise in the line of duty, and praises her if she is doing well.

**BROCK:** See, if your game is not prepared before it leaves you, then it's not going to be prepared. You can be right there on the scene, you can sit up there, put the dude on top of the broad, grab his ass and pull him up and down, you know, but if your game is not prepared, then you're going to lose anyway. The whole thing is preparing the mind. The body is there automatically, you know. The game is in the mind. See, every broad's got a different thing. Some broads you have to command, you have to talk a lot of jive to them. Some broads you have to be sweet to before they go to work, you know. Some you have to hug and kiss and baby and pet them and sweetheart this and sweetheart that. But you have to prepare them all with their different things directed toward the individual, you know, and then you won't lose your game.

Another pimp put it this way:

**CRAIG:** But see, what they don't understand, is what they do for this woman, whether it's understanding or help or need, she has no one to rely on other than you. Well, if you deny her, when she goes to work that night, there's somebody out there who's not going to deny her.

Turning out a ho is only the beginning of a continual maintenance job. According to the pimps, constant effort is required, because women are dependent on men to sustain them psychologically.

**STEVE:** There's no bitch alive that's as pretty as I am, to me. This is because without me she couldn't have anything. I've got to plant the seed in her before she can even think of conceiving anything.

You understanding what I'm saying? I'm the producer, so how can you be better than me and you produce nothing? You only produce after I've injected it into you.

Here Steve equates the pimp's game of producing money through his ho with man's sperm producing new life through the female. The pimp is constantly "injecting" and replenishing his game in his woman so that she will continue to produce. When a man realizes that his "true role in nature" is controlling woman, he has truly become a man:

**BROCK:** The great thing that happens to a pimp or player is when he stops listening to what woman has to say, and starts creating his thought in her mind. And she will automatically assimilate his thoughts, you know. If you've ever noticed your woman, actually dig her, you will see if she's talking to another broad, she's really reflecting your thoughts, your attitudes. And if you're sharp, she's going to be sharp. If you've got finesse, she'll have finesse. If you're crude, she'll be crude, you know. Violent, she'll be violent. If you teach your woman how to drive, she'll drive the way you taught her how to drive, and as she sees you drive. She will be a total reflection, like in a mirror, of you. And if you're a giant, she's a giant. If you're a peanut, she's a peanut. If you're a watermelon, she'll be a watermelon. See, peanuts have no business challenging watermelons.

**building a stable** Once a pimp has educated his main lady, he is in a position to expand his stable. He is now able to afford the car, clothes, and accouterments which help to attract the attention of other women who appreciate what money can buy. On the other hand, if he has been taking care of business he might not need the extra help, and might decide that it isn't worth the hassle of



managing two women.

But in *The Life*, having more than one woman is a matter of prestige as well as increased earning power, even though it is recognized that “two funky hos ain’t worth one good bitch.” Some “good women” will not tolerate competition after they have been alone with their man for a time, and would leave or cause trouble if he took on another ho. Other women enjoy the prestige of being in a successful pimp’s stable, and welcome the responsibilities and status of being bottom woman.

Several women approached Christina during the study period and recommended their men for her consideration; some even attempted to attract her sexually. One pimp in the sample built a stable of lesbian women by having his bisexual bottom woman serve as intermediate pimp. At parties, he would sit off in a corner while his woman mingled with the hos, trying to “catch.” This strategy also enabled him to “play past” the rule about “hitting on” another man’s ho.

One night in “The Player’s Inn” a new ho in town complained about the manner in which another ho had approached her:

FIRST HO: You know what they do out here? They say, “Before he comes home, my man fixin’ to choose you.”

SECOND HO: Tell that bitch where to go. That ain’t polite. She don’t have no manners, to do something like that, pull some shit like that.

FIRST HO: [Indignant] Fixin’ to choose me! I got my man!

SECOND HO: Some broad hittin’ on me like that, I tell her, “Don’t talk to me again unless you got some money!”

It is understandable that two or even three women could identify with a pimp’s goals, and expect to be with him to enjoy his success in their retirement. But can this rationale extend from four to

twelve hos attached to one pimp?

ELDORADO EDDIE: She feels, "What can I dedicate myself to in society?" She has no goal, unless she can get into a competition game. To be a star, for one of them to be the star. When you get past three, then it's their idea. The idea of being with this particular fella who is so much of a success that he has the respect of everybody. This brings him into a particular crowd or social strata, and means a certain amount of success to them to have a part in this. To say, "He's my man," and everybody has respect. After three it changes to a prestige game.

**A girl who joins a large stable, then, wants to be associated with a successful going concern. The one pimp known to us who has had from six to twelve hos at one time enjoys a tremendous mystique and influence in the community.**

**firing and blowing** To "blow" a ho is to lose her. Hos leave pimps for many reasons, including a desire to quit The Life altogether. When discussing game, pimps rarely blame a girl for leaving; it is always the man's fault that he "blew" her. Either he got "hung up on the sex thing," became jealous or possessive, "his game wasn't together," he was "chipping," or he "didn't make sure she was qualified from the git-go."

Sometimes players deliberately take on a ho they know will only last a short while. They figure they have nothing to lose, and attempt to get as much "short-stop" money as possible before she leaves. This game is known as "short money" or "cop and blow."

When a ho leaves one pimp to go to another, there are rituals both pimps may perform, in a gentlemanly fashion, to reduce

aggression between them. If the girl is out on bail, there is a formal meeting of the two pimps (for which they dress to the teeth, spending hours in preparation) in the office of a bail bondsman. The ho's former pimp removes his bond and the new pimp replaces it with his own money. This exchange of bond symbolizes the transfer of the woman's earning power from one man to the other. If the new pimp will not put up a bond, the former pimp legitimately has the right to perform what is called the "pimp's arrest." "Pimp's arrest" occurs when a man seizes his former ho and brings her to jail, forcibly if necessary, and then reclaims his bond money. Her new pimp must then go through the whole procedure of bailing her out himself.

Although the women choose their pimps, if a ho is choosing again she had better be decisive. If she vacillates between two of them, she is out of line, and the men will stand together against her. Ideally no woman can attempt to control her pimp by the threat of leaving him for another without getting two pimps angry at her; such is the nature of male solidarity among the players, and it is their strength.

CHRISTINA: I had the feeling that there was a lot of talk about violence, and holding grudges and things, but when it came down to it, most of the guys stick together against the women, and they would not let a woman put them up to any beef. They'll sooner put down a woman than another man.

STEVE: Right, because this is the code, it's a unity. The man is for man is for man is for man. You know. And no woman can come between two friends . . . if the friendship is worth it from the git-go. Now, if it develops into anything else after that, it's the weakness on the nigga's part for letting that happen,

understand what I'm saying? So it's a unity. And it's worldwide. But them bitches . . . a broad can come to her man and tell him about something and start some shit. And then the man has to take it upon himself to go out there and approach this motherfucker and let him know right from the git-go, in a nice sort of way, that, "Hey, this cannot happen as long as this woman here is paying me my money," you know. And you don't go out there dragging and kicking the dude. You put him off to the side, take him into the bar, buy him a drink, and let him know what's happening. "All right now, if you jump off this way again, well then, you know what we gonna have to do [that is, fight], so there's no need in us getting into no shit behind [because of] a bitch." You dig? "But if it's gonna happen this way, I would rather for you to kick my ass now, you know. If we fuck each other up, then the bitch still come out on the strong end of things." So after you talk to a nigga like that, he understands.

The only sensible reason for a pimp to fire a ho is if she stops bringing him the money, becomes mentally or physically incapacitated, or is strung out on heavy, expensive narcotics. But not every man is sensible.

STEVE: There are a lot of pimps, so-called pimps, out there who don't really deserve it. But, by crook or by fate or what have you, they run into some bitch who is just that illiterate enough to have what she feels she wants out of life, and she shoots him up the totem pole. Most of them, after they get to a certain position, they get rid of that broad who got him there. No good reason. Just because they are looking for something young, something new, something different. Or they'll keep the broad and catch another. They might lean more towards the one they just caught than the one they already had. And if the one they just caught is White and the old

one is Black, that makes it even better.

**But “The Game is a beautiful thing when applied and executed properly,” as Brock put it, “because it is the beautiful expression of manhood and womanhood.” If a pimp plays The Game according to The Book, “plays past” the obstacles, picks a good lady, and takes care of business, he can go far. Some do and some don’t. In the ghetto, most go nowhere.**

## **The Boss Player and the Simple Pimp**

It is said that “there are as many games as there are players,” yet it soon becomes clear that players fall into two very basic categories: those who have made it or are going to, and those who never will. In the language of *The Life*, one could designate these as the “boss players” and the “simple pimps,” and they are divided by their ability to use *The Life* rather than be used by it.

Self-confidence is the hallmark of the boss player. Some are dropouts from the Black middle class, although there are upwardly mobile individuals from the urban ghetto and from rural backgrounds as well. To spring from a family of nine children on a small farm in Arkansas, as one man did, and to reject the square ladder to modest security requires a fiercely independent personality, a real nonconformist. The simple pimp is neither upwardly mobile nor is he a nonconformist. His image of what he might achieve is limited by his lack of self-confidence and his conformity to the brotherhood-in-failure syndrome of the ghetto. Simple pimps have “running partners,” and are rarely seen alone, while the boss player almost always arrives and leaves by himself.

Never does the boss player use his Black skin as an excuse for

failure; he conceives of himself as a universal man. His race is a factor to be included in his strategy and used positively whenever possible. If it is a detriment in any situation, it is to be overcome by his wits. The boss player's concept of himself is as a superman, a loner, not as a brother to any man.

Nor does he need to keep proving his masculinity to the fellows on the street. As Brock put it, "If I was going to prove my manhood, I'd be trying to prove it to a woman,

not to a man. And if I'm pimpin', I'm pimpin' for a woman and not for a man, or two men, or in front of any man, you know." He needs nobody's opinion but his own, and no body's company on his road to freedom and security. The popular song "I Did It My Way" could be the boss player's theme song. In contrast, the simple pimp is easily insulted and is always surrounded by men who bolster each other's ego and self-confidence. James explains the difference this way:

J AMES: If you really got it, you ain't got to prove nothin' no more. You ain't got to go on and attract things and say, "I'm a man. Watch me and I'm going to prove I'm a man." If you know you are, you can relax behind it and groove and move beyond that if you want to go into some other area. You can even talk softly when you know you're a man. You ain't got to scream and bark loud and say, "Do this and do that, and I'm this and I'm that." When you know you are, you're comfortable with it and you can relax.

RICHARD: [Refers to a mutual acquaintance who doesn't seem to fit this description of true manhood.]

JAMES: Yeah, he tries to reach the statute that he's a man every night, every day, every afternoon, every half hour, maybe, that he's awake.

A boss player may occasionally indulge in stylin' and high-sidin'

matches as a Black cultural ritual for the fun of it, but he is in every other area of behavior a self-confident personality who doesn't need this kind of interaction to shore up his ego. Although he wishes to be above it, the boss player knows that he is a part of the subculture, that it is what he springs from, and that the other players are the only ones who understand his language. Accordingly, he may return to his old haunts periodically while he is making it or after he has left The Life, if only to assess how far he has progressed.

The boss player takes The Book very seriously; his main business is with his ladies, not with impressing other players. He has left the Black code of brotherhood behind, as well as the larger society's moral code. Since both sides are waiting for him to slip, "a sharp Colored dude has to be twice as sharp as a White dude." His relationship with his main woman is also a balance between the teachings of The Book and his desire to relax and be "for real." His true "backstage" is still solitary, but it is less fraternal and more familial than the "backstage" of the simple pimp and his "running partners." Brock can say that "woman is a tool to please man," but how he uses that tool shows that he has respect for his craft.

While the simple pimp's schemes for careers outside The Life are characteristically unrealistic, the boss player assesses his own abilities and plans accordingly. Unlike the simple pimp, he understands that the culture of poverty's, "live for today" credo leads to financial ruin. He will blow money, but nowhere near all of it, and he will not compromise his plans for the future while he is enjoying the present.

Other differences between the simple pimp and the boss player include the high percentage of the former who are addicts or heavy users of either liquor or hard drugs such as heroin. The boss player

is addicted to the game of "reality" in which he believes the sky's the limit. He may snort cocaine or have a drink, but it never becomes the focus of his day or a drain on either his financial or psychic resources. He also chooses his company carefully, and usually avoids "losers."

JAMES: I don't go to their parties. I don't even enjoy them. I was raised with them. I know them already. See, you're going to have to go back to where I've been to understand. You've got to retrace my steps. I don't need to go back. I've watched those cats destroy each other and I watched them methodically. They wanted me to join their clan three years ago. I said, "I don't belong to nobody. I'm free."

The boss player is a snob and an egotist, but he is independent and dedicated to taking care of business all the time.

He rarely downgrades his ladies in conversation or by calling them "bitches" either to their faces or when they are not present. "If you call a woman 'bitch' all the time, then's when she becomes one; that word should be used only when a woman deserves it, so that it will make an impression." A boss player's women are part of his high-class image of himself, and he will brag about their education, beauty, taste in clothes, and their rich clientele. We never saw the ho of a boss player work out of a topless bar because it was too "lower-class." They might, however, visit the bar escorted by their man on a night off. Some of the boss player's women worked from "books" of tricks and were really call girls, not streetwalkers, although they may have been at one time; they had "graduated."

While the boss player may be pimping expertly, "with finesse" as they say, he may also be in various stages of learning or playing a



higher game to which he will shift or has already shifted. In contrast, the simple pimp is trapped at the survival level of the "pussy game" by virtue of his personality and culture, and is unable or unwilling to attempt change. The boss player looks outside The Life, whereas the simple pimp only looks inside to the subculture and its members as a yardstick to measure success.

Although the simple pimp admires the boss player still in The Life, he distrusts the player who is trying to leave or has left The Life for another game. The basis for his distrust is that the boss player believes that he has a future outside of pimping, while the simple pimp can see no greater horizon beyond success in The Life. The distrust is mutual, since the boss player does not rely on the respect of anyone in the subculture, and often considers simple pimps to be mere clowns who will entertain him for the price of a drink.

## **Fantasy, Front, and Illusion**

**fantasy as a way of life** Can you imagine anything as fantastic as a Black man with a huge natural, dressed in wild hippy clothes with leather fringes, driving a purple suede-covered Mark II Cadillac while talking on the telephone? That would be Hippy Pimp, the eighth of twelve children born to a Kentucky dirt farmer.

HIPPY PIMP: Pimping is a fascinating life, it's just like being a player. It's a hell of a thing to know that the only way you can get to eat, sleep, rest, and dress, is to be the best actor you can possibly be. This is all you are doing is acting. We don't have the distinction of being movie stars, as far as society is concerned, but we are the greatest actors that ever

lived.

Not only is the pimp an actor, but a ho must be an actress in her work all the time.

Sociologist Erving Goffman's concept of "backstage" and "front stage" behavior works perfectly in the subculture of pimps and hos, for they themselves conceptualize "all the world" as a stage and "all the men and women merely players." Players need costumes and props, which constitute the "front." Flashy cars, expensive clothes, and dramatic personal style are needed by pimps to catch hos and by hos to catch tricks.

"Backstage" for a ho is her home life and her social life with other hos who are close friends. "Backstage" for a pimp with regard to his women is his fraternal life with his fellows. At the jam house they relax and discuss business and how to deal with women, but a great deal of "fronting" still occurs since the pimp is always trying to impress other pimps. The only real "backstage" for a pimp is when he is alone and contemplating his life.

Goffman describes a type of "backstage" situation:

When teammates are out of the presence of the audience [for example, when pimps are together without their women or when hos are together without their pimps or tricks], discussion often turns to problems of staging ... the merits and demerits of available front regions are analyzed; the size and character of possible audiences for the performance are considered; past performance disruptions and likely disruptions are talked about; news about the teams of one's colleagues is transmitted; the reception given one's last performance is mulled over in what are sometimes called "post mortems"; wounds are licked and morale is

strengthened for the next performance. (Goffman: 175-176.)

It is very difficult for a player to take off his or her mask for anyone. Part of the reason we were able to conduct this study successfully was that the players really welcomed an opportunity to converse with someone from outside The Life without fear of censure or embarrassment.

Language is often the key to worldview. From various linguistic devices used to describe The Life, we can discern three major symbolic images of the player's world. First and most prominent is their concept of life as a "game" and people as "players" competing for prizes or "cookies." Second, life is conceptualized as a horse race, in which men are the bettors and the women run the race. Women are described as "big stallions" if they are tall (despite the fact that stallions are male horses) and "thoroughbreds" when a pimp wants to brag about their "high class" or earning capacity. Prostitution in Eastern cities like New York or Chicago is known as the "fast track" and, of course, the women constitute the player's "stable."

When The Life is viewed as a game or horse race, the chancy nature of winning or losing is emphasized. The concept of life as a stage emphasizes the theatrical nature of keeping your "front" together as you make your entrances and exits "on the set" (the street and bar life). In this imagery, the ho is glamorized as a potential "star" with the pimp as her "manager."

At a party celebrating the opening of a record store by a pimp, Silk met up with a ho who had left him some months previously. She was a lovely, well-groomed Black girl whose heavy drug habit had "messed up her game." During the evening she decided to return to Silk's stable. He announced this event to us, introduced her as his lady, and with great pride and warmth in his eyes said

softly to her, "Baby, you going to be the star. You going to be a STAR." She kept her eyes downcast and did not react to his praise or optimism.

There are many indications of the pimp's and ho's desire to be like movie stars. Pimps often talk of famous Black personalities in sports, politics, and entertainment, and reveal their star-struck fantasies of making it "just like them." Sometimes they conceive of themselves as candidates in the long line of Black "firsts" in American history, in the vein of *Jet* magazine. Many hos read movie magazines avidly and can usually relate many details of the star's personal lives and finances. Among players who have, or hope to have, another career, the largest number desire to break into the entertainment world. Often they speak of several prominent entertainers who formerly lived *The Life*, including well-known soul singers, comedians, and musicians. The player's delight is to be able to go to Las Vegas or Hollywood, mingle with the stars, and, with their "fronts uptight," make heads turn leaving people wondering who they are.

Several pimps asserted that the men's clothing industry gets its avant-garde inspirations not from celebrated entertainers or socialites, but from the pimps whose custom-made clothing the stars copy! Ready Eddie, the bartender, regaled a crowd of players one night with the story of his trip to Las Vegas with a White pimp. They had dressed "clean" (sharp), completely changing outfits three times a day, and stepped out of their Cadillac in front of a casino to be confronted by Bobby Darin, "who didn't look like shit." According to Eddie, the actor did a triple take at their spectacular clothing and grooming. The idea of impressing a movie star, or outshining him with one's rich, dramatic, and flamboyant dress, was much appreciated by his listeners, and Eddie was called upon to repeat the story many times.

Movie stars' names are frequently adopted by the hos, as their own "stage names" (Samantha, Raquel); names of other famous, glamorous women ( Jacqueline, Bonnie Parker) were also used. The Hippy Pimp told us, "Use my real name, I'll be famous anyway." People in *The Life* often speak of each other's "fame" in theatrical hyperbole. One player was so glittering, charismatic, and theatrical that the cats on the street said, "There ain't been nothin' like him since God left Chicago." This man's image has many imitators, but none crafted with his natural genius as an actor. On one or two occasions, we saw players who had copied his custom-made clothes down to the most minute detail, emulated his walk and mannerisms, and attempted to use his street name, which made him furious. Although we knew him, he never consented to a taped interview because he realized the value of his mystique. "Besides," he says, "The Game is just a chapter in my life. Wait until I'm farther on in the book." He is seriously striving to enter the entertainment world. Harris, one of the older players (he is a youthful forty five) gave us a description of a typical "Players' Night," which illustrates the pimp's love of theatricality, dressing up, and pretending to be rich and famous (which many are by the standards of the ghetto) . Harris was born in Memphis and moved with his mother to the Chicago ghetto while still in his early teens. He dabbles in erotic photography, but also owns and operates a soul music record store, which is on shaky financial legs. Without the income from his two White ladies to sustain it through lean times, the store would probably have folded long ago. Harris's passion is classical violin music; he never misses an opportunity to hear Heifetz or Isaac Stern when they give local concerts.

About six feet tall, with an extravagant moustache, Harris is a resourceful and cunning businessman-hustler with the capacity to inspire confidence in men as well as in women; his rap is his

fortune. Harris has a mature storehouse of varied survival techniques, including his skill at pool hustling and three-card molly (a version of the old shell game) ,and is consequently very adaptable to the ups and downs of The Life. He is anxious to retire from hustling altogether and have the financial security to enjoy his middle age with his two young ladies and his infant son, on whom he dotes. Here is his description of a pimp's night of spectacle and glory:

HARRIS: I went to this party in New York, you know, all the players were there, all the players from all over the Middle West and the East Coast. They was from Detroit and Chicago, Cleveland, Naptown, [which is Indianapolis], New York. They had this big players' party and all the big boys came in, you know. Looked like the alligators were walking that night, so many alligator shoes, you know, and silk suits, white on white shirts with all designs, diamond stickpins make you nearsighted, yeah. Diamond rings, diamond rings sparkling on some of these cats, they had diamond rings on all of their fingers, you know. There was one cat out of Miami, believe it or not he had a diamond in his teeth. I swear to God, had a diamond between his teeth, that's right. Had his ears pierced, had a diamond earring hanging out of his ear. He was a diamond fancier, I'd say. The natives were flashing, man. And there's a certain man in this town, like he had a watch made, got two hundred and eighteen diamonds in the watch. Two hundred and eighteen diamonds in the watch. Now, that's what I call a lover of the stone, or a connoisseur of nature, because diamonds are a form of nature, you dig? RICHARD: So what was happening at this players' convention with all these alligators walking around? HARRIS: Well, they used Smalls' Paradise, which is now Big Wilt's on 135th Street and Seventh Avenue. And they rolled out the red carpet for these cats. The cat that owned Small's Paradise at the time said that was the biggest night he had had business-wise in twenty-five years. They sold

out of beverages, sold out. CHRISTINA: How many people do you think were there? HARRIS: Well, there were approximately, in and out, I'd say about two thousand people. All floating in and out on the sidewalk, everywhere, from all over. CHRISTINA: From all over the country? HARRIS: That's right. You know, the players and their ladies with mink coats and the female jewelry, you know, and you had mink, and chinchilla, you had rabbits, everything. RICHARD: When was this? HARRIS: This was in 1962. And cars? I never knew the brothers owned Rolls-Royces until then, that's right. And foreign Mercedes, uh, they had Cords, right, Cords, man, Aston Martins, huh. Some of them look like, you know, with the fancy hair [referring to high conks or "process," straightened and teased hair]. One of them had his hair down to here, man, you know, but he was a player. He was doing his thing, because he had instilled in his women that they was put here for one purpose and that was to please man in the way she was intended to please him, you dig? And pleasure, like anything else, costs.

The two players' conventions which we attended in the Bay Area were similar to this one in New York in that they had the intentional flavor of a Hollywood premiere. At such gatherings, it is clear that players emulate and identify with movie stars.

**illusion as a business** Part of the reason for all this drama is that players are well aware that they are in the business of fantasy. Without the sex fantasies of White businessmen tricks, *The Game* could not exist.

We all have our fantasies of how we wish people would behave towards us. When money can buy behavior and we have the money, it is difficult to resist purchasing our fantasies. The trick and the whore play the same game as the whore and the pimp: each gets a feeling of power from changing apparent reality. James views "the

street” as a

“cheap marketplace” for fantasies. JAMES: Two things, money and sex appeal, have one thing in common. If you don’t have either money or sex appeal, you have a great need for it. Now check it out with your head. If you don’t have a certain thing, you need it; if it goes beyond you, you need it desperately. If you don’t have sex appeal, you need it in someone else to turn you on sexually. If you don’t have money, you need it in someone with money to carry you through life. If you got money, you can just do your own thing, you don’t have to worry about it. You got something, you can relax. Dig what I’m saying. If you got it you don’t need it no more, you can just groove on something better than that. If you don’t have it, you got to go out and reach everybody on the front line, out in the streets. The streets is the front line. It’s like a marketplace, cheap exchanges all day long. Cheap marketplace, exchanging exchanges that don’t have any real meaning. The marketplace swapping ain’t no big thing, but people go out and make long contracts and swap because they need to. The swapping process is much more to them than reality. So the marketplace ain’t shit and that’s where everybody is and they hung up on sex, the pee hole. Harris had the following to say about tricks and their search for illusory gratification. HARRIS: You see it’s kind of funny about a trick. The average trick, I’ll say up to seventy-five percent of them have falls in their marital lives, sexual falls. Either they’ve got frigid wives or they lean more towards the fetishes, you know. Like most of these guys have very attractive or even beautiful wives, but they’ll go in the streets and I don’t care how ugly a hooker is, if she pats on a lot of makeup, dress rather gaudy which most of them do, they are very gaudy dressers, this is their thing because the tricks go for it, you know, they go for it. A plain Jane, you know, “Aw well, that’s my wife, I don’t want her.”



And you take along the street there are quite a few topless clubs which in turn employ quite a few topless dancers. I don't care how bad a topless dancer looks in open daylight, they look very good up in those lights. And thanks to Thomas Alva Edison a lot of dollars have gone to either good or bad, what have you, through these chicks standing under those lights and doing their thing. They're selling themselves, man, yeah.

A John sits down in an audience, man, like you come back to the question why do a guy go to see a topless show? More than likely his wife has much more attractive breasts than some of those you see in a club. But it's a thing called desire, and that desire has got to be riddled, you know. They see something they want, you know, the gaudiness. At home it's just the run-of-the-mill thing, but out here it's something else and this in turn turns him on. It's an illusion like he's reaching for something that isn't there. Like they take these chicks up into a room and, you know, first the money come and then all of a sudden he wants the light out, you understand? Mainly because he wants to remember her as she was in the club, not like she really is now under an open bulb, you understand? And most of the flues [rooms] around have an open light bulb which hide up nothing from view so he wants the lights turned off. Most of them even undress in the dark, you know. But the question of money is always first. Like when, you find most chicks if they're trained right, you know, they'll tell a guy as soon as they walk in the room and close the door, says, "My name is Advance." So, like I don't care how dumb you are, you get from that chick, you get the message.

Whether one is inside or outside The Life, most people are captives of illusion at one time or another. Money and sex appeal are both objects of desire and delusion; both hold the illusory promise of happiness.



## Chapter Five

# Ghetto Roots

### Paranoia

**Avoiding the giant white foot** At the root of Black personality and experience in America there is paranoia, the fear that someone is out to get you. Black psychiatrists William Grier and Price Cobbs identify this constant awareness of being an unwelcome alien in a White man's world as the "Black Norm," which they use as a base line in assessing the pathology of Black neurotics. As they point out, it is necessary to recognize that Black paranoia is totally justified as a realistic response to experience.

We submit that it is necessary for a black man in America to develop a profound distrust of his white fellow citizens and of

the nation. He must be on guard to protect himself against physical hurt. He must cushion himself against cheating, slander, humiliation, and outright mistreatment by the official representatives of society. If he does not so protect himself, he will live a life of such pain and shock as to find life itself unbearable. For his own survival, then, he must develop a cultural paranoia . . . . To regard this Black Norm as pathological and attempt to remove such traits by treatment would be akin to analyzing away a hunter's cunning or a banker's prudence. (Grier and Cobbs: 177-179.)

Within the subculture of *The Life*, we observed an even higher degree of paranoia, which we call the "Player's Norm." Fear and uncertainty are much greater among players and other hustlers than among square Blacks, but this Player's Norm is also an undeniably realistic attitude. When we interviewed Iceberg Slim in his Los Angeles home, he began by expressing his delight that in his present square existence, he no longer was fearful of a knock at the door:

ICEBERG SLIM: I'm ecstatic that I escaped the idiot's paradise. Really. When you knocked on the door? I wasn't leaping out of my skin to hide some dope. My heart wasn't palpitating. I didn't even have to peep through the blinds. I went right to the door. Look, for a roller [policeman] to come to this door -he's insane, he's gotta be a nut. Because I'm not doing anything, you dig it? I used to live in absolute terror. Used to be afraid of having visitors, for instance. Like, you have come. Well, I still don't like many visitors, even now. See, I knew a fellow named Pretty Willy, a pimp. I knew this man for thirty years. He visited me once; by accident I cracked [let slip] where I lived. By accident! All my

friends, Baby Frank, Yo-Yo, I always met them [only] in the street.

Day in, day out, a pimp lives with fear. "In The Life," Harris commented, "We have a saying: when you commit a crime, the world is made of glass. Yeah, you think everybody can see what you're doin'." The pimp must always be on his guard against vice police, narcotics agents, his own women, White people in general, and other Black hustlers.

His greatest fear, of course, is that Whitey will "peep his game." Sometimes when a pimp attempts to "hit on" White women in public places, the hostile glances he receives from nearby White males create excruciating tension. He knows that if a physical fight should develop, even if he wins he will probably lose when the police arrive. It is as if the pimp accepts the fact that he exists under a giant White foot which is continually about to crush him. And so he devises a strategy whereby he can keep placing a tack under that foot so that he can be free, even if only for a minute, while the giant hops around trying to remove the tack. His temporary freedom and his big moment are ephemeral, but very satisfying to a psyche which already feels crushed.

The philosophy of The Life brilliantly codifies the disillusionment, which Blacks feel with the larger American society and its promises, and with Black society as well. At the same time, the players accept the most ruthless and materialistic values, which America has to offer, and they constantly risk all for a shot at affluence and "freedom." But the strain of constantly dodging the giant foot takes its toll; the degree of sadism, masochism, drug and alcohol abuse, and violence in The Life is born of profound stress and frustration.

Those who enter The Life already feel the whole world is against

them. The Book provides them with a philosophy, which neatly crystallizes this point of view, and gives them rules of behavior with which to fight back and perhaps win some of the battles. Everyone is a square outside The Life. A ho looks at all men as potential tricks or police until proven otherwise. A pimp views all women as having their price. Every friendly new face is suspected of being a con artist, informer, or a "police." Life is viewed as a game in which one must get "them" before "they" get you. While The Book provides a daring offensive strategy against oppression and poverty, it most often leads to a self-destructive, self-defeating way of life from which few escape.

In the insular society of The Life, people may at least rely on each other's bitterness and cynicism as a common ground. Consequently, their greatest hostility and disdain is directed at those who still believe "love can last a lifetime," "love, sex, and marriage go together," "honesty is the best policy," or other rosy bromides. Individuals find some security in the rules of The Book, which reinforce the tough psychic shields they have already constructed: love, hope, faith, and trust in friends shine faintly through cracks in their armor. Christina was once deeply affected by the wistful quality of the Hippy Pimp's disbelief when she spoke of home, husband, enjoying her work, and planning a family. Basic disillusionment with life's promise of these pleasures and the accompanying rage are expressed in the dying words of one of Iceberg's characters: "Piss on you squares!"

While the shell that surrounds the pimp or ho protects them from pain, it also prevents many from forming deep and honest relationships. It becomes the psychic "front" which they are always trying to get together and keep together. Since there is no vacation from The Life, they hold on tightly every minute to keep from falling. Craig confessed that he suffered from insomnia and ulcers,

and wished he could go away and just forget it all for a while. Other pimps have expressed the same desire for a retreat, which is one indication of the unrelenting strain under which they must function. Constantly being an actor on stage with no one with whom to be "for real" leads to a quest for solitary pursuits in an attempt to find some peace. Brock takes his dog and goes riding every day out of a stable in the Berkeley Hills. He said he likes nothing better than to tie his horse to a tree, sit down on a hill overlooking the Bay, and let his thoughts wander. He emphasized that he tries to banish all thoughts of The Game from his mind at these times. **some of us is and some of us ain't** There is an ambivalence between the attitude that "we're all brothers" under the foot, and the paranoia about one's fellows: "Some of us brothers and some of us ain't." As Redd Foxx told a Black heckler during his nightclub act, "Some of us gotta go before some of them." Soulful Spider and Tanya explored this dilemma of whom to trust in an animated discussion with us one afternoon.

Soulful Spider was born and raised in an urban ghetto in Canada; he is twenty-one and of graceful, wiry build. As might be guessed from his choice of street name, Spider is a poetic rapper, a spinner of phrases and tales. He keeps a notebook of his writing, chants his poems while playing conga drums, and is a natural dancer and superb mime. It seemed that Soulful had dabbled in a little bit of everything, even being a Black militant, at which he was very fierce in an admittedly theatrical way, but he never could successfully pimp.

Soulful is a supreme example of the versatile street cat. His sense of style is inspired, outrageous, costumey with capes and ivory-handled canes and wild hats and jewelry, but entirely masculine. He also passes as a "hippy" and moves easily through the pot-acid crowd, dealing and hustling whatever comes his way.

He had picked up Tanya, an attractive young Black girl, on the street and -as a lark -decided to bring her over to our apartment, where they taped the following dialogue on Black interpersonal behavior.

Although not in *The Life* herself, Tanya is the younger sister of four pimps and one ho plus assorted relatives in *The Game*. Now twenty years old, she was born and raised in San Diego by a Black father and White mother. Tanya has one illegitimate child which her mother is raising and a failed marriage already behind her, but she affects middle-class values and innocence at the same time that she enjoys showing off her knowledge of the “fast life” of her siblings.

SPIDER: To be Black and to just be yourself and be above that whole thing is harder than it sounds because you're living with your people, you're thinking like your people, you know what they know, but even if you're on a higher plane and you can see all of it, you're still with it, you dig? CHRISTINA: So they remind you that “you're Black and don't you forget it” and more than that, every White person you meet is thinking you're a representative of the Black people? SPIDER: Right. And plus you and your Black brothers, if you put yourself in a compromising position with all of this, you know, and you manipulate everyone, and you pick out the White and the Black and you constantly picking out who is and who ain't, 'cause you know who are prejudiced and who ain't, you know who's the people and you know who aren't. And once you get these people together, I'll bet you any amount of money all of them ain't gone be Black, and all of them ain't gone be White, and all of them ain't gone be Chinese, Japanese, or Mexican. Dig it? So with this type of environmental



friendship and being in the Black community you're going to be accused of being an Uncle Tom unless you're known to one of the Black parties or to a Muslim-type trip and still you're not militant enough, you know. You're too softhearted, you're too this, you're too that, still something is lacking. But they're not aware that you are aware of what's happening and what's gonna come down, and you know who is White and who ain't Whitey, and that everybody's going to be surprised to see who Whitey really is. Dig it when it comes down. It's like being in a square village that's never had any contacts with anything. You become an indirect king, but you still be playing those games, and people still keep trying to classify you. TANYA: Do you know when I came out here I said, "Oh nigger," and my brothers looked and said, "What did you say?" I said, "I said nigger." They said, "You better get the hell out of here." I said, "What's wrong with that?" Said, "Shit. I ain't no nigg-er. What is a nigg-er?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "Girl, you mean nigga." I said, "All right." I was really tripping, you know. I used to be polite, like, "Give me a glass of water, please." They knock that out of you. CHRISTINA: Oh, you were too White for them? TANYA: Yeah. Now, like my friends, I have White and Black and my thing is much different from theirs, but I still dig them, we still tight 'cause we have this thing in common, we're Black, which is cool. We just have this understanding, but they're like militant, you know. Like, "Whites, don't touch me," see, and I don't feel this way at all. My feelings are Black power and everything is cool, but anything can go too far. I'm in a group where there's a bunch of broads, you know, Black-minded broads, really. Like the other day we were walking down the street and we had just bought some hot dogs and this White guy passed by and he goes to sneeze. Well, this

one sister she goes, "God dammit, that Whitey blew on my hot dog," and she threw it away. She threw it a-way. I mean, now this is really Black-minded, but we're together. SPIDER: Nobody can be the same, but everybody can have that feel for everybody. RICHARD: Are you saying that everybody has to belong to a tribe of some sort? SPIDER: Not necessarily so, not necessarily a group. They already are a group, but in that group there are individualities. It's like being in jail. When you're in jail, you're among so many different environments, but they're all Black, but they're all from different environments and they all think different, but basically the same. TANYA: Yeah, like if I walk down the street and I see somebody I don't even know, long as she's a sister, everything's cool, you know, even if I don't know her. Well, there's a lot of uncool Negroes too, don't get me wrong. SPIDER: Yes, the only place you can classify them is Negro. [Uses contemptuous tone] RICHARD: Remember when you met that guy in the street and you thought you knew him? SPIDER: Yeah, right. I ran up on a brother (I was with this Japanese chick) and I thought he was Smokey. "Hey Smoke, don't drive on past me like that." Aw wow, right on up, you know, "Hey, what's happening?" "Oh brother, ain't nothin' to it" (slap) He say, "Well, where you going, man?" "I'm going up the way. Where you goin', man?" "I'm going on down Broadway; I'll take you." I said, "All right, man," (zomp) got in. "Yeah, what's been happening?" (Blam, aw wow, this is not Smokey.) "Yeah, what's happening, brother?" RICHARD: After you found out it wasn't Smokey. SPIDER: After I found out it wasn't Smokey, I just quit calling him Smokey and started calling him brother. TANYA: Sure, that's what I mean. Now if this had happened to a White person they would have said, "Oh my God!" CHRISTINA: "I'm

terribly sorry!" TANYA: "You can let me off right here." I mean they acting like if they don't know each other, they're strangers, boom. "Don't touch me," you know. But the brothers, if they find out that it wasn't him, they still cool, they still tight. They just have that Black feeling towards each other because they feel like they're inferior to the White people in the first place, so they get together and they're close. They have to be. CHRISTINA: Do you know the book, *Black Like Me*? TANYA: Yeah. CHRISTINA: This journalist took a pill to darken his skin pigment and he went down South to experience how it feels to be Black. He said that you go into a men's room, you know, a segregated men's room, and it was really different than the White men's room. People would say hello and they were friendly and wherever you went, even though people never saw your face before, because you were Black, Black people would help you out. TANYA: Right, especially in the South. The thing is eating, you know, in the South. If you meet someone, it's "Let's go eat some gumbo" or something, that's the thing. And if they see a blood [Black person] stranded, they take them home and feed them and "Kick off your shoes and make yourself at home," you know. Now if you get down funky, you gone have to leave which is in any situation, you know. But as long as everything's cool, it's just like a big family. And to me it's just not like that in the White race. SPIDER: The hippies are something like that. TANYA: There's too much paranoia, too much greed.

SPIDER: And suspicion, and too much materialistical fear. TANYA: That's where it's at. SPIDER: And you just come up to a brother and say, "Hey bro', what time is it?" Whereas if it was a White man, I would say, "Excuse me, sir, do you have the time?" CHRISTINA: Well, you know White people say that to each other too. TANYA: Do

they really? CHRISTINA: Sure. RICHARD: But look, often there are situations where I've seen a brother get very suspicious when a blood comes up 'cause they think maybe he wants to game off him. SPIDER: Right on. I run up on that all the time. And they're so skeptical of me 'cause they don't know whether to believe that I'm an individual or that I'm just a Black militant, or I'm a hippy or I'm here just for the game or what. CHRISTINA: Well, you are one of the most individual people I know. There's only one Soulful Spider, you know. Other people come on with "I'm Black" every minute and they don't let anything else show. They can't be for real with me and they can't be for real with each other. SPIDER: This whole city is nothing but games. People just can't sit down and talk to each other because all the time they're talking, they're trying to psych the other person out and see if they're running a game and all the time they are running a game, and it's just not cool. You don't have anybody to trust. TANYA: Yeah. But see, that's where you got to keep your faith. SPIDER: Honey, I'ma keep my faith. Really. When you play the middle, you're on a rope. And the only way you can keep from getting burned, like you always do, is keep the rope wet. Keep each side in a compromising position, and keep that rope wet, and you might get plumb away. TANYA: But you're still running a game. RICHARD: The man's just trying to protect himself. TANYA: Well, it's cold all right. I guess you have to keep everything covered until you find someone you can be for real with. SPIDER: Seem like every dude I talk to now, he's got a game. It's not even interesting anymore. It's not even too exciting. I'm gone walk up to people from now on and tell them, "My name is Soulful Spider and I ain't got no game."

Note that Spider and Tanya first mentioned the traditional brotherly behavior of the old South, then the new brotherhood within divided factions in the urban setting, and finally the ultimate

factionalism of the individual urban hustler who is "running a game" on everybody, the extreme situation of individual mistrust and paranoia.

**lobsters in the basket** A man's image of what he can achieve limits his efforts and places a ceiling on his accomplishments. He may even succeed beyond his hopes, only to "fuck up" and be kicked back down the ladder. This failure syndrome, which is also recognized by Grier and Cobbs, afflicts Black men at all levels of society; pimps seem particularly vulnerable to it.

Ghetto brotherhood-in-failure can be likened to the behavior of lobsters in a basket. Fishermen do not cover lobster baskets, for they know that if one lobster tries to crawl out, the rest will pull him back in. Ghetto culture prepares one to excuse failure, while one's fellow lobsters actively pull you back into the basket.

SWEET JIMMY: See, there just ain't enough money in the ghetto. Whenever some nigga brings in some money from Mister Charlie, all the other niggas want a piece. If a dude got something good going, all his friends and relations come gaming off him to get them some . . .

A Black woman, Queenie, who danced part time in a topless bar, was aggressively pursuing a fashion modeling career. She related that whenever she got her picture in the newspaper, the other girls in the neighborhood would beat her up. Her husband had been jealous of even her limited success, and had beaten her the day before she was scheduled to have an important photography session.

The simple pimp who will hustle every day of his life to remain right where he is subject to pressure from within himself and from outside to be no better than his brothers. To succeed is as

threatening as ego loss, loss of identity, loss of identification with his people. He is unable to imagine who he would be if he succeeded, and so he defines himself as successful in terms of his own culture if he has only mastered the day-to-day survival game.

On the other hand, the boss player seeks to escape the other lobsters in the basket and their attempts to keep him down by rejecting their “jive” and their clannish brotherhood-in-failure. The boss player is nobody’s brother. Through the characters in his novel, *Howard Street*, Nathan C. Heard expresses the dual nature of the hustler’s clique which both supports its members and keep them down:

It’s the ones who supposed to be your friends that you gotta watch, though. These chumps blow the whistle on each other an’ still stay tight, like ain’t nothing happened.... “I know where you at,” Franchot said. “I tried to tell him a long time ago that these so-called slickers and thoroughbreds don’t mean him no good. Ain’t none of ‘em got nothin’; just livin’ from day to day, and they don’t wanna see nobody else doin’ halfway good.” (Heard: 36; italics ours.)

While a simple pimp often feels compelled to lend money to another pimp or to take him in when he is down, a boss player seeks to avoid any such close contact. He would rather risk losing the support of the group in his own time of need than let clique membership cramp his style and expose him to parasites.

**you can miss all the rungs going down** According to the traditional Book, one is encouraged to live high and spend all the money in an orgy of “easy come, easy go.” Life is fast-moving and subject to extreme changes, wild swings between up and down

which foster a "live for today" attitude. The idea of saving or investing money for long-term goals is fairly new and is, in a sense, antithetical to the game's self-defeating foundation.

HARRIS: One thing I can say for The Game, very few players, very few, ever made any money in this business. The majority of them you see sitting in the pool hall and on the corner begging for quarters when they get old and saying, "Aw man, I knew when I used to wear three hundred-dollar tailor-made suits, hundred-dollar shoes." But all of them say "I knew when. I knew when I had." You dig? And man, like money in the hand of a fool is like corn in front of a chicken. Goes from his mouth right down to his asshole, that's right.

I'm not saying that I'm any different because like I have just blown money just to blow money. I had so much I didn't know what to do with, like you know yourself that I have spent sometimes as high as three, four hundred dollars a week buying people drinks, that's right, a week, man, blowing money buying people drinks. And my clothing bill, sometimes it be a thousand dollars a month, yeah. Everything I see I want, I go buy it. Oh I got money.

But then, one night you might be feeling good, you get dressed, you go over on Broadway and then you go downtown and you stick a key in your door and BOOM, just like a cannon at Lexington. CHRISTINA: It's the Man? HARRIS: That's right. And you can beat it, because money can buy anything. But it takes so much money, you dig, a lot of money. Easy come, easy go, right? But if I get broke today, man, I look at it like this, I'll say to myself, "It was good while it lasted," because I did get a chance to do some of the things that I have wanted to do in life, you know. You see, I'm a lover of classical music. Well, in fact I love the

classics, be it music, plays, literature. You see that's where I separate myself from the average run-of-the-mill player, you know I do cater to the fine things in life. Good food, going to the best restaurants, ordering a fine meal.

James spoke of a former pimp in the following terms.

JAMES: Red Williams was a very big pimp in San Francisco eight, nine, ten years ago. Red Williams made a lot of money at one time. Red got busted and he got shot down by the Man. Red is afraid to be that again, he can't make it no more. He don't have the stuff anymore, he just, he looks dehydrated, he looks beat.

RICHARD: Yeah, he looks that way, but he still has a lot to say:

JAMES: Of course. He watched people very carefully. You see, you have your moment, just a moment. It may not be nothing compared to someone over here. It may be two degrees over everybody else who is thirty-five degrees somewhere off you know, but you got something. But then you go down. You have your moment and then you go down and you start coasting, and Red's coasting now.

Aside from the chance of getting caught, "fucking up," or blowing his women, the pimp game has its own natural limits. What, we asked Iceberg Slim, is the greatest threat to a good pimp? He replied:

ICEBERG SLIM: The passage of time: you become more insecure the older you get, just like a whore becomes more insecure. That's the worst thing, the most traumatic thing about pimpin' and hoing. 'Cause you got these little fellows coming up all the time, nipping at your heels, at your broads.



But you always got to have young broads to get money. But you're getting older; older and older. You gotta have nineteen-and twenty-year-old broads to get money. And here you are pushing thirty-five, you got a broad, and here comes a little fellow twenty years old, "talkin' that talk and walkin' that walk" and looking the way you used to look with their freshness and their verve and their vitality, and you haven't GOT it. And their sweetness and lightness of heart and their charm.

The pattern repeats itself; "the players change, but The Game's the same." If a pimp makes it to the top of the ladder or even near the top, he retains his fear of falling:

HARRIS: A lot of people fail to realize that that ladder is a long, hard way going up, Jack. ... You cannot miss a rung going up, but you sure can miss them all coming down; you don't have to touch n'ere one, but you gone get down.

Therefore, he is encouraged to enjoy his "big moment" to the full, and to hell with tomorrow. The important thing is to have something to remember after he takes his big fall. Grier and Cobbs tell a story which perfectly illustrates this attitude in their discussion of character traits in Black personality and culture:

A brother died and went to heaven. He was appropriately outfitted with white robes, halo, and wings. The wings fascinated him; he fluttered them, stretched them, and began tentatively to fly. As he gained experience he tried long swooping glides, he flew high, he flew low, he flew backwards, he flew upside down, and finally he made dive-bombing attacks on the peaceful citizenry below.

Swoosh -within inches of the golden streets. Down over their heads he came, scaring the hell out of cherubim and seraphim. Finally his antics were too much for the management to bear and he was grounded, his wings removed and locked up. As he sat forlornly on the curb a Black brother came up. "Now ain't you a bitch — the way you were performing and carrying on. I told you you were going to lose your wings. If you'd listened to me you'd still have them. No, you had to perform — and now here you sit grounded with no wings!" The miscreant looked up. "But I was a flying son of a bitch while I had 'em, wasn't I!" (Grier and Cobbs: 113; italics ours.)

"Go on, spend it all," says the traditional Book; "steak one day, hot dogs the next." The Game is designed to perpetuate itself regardless of the casualties.

Velvet and his woman are among the casualties. A young, skinny dude, Velvet's appearance is decidedly sinister, an effect which is heightened by his omnipresent black-rimmed dark glasses. He wears a gold crushed-velvet jump suit with purple velvet scarf and an old-style conked hairdo that glistens like patent leather. The ensemble is completed by a tiny Chihuahua wearing a jeweled collar which he has trained to perch on his arm. Like Velvet, the dog is skinny, black, and nervous. His ho is a fat, pimply, unpersonable teen-ager who is, as all hos are, a good indication of her man's level of game.

Once we saw him deliberately burn a bar waitress on the thigh with his cigarette because she didn't respond quickly enough to his summons. Another time he picked a fight with an "outlaw" ho and dragged her up and down the length of a bar until Eldorado Eddie intervened. It was said by the other men that Velvet was afraid to test his manhood on another player, so he would slow off by picking

fights with women and beating them. No one was impressed by these demonstrations, or by Velvet's obnoxious hustling of drinks and small loans whenever he was broke.

One night Velvet came into a bar high-siding about the big "sting" his ho had achieved. An elderly trick had given her eleven hundred dollars in exchange for her phony promise that she would use it to escape her "life of sin." Velvet flashed the money around for all to see, repeatedly bought drinks for everyone, and talked about what he was going to buy with all that cash. He hugged his ho and paid her compliments as she sat expressionlessly by his side.

The very next week Velvet was back in the bar bumming drinks off anyone who would tolerate him, and it was obvious that all the money was long gone.

## **The Hustler as Horatio Alger**

Le Grand is a pimp with two young Black hos, but he works hard every day on his own hustles, such as dealing in dope, stolen merchandise, credit cards, and traveler's checks. He is not unusual, for there are simple pimps who compromise The Book's injunction never to work except at managing a woman. But Le Grand is unique in that he admits that he enjoys earning his own money more than getting it from his ladies. He is so industrious within the hustling subculture that he gets up every morning at 5:30 A.M., lays out his clothes, shines his shoes and dresses meticulously, then begins to make his rounds in the underground business world.

He is concerned that his word is as good as gold, that every delivery is made on time, that contacts are maintained even when goods are not available. He may bilk the taxman or the insurance company, but he maintains the highest of credit ratings with his peers. He is energetically "taking care of business" from dawn until

long after dusk.

Sociologist John Horton neatly expressed the degree of efficiency required of the successful hustler when he wrote, "The political conservative should applaud all that individual initiative" (Horton: 42). Le Grand is completely unaware, however, that if his talents and drive were transplanted into the majority culture he would probably be a very successful salesman. An accident of birth placed him in one environment and he has made the best of it. At the same time, unlike the White square working male, he is subject to the psycho cultural strain of never forgetting that he is an outsider, a member of the "underdogs," and an imitation businessman.

When White middle-class people are presented with this view of the hustler as a dedicated capitalist who is trapped in the hustling underworld, a common reaction is, "Why don't these people just use their abilities and energies to pull themselves out?" A few do. But it is an extremely rare individual who can step outside of his culture, and throw away the survival kit with which that culture has provided him. Many recent Ph.D.s who have been forced to find employment outside their own academic subculture can attest to the magnitude of this task. The tools and attitudes, the cultural lenses upon which a man has learned to depend, cannot easily be discarded for another set. Often one hears about "self-help" programs whose theme is that the people should "raise themselves up by their bootstraps." The image is apt. Promulgators of these programs, as an experiment in semantics, should put on a pair of boots, take hold of the straps, and try to see how far off the ground they can lift themselves!

## Junior Pimps and Hos

The pimping game and other games or hustles arise out of the necessities and conditions of ghetto life. From interviews with players, it appears that three patterns of ghetto existence contribute heavily to steering young people into The Life: early exposure to sex, early initiation into hustling as a way of life, and the apparent irrelevance of the educational system to the lives of Black youngsters. While in themselves each or all of these patterns are not sufficient preconditions, one must

view them against a general background of racism, poverty, hopelessness, cynicism, and paranoia. One twenty-one-year-old player, Bobby Joe from Baltimo', was given a description of what it is like to be schooled

and socialized within the White middle class. He was quick to point out differences in upbringing and outlook he had experienced by being raised in the ghetto:

**BOBBY JOE:** First of all, we know all about sex earlier in the ghetto. When we were little kids we used to play "House." I'd be the Daddy, my little cousin was the Mama, and we'd tell the other kids, "Now you eat your food, Mama and Daddy got something to do." Then we'd go off to the side and we'd fuck, like we know a real Mama and Daddy do. Naturally, when you're a little kid you don't really fuck, we didn't even take our clothes off, but we'd be grindin' up against each other, just standing there, and my dick'd get hard. I fucked all my little cousins like that, even fucked my sister once. It all starts when you're four, five years old. You know what's going on, you hear it from the older kids and you can hear your own Mama and Daddy doin' it, the place is so small and the walls are so thin. In addition to early exposure to sex, the youngster growing up in the ghetto gains early exposure to "the

game” of survival. As another player described it: SWEET JIMMY: One thing you learn early is how to hustle. In the ghetto, everybody hustling off everybody else. From the time I was four, five years old I was gaming like a motherfucker! Had to. Those little kids out there are hustling marbles, playing for keeps. As you get older, you see that you got to get for yourself whatever you can. Your old lady, she may have a square job cleaning Miss Lucy’s kitchen, but she holdin’ policies, bettin’ on the numbers. Your uncle’s always at the racetrack tryin’ to hit.

See, there just ain’t enough money in the ghetto.

Whenever some nigga brings in some money from Mister Charlie, all the other niggas want a piece. If a dude got something good going, all his friends and relations come gaming off him to get them some of it. So it keeps circulatin’ and nobody’s got much at anyone time.

Born in a rural Texas town and raised in a California urban ghetto, Sweet Jimmy was the eldest of seven children, and is now the father of four – two by each of his two women. Jimmy’s style of dressing is casual mod or hippy, and he drives a secondhand Volkswagen van, which had been gaily painted in psychedelic designs by its previous owners. He is good-looking, thirty, of medium complexion, and a very candid, bright, energetic, and entertaining rapper. Jimmy didn’t finish high school and left home at fourteen, but he maintains close ties with his mother. He married and divorced by the time he was twenty-one, then drifted into The Life.

Sweet Jimmy sincerely loves his women and children and sometimes despairs at their future. Unlike the dedicated career pimp, he doesn’t like his women to ho (one of them now carries a square job) because it makes him too nervous when they are out “on the stroll” and subject to arrest. He prefers to take risks

himself as an occasional dope dealer rather than risk his ladies getting busted, which would leave his children without their mothers. Half a “hippy” and half a pimp, Jimmy is uneducated, unskilled, and bitter with the alternatives society seems to offer him. Yet he still manages to be good-humored and happy with his home life, and ambitious and hopeful about the future.

As we discussed differences in upbringing, and the ghetto child’s early exposure to sex and to hustling, Jimmy ventured that this early knowledge makes it almost impossible for a middle-class White schoolteacher to communicate with ghetto children. Her real or pretended ignorance of these realities causes many young people to lose any respect they might have had for her ability to teach them anything:

SWEET JIMMY: By the time you out of grade school, you know that books ain’t where it’s at, that so-called education is just a bunch of bullshit. Square teachers who don’t know nothin’ about life tryin’ to tell you how to act and what to do, fillin’ your head with a lot of shit that ain’t gonna be no use to you. All a man need is to count so he won’t be cheated, read so he can read a contract, and be able to write a letter.

The kids is hip to the system by seventh, eighth grade. That the teacher’s just tryin’ to brainwash you so you’ll take a chump job. By that time, they gamin’ on the teachers and using the school for their own purposes — peddlin’ dope, making contacts, pimpin’, or whatever. They come to school drunk or fucked-up on reefer and pills. Usually, they drop out before they finish high school.

There is the “College of the Street” and the “College of the Joint” (prison) and both, along with the high schools and sometimes junior high schools, form the settings in which the game

tradition is handed down. Kids start pimping and hoing in their early teens, playing at The Game without really knowing what it is. They see their older brother or cousin or neighbor with a big flashy Cadillac “talking that jive” and “high-sidin’” about his roll of hundred dollar bills with its diamond money clip and they are impressed.

The idea that sex can buy all this and a brighter future than the society seems to offer is heady wine for ghetto teen-agers who are fed up with school, fed up with religion, exposed to heavy dope, and (perhaps) experiencing their first ego-testing love affairs. Here is tangible proof, measured precisely in dollars and cents, of a teenage girl’s feminine lure of which she is yet uncertain. Here is tangible evidence that a boy is really a man who not only can get money, but get it from a girl who is all “hung up” on him and will do anything to keep his attention. That’s manhood: money and power over women. If he or she gets arrested, their “education” continues in reform school or jail, and when they get out they are ready for advanced courses at the “College of the Street.”

This time they are going to do it right. Maybe someone they know was a ho at one time or their uncle was a pimp, but they are the older generation and their warnings go unheeded by rebellious youth with few alternatives. Why should they keep their job as a delivery boy for “chump change” when they could be making big money? They read Iceberg Slim and see glory instead of pain. Maybe they know that the liquor store on the corner is owned by a successful former pimp and they decide that they are going to own the whole block, and an estate in the country, and a Lear jet. And so they get turned out.

Sometimes a young man hangs around pimps until one “runs down a little game to him.” Just as frequently a girl may “turn out” a young man by offering to ho for him. Others get turned out after



they have been married and had children, been in the Service, and tried working to support their wives. They are disillusioned with what square society offers them because, unlike the high-school pimp, they have tried living "straight" as adults and found the experience not only wanting but emasculating. Elliot Liebow in Tally's Corner notes how most ghetto people try the American Dream at least once before giving it up. Women get turned out when they have children to support and their man or men have left them, or, if they are single, when they have been working at a meaningless job for low pay and yearn for romance or excitement. Many simply drift into The Life for lack of any promising alternatives.

During the study period, an excellent series of articles on local youth problems by reporter Jim Brewer appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle. According to Brewer, teenage prostitution is rife in the poor Potrero Hill section of The City, "where some 600 families live . . . nearly two thirds of the households are headed by women on welfare." In this environment Brewer documented the existence of at least fifty prostitutes under the age of sixteen. Groups of ninth grade boys at one junior high school were found to be dealing "in narcotics and prostitution, with seventh and eighth grade girls 'turning tricks' for as little as \$5. Their friends call them 'weekend warriors.'"

Although some of this activity may be attributable to the need to raise money for hard drugs, clothing, or other specific purposes, one major cause seems to be a powerful drive in these youngsters for a feeling of accomplishment. Brewer interviewed a local youth group worker who has been working in the area for eleven years. The kids do it because it is "a logical alternative to hunger," he said. "Hunger for love, for status — hunger for the things many kids on the hill never experience."

## Pimps and Hos at Home

After the glitter of flashy cars and grand entrances on the street in custom-made wardrobes, it is something of a revelation to visit pimps and hos at home. In public they deliberately project an affluent image which often bears little relationship to the character of their private lives.

Sharp contrast between street life and home life is a general ghetto characteristic. Since the ghetto dweller feels trapped in a segregated, run-down area where burglaries are commonplace, he takes out his frustration on the home – by ignoring it. Thus he contributes to the downward spiral of the neighborhood. For many ghetto dwellers, the “scene” is not in the home, but out on the street. For the pimp especially, life is most beautiful when he is moving through The City as a whole, using his car, clothes, and folding money to create whatever image he desires. People may wonder: is he a fashion model? A singer? A musician? No one knows who he is, what he does, or where he lives. He could be anyone, could be living anywhere. But when he confronts his shabby walk-up apartment, he is only another nigger in the ghetto.

There are exceptions, of course. Several of the boss players were proud suburban homeowners who had successfully divorced themselves from the ghetto. Such homes are sanctuaries of affluence in the middle-class mode. If there are children, they are kept ignorant of The Life and are indistinguishable from their well-fed, well-scrubbed playmates.

Not so the children of the simple pimp. Moving frequently breaks up their schooling at an early age, and cramped quarters encourage early sophistication about sex and The Game. For most simple pimps and their women, a motel room or furnished apartment is home. Since car and clothes (street front) come first,

little attention is paid to the decoration of living quarters or the accumulation of furnishings. Some do talk of decorating or painting, but never seem to get around to it.

It is difficult to shield children from The Life under such conditions, particularly when playmates repeat the neighbors' derogatory gossip about the new "family" next door. Of course, there are those who have neither the intention nor the desire to hide their lives from their children, but most parents in The Life seem to have conflicts about this aspect of child-rearing, and it is considered a problem. Often a ho's children will be cruelly taunted as "trick babies" by the neighbors' children. Some are delivered from this fate by being sent away to live with a grandmother or other relative.

We visited many pimps and hos at home and were able to observe something of the rhythm of their daily life. Several of these visits were to the suburban citadels of boss players, while visits to the less affluent households brought us to a squalid boardinghouse room, a motel room, an inexpensive furnished apartment house, and an overpriced modern furnished two-bedroom. In the shabbier dwellings the only touch of illusion is that of "good times and wild parties," which sometimes are frozen in numerous Polaroid photographs which line the walls. Usually the snapshots include girls, some in the nude. "Ah, we had plenty, plenty fun that night," they recall, and the proof is in the picture, another fleeting moment of "making it" preserved for all to see.

We have chosen to describe visits to two households which will give the reader some idea of the range of variability in home life. Neither of these are extreme; there are both poorer and richer households. First we will take you to an inexpensive apartment building to visit Mitchell and Mojo and their ladies, once in the afternoon and again later at night.

Then, by way of contrast, we will recount an evening at the expensive home of Keith and Jacqueline, who graciously entertained us in suburban affluence.

Mornings in players' households begin anywhere from 11 A.M. to late in the afternoon. At about 2 P.M. Christina visited Mojo's household in an old brick building which had seen better days. Mitchell and his ladies lived in an adjacent two-bedroom apartment. Both were decorated in Early American Depression; the old stuffed chairs and ancient standing lamps came with the apartments, and served their purposes. However, the contrast between this well-worn, little-old-lady atmosphere and the personal style of the tenants was something of a mind boggler. Mitchell, for example, kept an elegant pedigreed whippet which contrasted with the surroundings like a diamond tiara at a rummage sale.

Mojo's household consisted of himself, his Chicano lady, Pam Pam, and his Black lady, Beverly. His next-door neighbor, Mitchell, also had two ladies, Shannon and Lana, whom the reader has already met (at the soul music performance). At Mojo's apartment the two ladies had possession of the two bedrooms, and the pimp either rotated between his two ladies or slept in the main room alone.

Mojo has well-proportioned strong features, which are decorated by a huge Afro and a handsome goatee. He clowns a lot, pouts, cajoles, and is never quite convincing at being serious unless he is angered, when he becomes vicious, sneering, and wild. It seems almost as if he must keep his enormous potential for aggression under control by acting the little boy. Despite his four years in *The Life*, Mojo has not yet been able to get his "front" together, since he spends most of his money on alcohol, grass, cocaine, and pills. He is in his mid-twenties.

His Black lady, Beverly, is twenty-one, with a slim figure and medium-light complexion. She has three children by her former husband: they stay in Oakland with her mother, and Beverly visits them often, bringing them money and presents. Beverly has a shy, sweet smile, and appears friendly and warm to tricks, whom she either enjoys or robs, depending on whether she likes them. Two years ago she left her husband for Mojo, because she thought him stupid and square for refusing to let her ho. "He didn't want to do anything," she explains, "just go to work and come home every day." Her behavior illustrates an old adage of The Life: "When a woman wants to sell her pussy, ain't nothin' gone stop her!"

Pam Pam is Mojo's Chicano woman, an eighteen-year-old who is very raw and inexperienced in the ways of the world. She goes about her business without "finesse" and cannot resist making witless wisecracks to tricks, but her girlish charm allows her to get away with it. She has large mischievous eyes to which she adds huge false eyelashes, and long curly black hair, which she often hides under a blond wig. Pam Pam has been with Mojo for more than a year. She seems content, and often spends her free time reading Archie and Veronica comic books.

Christina's afternoon visit to Mojo's place was in response to Pam Pam's invitation. She arrived to find Pam Pam alone in the house wearing Mojo's pajama top and her hair up in curlers. She was cooking home fries in the kitchen, and explained that Mojo and Beverly were out at the grocery store and would be back shortly.

Pam Pam opened the visit by talking about the bruises on her face which Mojo had inflicted the night before, showed Christina around the apartment, and described what she wanted her bedroom to look like. Beverly returned from the store with Mojo, wearing a brown wig with curlers in it, which she took off like a hat. Everyone then settled in the kitchen, and Beverly and Pam Pam prepared the

afternoon meal: hamburgers, home fries, and bottled Kool-Aid.

Mitchell came in from next door to get in on the food, and Mojo in turn “borrowed” a dollar from him. There was no other money in the house; all of it had been spent on the meal.

Mojo provided entertaining banter throughout dinner. He is about twenty-four but acts younger; he is constantly teasing, jiving, bragging, and exaggerating each emotion until it becomes self-satire. The girls seem appreciative of having snared such a sexy, good-humored fellow, despite the occasional beatings they receive. Devoid of props or front, Mojo is the most sparkling and theatrical of the three, and the drabber women cater to him like two stage mothers with their temperamental child prodigy. As in most pimp households, the woman is the “star” only by herself out on the street. At home, the man usually far outshines her, and Mojo was no exception.

As the afternoon wore on, he continued to joke and banter, made mock attempts to “pull” Christina, and played largely good-natured personal power games with his women:

MOJO: I’m gone get my own apartment and get away from these crazy women.

PAM PAM: No, you ain’t. You just want to party with some bitch who ain’t givin’ up nothin’, that’s all.

BEVERLY: He don’t have the money, that’s for damn sure. He don’t even have a ride [car].

MOJO: Shut up, woman. If you’d get off your lazy ass we could all have separate apartments.

PAM PAM: I don’t go for that. You need watching.

MOJO: I need watching? I turn my back for a minute and you get drunk and party for two days, don’t come home, and where’s my money?

PAM PAM: I wasn't drunk, I was high, and whoever told you that is a goddamn liar and I'm gonna find out and kick his or her ass. Cost me a beating for nothin' 'cause I brought you your money. I damn sure wasn't going to come home without any. Why you think I stayed out working for two days? It wasn't no party neither.

MOJO: Working, huh. You call that working?

All the while this sort of conversation went on, the women were cooking, washing dishes, reading comic books, bathing, getting dressed, and styling their hairpieces elaborately for the night ahead. The only moment of affection was when Mojo and Pam Pam recounted and demonstrated how they picked each other's pockets once. At the end of the demonstration Mojo reached into her blouse and awkwardly squeezed her breast, whereupon she got embarrassed and barked at him to "quit it."

After dinner, Mojo received a phone call from a friend who was trying to raise bail for a mutual buddy. Mojo, of course, was broke, but he spoke with real concern to the caller, and they discussed how to pawn the man's jewelry in order to raise the money. It became clear that if either of his women were to get busted that night, Mojo would have to go through the same process to raise their bail, despite *The Book's* admonition that a pimp should provide for such exigencies well in advance. Before the phone conversation ended, Mojo "styled" for his friend about Christina's presence in his apartment, and she was asked to verify her identity by talking briefly to the caller. No opportunity to impress others is passed up by a pimp.

Mojo treated the girls to a recounting of a time when he had been busted. It was a "sidity" narrative, portraying himself as the "craziest, baddest nigga still alive." The girls said that they had

never heard the full story of that incident, but didn't challenge any portion of Mojo's obviously exaggerated version. Their ability to believe any sort of story he could invent was demonstrated when Beverly told of how he had sent her a picture from Las Vegas of a mink stole that he had bought and was bringing home for her. Of course, he never arrived with it, claiming that it had been "ripped off," which she accepted as true. The picture of the mink stole and other snapshots which lined the ledge around the room were each explained in an effort to impress the visitor with the "glittering" life they portrayed.

As the "git-down" time neared, the women complained about having to go to work on public transportation rather than in a car. Both girls agreed, however, that having a Cadillac wasn't all that important, as it cost too much money for just "flashing around in." Mojo and Mitchell discussed buying a car jointly so that they could ride around together while their women were working and pick them up when they were done, but this plan never materialized. Mitchell bought a car long before Mojo could save up enough money to pay his half.

After work, between 2 and 5 A.M., pimps and hos may go to sleep, go out to eat, or get together and socialize, during which they often "do jam" and smoke marijuana. If the women are not too tired, they welcome the opportunity to socialize with their men, celebrate what they have earned, and perhaps spend some of the money. On one such morning we accompanied Mitchell and Mojo to their apartment house, along with Bobby Joe, one of their partners, for a late evening visit.

First we went with Mitchell to his apartment. The children were away with relatives. His ladies were both asleep, but he roused them and we all went across the hall to Mojo's "crib."

Shannon was soon alert and ready to party, but Lana was disturbed



at having to interrupt her night's sleep. She was then firmly ordered by Mitchell to sit in the living room with the guests, although she looked sound asleep even with her eyes open. After a short while, the men went into a walk-in closet to shoot up some cocaine, explaining that this was private since we didn't indulge. They returned somewhat "mellow," enjoying their high. With a benign expression on his face, Mitchell extolled the virtues of shooting cocaine. "It's a monster," he said. Lana finally slumped in her chair, and Mitchell allowed her to retire.

Mitchell showed off his few elegant possessions, and proudly demonstrated his control over his fine whippet dog. Beverly went to bed, Pam Pam went out again in response to a call from a hotel bellhop, Mojo felt ill from the shoot-up and retired, and the party dwindled. Bobby Joe finally asked us to call a cab for him because he feared the dispatcher would not send one to that address in response to a Black man's voice. We left together at about 5 A.M. and as our cab passed through the Tenderloin, Bobby Joe pointed out the hos standing on the corner, their day still not over.

Once in a while a pimp's and ho's fantasies come true. An evening visit with Keith and Jacqueline showed us the style of living a boss player and his lady work to achieve. From beginnings which were no more auspicious than Mojo's or Mitchell's, this couple and their children had moved out of the ghetto and bought an elegant suburban ranch-style home. When we arrived, Jacqueline's son was glued to the telephone describing to his girlfriend the "bad boots" and leather vest he had just bought. Like many middle-class teenagers, he stayed on the phone for hours.

Keith is a good-looking, well-built, friendly, quiet Black man of about thirty-five. He does not affect the flash and style of the traditional player. With his unspectacular conservative suits and modest "ride" (a Toyota station wagon) he could easily be your

neighbor, just a family man with a small business of his own, a churchgoer -except that he isn't. His wife Jacqueline has been in The Life for about sixteen years. Although she feels ready to retire, only now is she beginning to achieve the style of life that she always wanted with the man she loves. She must therefore continue indefinitely in order to insure against losing it all. Her business is made up entirely of returning "steadies," which is not surprising in view of her charming, good-humored, and flirtatious personality. She is an avid reader of glamour and movie magazines, and cherishes the memories of her brushes with the great and famous she dated when she plied her trade in Las Vegas years ago.

Jacqueline and Keith live in a sprawling split-level ranch home with four of her five children, and conduct a respectable middle-class life in every way except for their source of income. They have been together for the past ten years, and Keith does not have any other ladies, nor does he want any. Although he jokes about "catching another ho," it is plain to all who know them that Keith and Jacqueline are one of the very few happy and monogamous couples in The Life.

Keith showed us the split-level four-bedroom house, their dogs in the backyard, and ushered us into the family room where we listened to the stereo. It seemed as if there were a television set or radio in every room. Jacqueline appeared in low-cut lounge pajamas molded to her buxom figure, still perfect after bearing five children. She looked a bit weary of life's pressures, and seemed slightly self-conscious about the contrast between her work and the new home environment to which they were becoming accustomed.

They had just moved in a few months previously, direct from an ordinary apartment in a low-rent area, where she still maintains an apartment for her work as a call girl. Keith served good wine with a tray of potato chips, onion dip, and frankfurter

canapes, and also offered marijuana and cocaine from elegant containers.

Ashtrays were frequently emptied, and the middle-class Black magazines on the coffee table were carefully laid out with the titles visible. Rows of dolls, stuffed animals, and toys in the children's rooms were neatly arranged in place. Everything looked as if it had just arrived from the furniture showroom, as indeed it had. There were few personal touches; the house was an almost impersonal embodiment of "gracious California living." They were making a fresh, clean start. The perfection of every detail of their recently realized dream was testimony to their nightmares that they might wake up one morning and find it all gone.

Talk turned to Keith's cousins who were jealous of his new home, and of the friend they knew "before" who had lived in a much finer apartment than they and could no longer feel patronizing towards them, of their buying a modest car rather than a Cadillac, for the sake of inconspicuousness, and of the square White suburban couple with whom they are friendly. We were shown albums of color photos, including the average American's pictures of middle-class friends and family at parties and weddings.

Especially significant was the framed photograph of Jacqueline's teen-age son in his football uniform. It was inscribed with a long, beautifully written paean of praise, love, respect, and gratitude to his parents. His flowery language could not mask the genuine love that binds the family together in their struggle to live both normally and luxuriously. Jacqueline is concerned that her son meet "the right kind" of friends. They live with their secret and their fear of falling back down the ladder; they know full well how tenuous is their grasp on success. Instead of dividing the family, the struggle emphasizes their best personal qualities, and it appears that the three generations (Jacqueline's parents, her and Keith, and

her children) share a remarkable closeness.

Jacqueline told of one night when Keith and she had an argument and "he stayed away for three hours." Her manner revealed how lost she would be without his love and esteem, and how lucky she feels to have found him this late in the game (she is thirty-two and Keith is about thirty-five). They were the only couple at a large player's party we attended who clung together while the rest of the men and women sat rigidly segregated. At that party, the typical ho's sororalism and the pimp's fraternalism contrasted strongly with the conspicuous familialism of Keith and Jacqueline.

As the evening wore on, we spoke of people in The Life who had been at that party and some who frequented "The Player's Inn" and we learned of their changing fortunes. Velvet had been shot to death, Eldorado Eddie had been ambushed and shot by some "brothers" of a Black airline stewardess he had tried to "catch," and another older player had moved into a fabulous apartment across the street from the state attorney general's house (!) and had been busted for marijuana and cocaine during one of his late-night parties there.

Keith said he didn't see that crowd very often and, like most boss players, preferred to keep to himself. Safety, security, gracious living, and respect (and love, if one is lucky like Keith and Jacqueline) are the boss player's desires, even if he has to leave his friends, the simple pimps, behind. Upward mobility can be a lonely road.

Although they have attained their fantasy of gracious living and made it a reality, we got the impression that they are spending as much as Jacqueline earns (one hundred and fifty dollars daily) to maintain it, and do not want to be hustled by any of their old friends for loans. They have no intention of sharing their hard-earned rewards with the "lobsters" in the ghetto they left behind.

We mentioned how Brock, a mutual friend, had had a pony when he was six years old in Oklahoma and had sold rides to the other kids in the neighborhood for ten cents. Keith responded, "He worshiped that pony, but he still sold rides on it," and he looked smilingly at Jacqueline. She laughed as she got the joke and repeated it in a philosophical tone of voice. We left at about 1 A.M. as Jacqueline must be up at nine to commute to her City apartment.

## Some Juicy Gossip

To round out the picture of everyday life, we are going to spend a few pages gossiping about the people in a particular "pimp and ho" apartment building. Our prime source is Queenie, a loquacious Black girl who was not in *The Life*, but who lived in the building for about a year. When Queenie had moved in, one of the girls had said to her, "This is a pimp and ho building. What are you doing here?" To which she replied, "There ain't no sign outside."

Although Queenie is not a ho and has never been in *The Life*, she has been around it long enough to know the scene well. Queenie worked in one of the topless bars for a while before her temper flared in a beef with a scrappy pimp, and she was fired for causing the brawl. At twenty-two she is the mother of one young boy, and her ambition is to be a high-fashion model. She has made some small progress towards this goal, but her beauty has suffered through her stormy encounters with the men in her life, who have a tendency to want to beat her up. Queenie attributes her troubles to jealousy on the part of men who "can't stand to see a woman doin' good."

According to Queenie, the building was occupied by six pimp and ho families, assorted bus drivers, mailmen, and a few Black Panthers. Tenderloin Tim, who lived in one of the apartments with

his Black ho, was displeased at having militants for neighbors. "God damn," he said, "they gonna shoot up the place." The Panthers told Queenie she should throwaway her wigs, wear a natural, and "be proud." They only stayed a month, for they made some trouble and got themselves thrown out. However, they retaliated by taking some furniture with them and breaking windows. The bus drivers and the pimps agreed that they were glad the militants were gone.

Tenderloin Tim and his lady "were like married," according to Queenie, "but sometimes he would let her freak off with another woman." He kept a tight rein on his lady; "he wouldn't even let her smoke a joint without his permission. Made her treat him like a king: set the table fine and always had a pitcher of Polly Pop [Kool-Aid] in the refrigerator." Queenie said that none of them ever had any money; "Couldn't borrow a dime from them, but they'd always be wanting you to lend them money to blow on cocaine and gambling. They'd buy and sell hot goods all the time. Tim and his woman had two motorcycles, a car, and clothes to sell." Once, the master spy Queenie listened in on the party line and heard the following: "Goin' to the Tenderloin tonight?" "Yeah." "Gonna take the cars?" "No, you know they're rented."

Craig, Shari, and her three children also lived in one of the apartments, an overpriced (two hundred and forty dollars a month) carpeted modern two-bedroom. Craig is a tall, dark-skinned, mustachioed man of twenty-eight who peers out somewhat cautiously from behind oversized mod glasses. Clothing seems to be his only passion; whatever the latest men's styles happen to be, Craig will be one of the first to model them for the night people. Despite his pretensions of living a happy-go-lucky playboy's existence, he readily admits to insomnia, ulcers, and a desire to "get away from it all." Sometimes other ladies join Craig and Shari,

but none ever stay for very long. When he has other hos to worry about, Craig's ulcer acts up.

Craig's old lady and bottom woman, Shari, is also twenty-eight, but could pass for eighteen. She could also pass for Polynesian or Hawaiian, but she is "Black-minded" and never attempts to be what she ain't. Attractive, slim, and witty, her ability with a quick comeback is likely to catch the fancy of a trick who is bored and seeks entertainment as well as sex.

Shari is a seasoned ho who knows the streets and all the bars, and is adept as a chameleon in adjusting her behavior to her surroundings. She and Craig have been through hard times together, living in small motel rooms, and they have also tasted affluence. They never have been able to get enough money together to retire or go on to higher game, and so they continue to play the survival game — but neither seems to want to change badly enough to break the inertia of their lives. Shari actually seems to enjoy herself immensely on the stroll, and it is difficult to imagine her giving it up.

The father of one of her children is rumored to be a member of a famous Black singing group. When the group was performing in town, they all came to the "Player's Inn" and Shari was with them. Craig and she have been together nine years, and he told the Hippy Pimp who lived with him for a while that he really dug Shari and the kids. Queenie reports that Shari was "bossy and got beat up all the time."

Craig did not want Shari to have her third child, and kept her out working until the day before she gave birth. He told her she couldn't bring it home from the hospital, but she brought it home anyway. Craig renamed it and let it stay. The baby is now his favorite: He came into one of the bars after it had been born with an annoyed expression on his face. Some of the hos had been talking

about the baby, and Birthday Cake approached him, slapped him on the back, and loudly asked, "Where's my see-gar?" He replied that the sooner Shari got back to work the better, and went down the bar muttering "see-gar, see-gar" to himself.

Usually the pimp tenants would gather in Craig's apartment, Queenie reported, and "do cocaine and talk about what the women should do." Many of them had known each other before in other cities. Queenie said that Shari's children knew what she did for a living and "kinda ignored it." When she was in jail for six months, they said she was "in the hospital."

Hippy Pimp lived with Craig when he had no lady, and for a while after he "caught" one. He reports that a ghetto White broad who had been one of Tenderloin Tim's ladies "came around every day to get some dick," but that he "didn't give up any," saying, "I don't want no short-stop money" (meaning that regardless of how broke he was, he would insist that a ho choose him properly rather than pay him for occasional sex).

Once Hippy Pimp and Craig had a falling out. One of H.P.'s ladies had come to Craig with her problems, and he had advised her to "take a vacation" from Hippy Pimp and "think things over." Despite this serious breach of male etiquette they are "partners" again, and Hippy Pimp says that Craig is the only one he could trust in an emergency. "Of course," he adds, "Craig doesn't have any money. He still owes me sixty dollars, so there's no insurance in that." Although Craig had formerly driven a late model Cadillac, when we knew him he didn't own a "ride," and during the study Craig, Shari, and the three children all moved into one motel room. "The older boy ran away one day," related H.P., "and Craig had to call the police to find him a block away." Fortunes change in *The Life*, but it usually is a matter of how far down you are rather than how far up. However, the last we heard of Craig, he had his women



and children comfortably ensconced in a pleasant, roomy flat in a nice neighborhood.

Queenie described other doings in the apartment house. A Chicano ho used to hang around the place and switch pimps several times a month, depending on who was free because his women were in jail. She showed Queenie a hundred dollars' worth of counterfeit money for which she said she paid forty dollars. Queenie was always aghast at the audacity of her neighbors' games and swindles. "Those hos," she said, "they brag about how they only take off one leg of their pantyhose and never get their hair messed."

These everyday, gossipy accounts give us a sense of the character and flavor of the simple pimp's way of life behind his front of fantasy. Despite his special games and rules, he is still very much a part of the ghetto. Every kid on the block knows in which apartment a pimp family lives.

## **Change in American Society, the Ghetto, and The Book**

**black capitalism, racism and pimping** In the old days, according to Iceberg Slim, pimping was based on a pathological hatred of women; "a pimp would get a thrill out of vilifying women," and, of course, there was the thrill of having a flashy car and clothes, and living, if only for a short time, like a rich aristocrat. Much of this lure is still present today, and a good number of the pimps we encountered are living the old life for today's thrills and not tomorrow's security. In the heyday of Iceberg Slim it was "pimp or die," and very few pimps thought or planned for tomorrow. Most of them expected to end up no better than the women: in jail, over-

dosed on drugs, chronic alcoholics, a bullet in the head. Iceberg Slim almost ended up this way. He and only a few of his peers managed to retire from The Life with any security and their minds intact.

Today, along with the greater hopefulness of Black people in general, a good many players claim to be planning for the future. This development has produced significant change in the rules of The Book. Whereas before in orthodox pimping it was strictly taboo to accept money from any other business than prostitution and the pimp never hustled or worked at anything else, today the players more often than not are involved in getting a career of their own started while their women are working. It is no longer a question of "pimp or die" for the men and ending up in Woolworth's for the women. The Life for its own sake has its glamorous traps, but both the men and the women no longer resign themselves to poverty or incarceration when their day is over. Some continue to "blow all the money up their noses" (cocaine), but all of the informants at least claimed to be planning for the future.

Madame X described the shift this way.

MADAME X: Well, I'll tell you on the Negro side. The Negro player, it is a fight against racism, that he has turned player. He is three steps ahead of Whitey in every way and the only way he could get this was with women, because he tried working.

CHRISTINA: All right, well, let me ask it to you this way. You see now, a lot of these dudes that I have talked to here, they will talk about some goal that they have. Sometimes it is a very small business goal: a liquor store, a bar, a service station. Now in your experience do these cats actually follow through their goals?

MADAME X : Well, in the East, this started just after World

War II, it became prevalent among the Negro especially to gain prestige. It has only happened in the past year on the West Coast, oh, I would say in the past eighteen months. About eighteen months ago I sat in a little honky-tonk in the Fillmore and watched this big cat come in from Los Angeles and I will not name the sum of money, but it was so fantastic that the hundreds of thousands of dollars that were coming out of these Negro pimps' pockets for this syndicate. Now what they are doing, they are all going into righteous business, buying properties, putting up highrise buildings, office buildings. And there are little syndicates and there are big syndicates and there is factions thereof and they are spreading all up and down the West Coast. And they will be the ones who will meet the middle class, they are the ones who are giving the loans now and they have the forethought of opening a bank. Remember all this money used to go for dope and Cadillacs and other such stuff? It is now going into conservative used cars, into conservative dressing, and the diamonds are being put away for security and they are living in more moderate-priced homes and they are investing their money.

This interview was conducted in the fall of 1968, and since then we were able to verify the boasts of various players that they were involved in this or that business, although confirmation of the "big-time syndicate" and other grandiose visions of Madame X eluded us. The businesses which we verified among our sample include a gas station which folded, a talent agency which folded, a liquor store which has been successful for years, a successful record store, a massage parlor since sold, a successful photographic supply shop, apartment buildings, a movie theater, a beer bar, a fried chicken store, a Black advertising agency. The careers include two artists, two filmmakers, a number of musicians,

actors, and managers, a real estate trainee, a male model, and many individuals who aspired to careers outside The Life but had not yet achieved their ambitions.

We did not find any indication, however, of the degree of organization described by Madame X, although other sources could not demolish her story either. At the time this interview took place we did not know of all the businesses listed above, and so we challenged her on the degree of culture change that had occurred.

RICHARD: It is very interesting what you are saying right now, because I confess I haven't heard about any of this and most of my observations up to this point are that people are doing what you would call the same old thing; they all have Cadillacs, sharp, expensive clothes, diamonds, and they talk vaguely about the future. Most of them say that they want to have a good time today while they are still young. At least five of them that I am thinking of would go to a jam house and blow a hundred dollars a night without even thinking about it, if times are good, and maybe one or two of them that I know have started small businesses and they keep it as a sort of front and also hope that in later years. . . MADAME X: That's right. . . Well, now you can go into the slums and ghettos of Fillmore, I speak here of our own area, I know of at least fifteen righteous places that have opened and they are for the middle-class people and for the workingman to come to ... well, like bars, restaurants, record shops, clothing stores, just diverse places, all types of businesses, and they have all made their money off of Game. They saved their money and their ladies are still working because you know it takes about two years to see your money back in a business. The ladies are still out working, still bringing the money in, and it is still

being invested into the business. Well, I can't see anything wrong in that, after all, too many people are starving on fifty dollars a week. I know many many pimps that are married and have children and their ladies are their main ladies, and they have other ladies. Like, you know, like the fellow with the appliance store. I know who you are talking about, and I know the people that had the store before him, and before him too, and his ex-partner, all these people. I know all these people. I was just there the other night when this new place opened and one said to me, "What's he frontin' for?" And I said, "He's frontin' for nothing. He is selling beer to the public like you're selling fried chicken." I said, "Now if you think he is a front, why don't you go and ask him? He is supposed to be your friend, you are all supposed to belong to the same thing."

Although we have clear evidence that pimping is frequently used as a springboard for individual Black capitalism in the ghetto, we were unable to determine to what extent it is organized. It would certainly be an ironic chapter in the history of the rise of ethnic groups in the United States if, as Madame X suggests, an underground syndicate of Black pimps and their streetwalkers were part of the means by which Black Americans achieved an economic power base with which to battle for respect and their "moral" due. We can attest to the fact that this concept of *The Life* as part of the war against racism is a conscious idea in the mind of every informant, Black males and Black and White females. Their strategy is a wily one. Unlike the Black Panthers they say, "We do not put our heads in the lion's mouth; we just sneak around behind, cut off his balls, and take his wallet."

There may be some parallel here with the women of Algiers,

described by Frantz Fanon, who were capable of extraordinary psychological feats in wartime (Fanon: 58-67). Fanon describes the tremendous courage of the militant-women of Algeria who, prior to the revolution, were the repositories of traditionalism protected by their husbands and the veil from acculturation. At different stages of the struggle the wives and daughters of the revolutionaries were called upon to completely recondition their conceptions of their role as women. Fanon, a psychiatrist, analyzed the psychological and cultural significance of the veil and pointed out that its removal required a radically new attitude towards the body. When it was removed it was for the purpose of masquerading as a Europeanized colonial in order to travel unobtrusively in certain areas.

Later on in the war the militant woman reassumed the veil in order to carry concealed arms and explosives and perform sabotage in the cities. She had to travel alone on trains carrying important information for the revolution, although before she had never left the house without her mother or her husband accompanying her. She faced torture, rape, imprisonment, and court interrogation with astounding acceptance.

Fanon mentions that there were even militant prostitutes who functioned as intelligence agents for the revolution, and that "certain European women of Algeria were arrested, to the consternation of the adversary who discovered that his own system was breaking down" (Fanon: 61). The degree of psychological and physical reconditioning, cultural change under the conditions of the revolution, and the participation of European women is somewhat analogous to the player's tactics: the turning out of square women, the justification of pimping as the only way to "get Whitey," and the employment of White women who have cast their lot with the underdog.

One night in San Francisco, we witnessed the arrest of a well-

known player on a minor charge. He was soon released, but as he sat in the back of the patrol car we overheard the conversation of two Black prostitutes (not his) who were watching the proceedings. "Look who they've got in that car," said one. "Yeah," said the other, glaring at the police, "I wish I had a bomb right now." What is, of course, significant in this incident is that the prostitutes identified their personal oppressor not as the Black pimp, but as the White police.

**pimps and hippies** In the Haight-Ashbury and other sections of the city, Black pimps and hos often find themselves living in close proximity to White hippies. Often they are thrown together at informal pot parties and other social contexts. Several apartment houses inhabited by pimps and their stables were adjacent to hippy buildings. Craig would get up each afternoon, look across the alley to the house next door, and call out to his female neighbor, "Hey there, hippy girl, you ready to choose today?"

Contact with hippies and their influence on fashions have altered players' clothing styles; no longer does one see so many sharp silk suits. In the last few years sartorial tastes have shifted, and the current trend is casual as well as tailored with a partiality towards expensive leathers and fringes and the stylish pseudo-hippy outfits.

Cultural exchange between pimps and hippies is facilitated by their proximity in various neighborhoods, as well as by common attitudes about the police, narcotics agents, "squares," and perhaps marriage, school, and other societal institutions. One pimp, whom the reader has already met briefly, wears expensive hippy-style clothes, calls himself the "Hippy Pimp," smokes only grass (no harder drugs, alcohol, or coffee), eats organic foods, talks astrology, and one of his hos was a hippy panhandling spare change

downtown on Market Street when he found her. With his leather-fringed jackets and wild leather hats, he could easily pass for a renegade from the cast of *Hair* – or a prosperous San Francisco dope dealer.

These traits are in startling contrast to his purple-suede finish Mark II Cadillac (the entire car body has been sprayed with a synthetic suede) equipped with television and telephone, and his plans to buy a business in the future. He favors a fringed purple suede jacket which matches the car and its upholstery, with leather cutouts of stars, moons, and astrological symbols. His personal style is unusual for a pimp, with affectations of anything in the hippy mode, while in fact he is an extremely dedicated capitalist.

A few years back he tried to make his fortune as a dope dealer and got several years in prison for his efforts. When he was released, he decided to pimp because “it’s safer than dealing because the girl takes all the risks.” Despite his very meager education, Hippy Pimp has a lot of genuine chann, spunk, and a disarming love of outrageousness for its own sake. Once he was stopped by police, who searched his car for dope. H.P. put on a loud act of being offended. “I ain’t no dope dealer,” he proudly announced to the cops, “I’m a PIMP! Just ask my lady here, she’ll tell you, I ain’t no god-damn dope dealer.”

Despite Hippy Pimp’s fondness for the flourishes of the Aquarian Age, among most pimps the consensus is that “only the fuck-ups fall into the hippy bag,” and it appears that Black capitalism is a much more potent force for change. For example, LSD is one drug that the pimps unanimously either disliked or wouldn’t try although the hippies around them were doing it all the time. We asked one pimp why. He replied, “Oh, no, man, I’m not about to drop acid. It’s supposed to open your mind and show you the truth about yourself. Well, I don’t want to know the truth. Right



now I'm just happy making money, and if I'm a bad guy, I don't want to find out." His answer startled us because of the many times one reads warnings against LSD by psychologists who note its alleged propensity for "lowering goal-directed activity" and causing people to "drop out." The pimp really has many values in common with the White or Black businessman who fears that taking LSD would cause him to sell his business and become a bum smelling flowers in the park!

We have found that most Black hustlers we encountered had a similar aversion to LSD. They prefer drugs which allow one to "take care of business," especially cocaine, marijuana, and "pills." So we were not greatly surprised when Eldridge Cleaver announced in Algeria last year that he had placed Dr. Leary under Black Panther arrest for his continued use of "acid."

"We busted Leary," Cleaver explained to the media, "because we feel we need people with clear heads, sober people who have their wits about them." He claimed the Panthers were "through relating to this madness," the "whole silly psychedelic movement": "We do not advocate people indulging in revolutionary activity while under the influence of drugs of any type, that that is harmful to our cause, and the use of drugs under the present circumstances should be viewed as counter-revolutionary activity." Black politicians, like Black hustlers, want a piece of the action; while many disaffected white youths want to "drop out" of the system, Blacks want a chance to "drop in."

## **Relations Between the Generations**

Pimps do not always estrange themselves from their families when they go into The Life. Among those whose families live close by

there are many who see their relatives regularly and try to maintain good relations. Brock sees his parents quite often, and was very annoyed one night when his mother had forgotten his birthday. Silk came into the bar one night with his brother William, who is a butcher. He introduced William as such, a man with a "trade." William seemed delighted to be out with his brother, Silk the pimp, and he fell into the pimp style of "coming on" with obvious glee. It was obvious that they both respected and liked one another, despite the different worlds in which they travel.

We asked Silk if he had a sister. He said yes, that she is the eldest and he is the youngest. ("I came by pimping naturally; I was the baby of the family.") Silk said that his sister is a "ho" because she puts men into a "trick bag," but that she won't "cop to" that fact. She deplors his pimping because she is afraid that her young son might follow in his uncle's footsteps. Silk's mother is religious, he said, and "nice." ("She goes to church every day.") She is aware that he is pimping and calls him up sometimes to tell him, "I've had a feeling that you are in a bad way and I want you to know that I'm praying for you." Silk's father was originally worried that William was going to pimp because he came along first and he isn't married. Silk believes that his strong family ties make him a "good" pimp, not "like the others." If parents are caring for the offspring of a ho or pimp, they are often in even closer contact.

There is a remarkable tolerance and ability to overlook on the part of Black families. Black pimps and hos are not necessarily family outcasts in the ghetto. Religious mothers may weep and pray for them, but few will forsake their sons or daughters in times of need, even if the offspring are "sinners." They love their children and are well aware of the problems that they face. Hustling children dream of coming home one day and being able to say, "Daddy, I don't need any money, I just came to see you. By the way, do you

need any?" Harris Hew back to Chicago to see his father for the first time in fourteen years. He described his great pleasure at assuring his dad that he was "making it," and Hashing an eleven-hundred-dollar roll to prove it. Mitchell left home at fourteen years of age and recently flew back to Louisiana (ten years later) with his two White ladies and his children to make his triumphal return. It seems as if they all want to say to their parents, "You worked like a slave for the Man and told me I couldn't do much better, but I did it, my way. Can't you be a little proud of me?"

## **The Cat Versus the Bad Nigga**

A man's notion of his own worth is very greatly influenced by his parents' opinion of him during childhood. As we have seen, many pimps and hustlers are actively concerned with making their parents proud of them, despite their break with square society. One day Jimmy happened to mention that he was "supposed to be the bad one":

SWEET JIMMY: Yeah, I was the bad one, always acting crazy. The neighbors always said I would never come to no good because I was always getting in trouble in school, because I wouldn't take no bullshit. But their kids, the ones that went through school, the ones that's supposed to be the "good" ones, they never did nothin' for their Momma except drain her dry. Me, I just made the down payment on a new car for my Momma. So who's the bad one?

If being Black means one is the "bad guy" according to White majority culture, the question becomes how can one turn

“badness” into “goodness” without either “acting White” or destroying oneself. That is the personal problem of every Black kid who grows up in America.

Since being “good” by White standards has usually meant “knowing your place,” “doing what you’re told,” and being subservient, Black people have developed a counter standard. The White man’s definition of “goodness” is seen to be emasculating and stultifying, which is bad for Blacks; the man who asserts his masculinity and refuses to bow before authority is therefore “good.” Thus, a “bad nigger” is one who is so “bad” he is “good”: he is admirable in his defiance.

Of course, this turnabout creates a great deal of confusion, for a really “bad nigger” is so aggressive that he inspires fear in Blacks as well as Whites. If he is so “bad” as to be unpredictable and violent he becomes a danger to all; a man who establishes a reputation as someone who is “that bad” will be shunned. Even if he does not harm his fellows, surely he will do something that will provoke White wrath, which may come down upon the heads of his friends as well. Therefore no one wants to risk being associated with him.

The pimp or the player may be “bad” in that he ignores many rules of White and Black society, but his is a calculated “badness” which is highly respected. He values his own life and his own game, and is therefore predictable. He can be trusted not to blow his game, for he has disciplined himself to be “bad” in ways which contribute to his survival, not his self-destruction.

Black men who are hip hustlers or players are said to be like cats. They are cool, stealthy, independent, powerful, and have charm, finesse, and dignity. Bobby Joe once described the Black player as a cat in a beautiful poetic rap:

BOBBY JOE: The cat is a boss thing. He’s graceful, he’s

quiet. He walks up to the bird and the bird is fascinated, dig it? He don't run, he don't fly. He want to see what this cat is up to. Like a pimp coming up on a ho. By the time she gets hip to this beautiful cat, she's been caught, see. The cat is a boss thing. The cat have finesse. He keep a balance between scare and love; he keep the bird off balance. Sweet-talk her one minute, slap her up side the head the next. But with finesse, dig it, finesse is more beautiful than love, it's an art. If the cat can charm the bird, the cat will never starve; the cat is a boss thing.

Bobby Joe is new to The Life and to San Francisco. He has intelligent eyes, a dazzling smile, chocolate skin, and wears his hair in a close-cropped natural. Bobby Joe is a super-enthusiastic, very bright, and perceptive fledgling pimp philosopher. Although barely twenty-one, he is a facile rapper who abounds with ideas and verbal imageries, and already has one lady, his first ho. He is idealistic about the future and plans to go legitimate, perhaps even become a preacher when he leaves The Life. He compares himself, as many do, to famous Black talents who came up out of "the mud" and "did it any way they could," while saving their loftiest thoughts about helping their people until they themselves were on top. "How can you help anyone else unless you are able to help yourself first?" Bobby Joe asks.

We asked him if the Black Panthers were cats. Bobby Joe replied that they weren't "because they aren't cool and they can't move through nine lives." By this he meant that they were confined to one role, "the bad nigger," whereas the player can wear many masks with equal ease. He may pose as a "hippy" one day or a slick hustler the next; he can play to different audiences and be believable in the various roles which contribute to his survival. B.J.

admired this versatility in the cat: "He can bounce back and survive wherever you turn him loose. He's cold and distant one minute, next thing you know he's rubbing up against you. But he always get what he needs. The cat is a boss thing."

The cat and the bad nigger represent two different solutions in Black culture to the problem of being a man. The cat is an aspect of the trickster, the Signifyin' Monkey,\* Br'er Rabbit,\* the player, the pimp, the hero who uses wit and guile to overcome. The bad nigger is allied to the desperado, Bad Man Dan, "Stagolee," the black-jacketed militant with the machine gun, who plow against resistance with brute force, or the show of it. An old "bad nigger" ballad of the rural Deep South begins:

*I've Wild Nigger Bill  
From Redpepper Hill,  
I never did work and I never will.  
I've done kill the boss;  
I've knocked down the boss;  
I eats up raw goose without apple sauce!*

\* Heroes in ballads and folklore.

And yet there is widespread recognition within this tradition that the "bad nigger," despite his formidable "rep" (reputation), is going to meet a bad end, because eventually he will meet someone "badder" than he is. In folklore, a common way of meeting his end is when his desire for glory and "rep" forces him into a situation where he must use his gun, although he really didn't plan to kill anybody. Thus the role is seen as a self-destructive but not inglorious one.

In the following old "lie," which is still popular today, the "ba-a-a-dest" nigger around meets his match in an unusual way:

During slave days, there was a plantation owner that had the baddest nigger anyone ever heard of. His name was Kokomo and he was the biggest, baddest, meanest, ugliest nigger that ever lived. Now this plantation owner was so sure that his nigger was the baddest in the country that he was willing to bet his whole plantation that no one could whup Kokomo.

Across the way, at the next plantation, the master asked among his slaves if there was anyone who might challenge this Kokomo. Everyone told him about his own nigger Efam, who had the reputation of being plenty plenty bad. So the master asked Efam, "Do you think you could whup this Kokomo?" "He ain't nothin' compared to me, Boss," Efam replied. "I'm the baddest nigger in the whole state." He proclaimed his "badness" so loudly and with so much self-confidence that the boss bet his plantation against the other master's plantation that Efam could beat the giant Kokomo.

Now, the master didn't know that Efam was a big bullshit artist! Through his jivin' and carryin' on he had convinced everybody that he was bad, but he was no match for Kokomo; there was no contest there at all. But when the boss came and told Efam that he had staked his whole plantation on the fight, what could Efam do? He wasn't the type to run away -in fact he always tried to back up his bullshit, which was why he was always getting his ass into these ridiculous situations. So, although he was shaking inside, he continued to tout his badness and his strength. "Don't worry, Boss, I'ma kill that big ugly bear. I'ma waste that dude so quick everyone will see what a chump he is."\*

Efam moved into the big house, got the master to outfit him with fine new clothes, ate five meals a day, and sat right next to Miss Anne, the White belle of the plantation, at the dinner table. Instead of training he

spent all his time just a-restin' and a-dressin'. He had a high old time, enjoying his sudden good fortune, but meanwhile he was trying to figure a way to beat that mean, tough Kokomo.

Finally the big day arrived. The slaves of both plantations were on hand, and people had gathered from miles around for the event. As a warm-up Kokomo pulled a few trees out by their roots and threw them so that they landed a few miles away. Then he began to throw a gigantic sledgehammer way out of sight in the air, and each time it fell it would bury itself five feet in the ground.

After a while, Efam showed up in a fine horse-drawn carriage with the master and Miss Anne. He slowly emerged from the carriage and realized that if he fought he didn't have a chance. But he didn't let on. Instead, he gracefully removed his cape and walked towards his gargantuan opponent. When he was halfway towards

\* Muhammad Ali commonly used this psychological strategy before his prize fights, which was one reason for his enormous popularity in the Black community.

Kokomo, he stopped, clasped his hands, and looked to heaven. "Oh, dear Jesus," he said in a loud voice, "please forgive me for the way I'm going to kill this nigger. I know he don't stand a chance, and he just plain dumb to think he badder'n me, but he going to get wasted just the same."

At this, Kokomo started to get a little jittery. There never was a man who could stand up to Kokomo, and he started to wonder where this little-bitty nigger could get such confidence. Kokomo thought he must be crazy, and Kokomo didn't dig crazy men — no tellin' what they might do.

Kokomo started to advance towards Efam. He reached out his hand which was as big as a ham hock and could have just crushed Efam with one blow, but Efam suddenly called out, "Hold it, hold it," and stopped cold.



Then he slowly walked back to the carriage, took hold of Miss Anne's hand, and invited her to step out. When she did so, he said, "Where's my white gloves? Bitch, you forgot my gloves!" And with that, he slapped Miss Anne across the face, hard. The crowd looked on in stunned disbelief.

At this, Kokomo suddenly took off running and he kept on running and hasn't been heard from since. As he broke into his run, he called back over his shoulder, "Sheeit, any nigger that slaps a White woman in Georgia is too b-a-ad for me!"

Thus, the only man badder than this bad, bad nigger turns out to be the trickster, and a pimp-talkin', mackin' motherfucker at that!

## Chapter Six

# Sex, Race, Manhood, and Womanhood

Late one Saturday night, after the bars had closed, Brock sat in our apartment scrutinizing his perfectly manicured fingernails. "I think I'll have a little blow before we begin," he said as he produced the folded hundred-dollar bill in which he carries his cocaine. With a small-jeweled spoon of gold, he dipped into the white powder, gracefully carried it to his nose, and delicately inhaled in a manner reminiscent of a French aristocrat taking snuff. As his mood became mellow and reflective, we turned on the tape recorder. "The Game itself ... is a beautiful thing," he began, "because it is a beautiful expression of manhood and womanhood."

Anthropologists are trained to record all sorts of fantastic statements without batting an eye, but this was a bit much. Did Brock really believe there was something profound and “beautifully expressive” in the pimp game, or was he testing our credulity? We remembered the many times players had told us, “Everyone should know about the pimp game; it’s the whole foundation of what men and women are about.” As Brock continued to “run it down,” we glimpsed the emerging outlines of a fascinating view of man and woman, and the philosophy of life which lies back of The Book.

## **Man and Woman: The Players’ View**

We began to realize that night that the pimps have a complete theory of the nature of the sexes. Their practical application of this theory produces the results they seek, and they believe it to be universally valid. Iceberg Slim told us, “You know, I am almost certain that the principles of good pimping apply to all man and woman relationships.” The tenets of pimp philosophy provide a foundation for a remarkably consistent body of ideas on marriage, childrearing, sex, politics, and economics! In this chapter we will begin our exploration of pimp philosophy with a summary of the players’ view of the immutable nature of man and woman. Then we will delve into various aspects of race, sex, and violence in The Life.

### **the nature of man according to pimp philosophy**

Man embodies the principle of intellect. His natural role is to be the controller, the director, the lawmaker, and the leader. His analytical mind enables him to be coolly in charge and on top of every situation. He is able to perceive the hidden rules of worldly games and can teach his woman how to “play past” obstacles to

their mutual goals in life. Nevertheless, a man must be ready to defend his honor physically if the mental games fail.

By nature man is fraternal rather than familial. His innate sex urges may drive him to want many women, whereas a woman wants to capture one man with whom she can be secure. However, it is man's duty to conquer and control his sex drive, so that he may channel the energies into directions his controlling mind finds useful and productive.

In order for both sexes to achieve happiness, a woman must please her man above all else, "then she will be pleased." At the same time, the man must not squander his power and privilege, but must be a wise and just king, who takes full responsibility for setting the direction of the couple's destiny. While a woman will often battle to gain control, she really doesn't want it because "she don't know where she's going to go, she don't know where to go":

JAMES: Women can do two things: they can propel, project, and control their own life-forces, or they can attach themselves to a force that is even beyond them. Men can't attach themselves to a life-force. When they do that, they're losing their masculinity. Are you understanding what I'm saying? You start going with a star, your wife's a movie star, you start becoming her manager. Well, you are just following the star's path and you with her. She could fire you when she want to. And when she get that idea she can fire you when she wants to, she'll start firing your ass. When they can fire you, women usually fire you. A man only fires, if he's just and good, only fires when they deserve to be fired.

White men (and square Blacks) are thought to be "pussy-whipped" by their wives, after having been brain-washed by their

mothers to accept female dominance as the natural order of things. Most families today are controlled by women, who direct the goals and manage the money. Women are able to achieve this control because square men are weak-minded and sexually undisciplined; by withholding sexual favors, a woman can always get her way. White men are familial and of low sexual potency, because their masculinity has been subverted by women and sublimated into work at a castrating "chump job."

"White man" and "trick" are practically synonymous to the pimp, although a few White pimps pass muster so long as they conduct themselves according to The Book. Three White pimps mingled with the Black players during the study; all three accepted The Life's code and adopted a Black personal style as well. But although they were respected by the Black pimps, they were still considered to be White imitations in an essentially Black game.

James considered pimps "the only real men in America," a view which is widely shared in The Life. As far as the players are concerned, this country is "designed for tricks":

JAMES: There are very few "men" in this country, real men. The best they can get going for men are pimps at this time because he understands what manhood really means to him. RICHARD: My impression of all these guys walking around, you know, very cool, very sharp, acting too hard like they're on top of everything, they give me the impression of very tormented people. JAMES: I agree. But they know if they haven't found the answers before you have, they've seen where the answers were, 'cause they control the things that no American man controls and that's a woman. And they know that's more important than building the Golden Gate Bridge. You say, "Hey, I built that bridge, how about some pussy? I made that skyscraper over there, now couldn't I please have

some pussy?"

[Turning to Christina] What do they say to you all night in your joint? "I'm so and so and so and so. I got this car, this is where I'm at. Say give me a little piece of pussy, will you please? I've earned that, I've a right to it, I'm somebody." No, no, no, it's not somebody, it's what you are. If you're a man, don't be somebody, you can be yourself. And them little Negro cats know that over the average White man now, are you hip to that? I don't care how tormented, how sad, how unhappy, how unsure of themselves they are, the White man is a few degrees less in terms of certainty. Can you dig that? Can you appreciate that?

Black men, who have been denied access to the positions of power and prestige, long ago accepted a man's personal qualities as more important than his job status. For Black men it is almost traditional that what you do for a living cannot be your manhood; it is what you are, and if what you are is a controller of women you are truly able to command respect as a man.

Square Black men are thought to be in a worse position than White men, because they are castrated not only by Black women, but by White society as well. Through domination of a White woman, however, the Black man can "reverse the game":

SOULFUL SPIDER: That's all the White man is doing is pimping the Black man. But the Black horse is gonna ride the White horse. That's right, the Black horse gone ride the White horse; 'cause I would like to ride the White horse 'cause I done rode the White horse!

(This last line converts the symbolism of the White horse from White male to White female in a sexual allusion.)

According to the players, Black men make the best pimps because they have been tricked so long that when they “flip over” and reverse the game, they can really get behind it with a vengeance. Although a Black pimp may be more friendly to another Black man than to a White man, he would rather be with a White man who is hip to the game than with a square Black. Anyone, Black or White, who is married and holds a straight job is “unrespectable” and unenlightened to those in The Life.

### **the nature of woman according to pimp philosophy**

Women embodies the principles of basic animal biology. She is by nature concerned with obtaining security for herself and her offspring, and with pleasing her man. Because part of her essence includes the role of mother she tends to be concerned with matters of basic sustenance (food, money, home life), and is therefore a natural provider.

In her pristine state, woman is only half of the completed unit. Without a man she is nothing. Her being is a vessel to nurture the thoughts and the seed which her man implants in her. Without his seed she cannot bear children, and without his Pygmalion-like efforts to shape her mind, she cannot be productive or happy. She is the natural student of man, who provides her with “direction”:

BROCK: The Game itself when applied and executed properly is a beautiful thing, because it is a beautiful expression of manhood and womanhood. Woman was placed here by God to be used by man as man sees fit, you know. Now woman, in her total complete existence, is a tool to please. She's a pleasure unit, mentally, physically. To feed him, to fuck him, to aid him, to be his ally when he has no

other ally. You know, and financially, of course. She is in a position to please a man [the trick] whom society has trained to give her everything that she wants. And her whole objective in life in this particular capitalistic society is to have money, and all she needs is direction in order to get this money.

But woman's concern with security and rearing her children spills over into a tendency to want to dominate all men and make them her children also. However, man can resist her will to dominate by strength of mind and purpose and by sexual self-discipline. Because of the woman's basic childbearing function, she is endowed with a much greater sexual drive than man's. Withholding sexual gratification from the female is therefore the male's trump card, which he can use to escape her domination and her desire to turn him into a child.

Although woman's natural state is to have a stronger sex drive than man, square mothers continually reverse this situation in their upbringing of children. They perpetuate the fiction that men are animals who are preoccupied with sex while women are pure and above the need for constant sexual gratification. They encourage naive girls to concentrate on obtaining a mate who will be a good provider and discourage them from forming strong sexual attractions. Square mothers also encourage their sons to regard women as sexual prizes to be treated with great deference and desire. Daughters are trained to be seductive, but only for the purpose of trading sex for a man's money and security, not for the pleasure of it. Therefore the pimps conclude that square mothers bring up their daughters to be hos and their sons to be tricks, thereby perpetuating the control of society by women. A bit later in the chapter we will explore this idea at greater length.



With both White and Black hos, the pimp exploits woman's natural drive for security for herself and her children (whether or not she has any) by keeping a money goal in the forefront of her mind. He also relies on her motherly capacity for self-sacrifice and high sex drive to motivate her further. Since all women are reflections of their men, he programs her behavior to be as lucrative as possible, while resisting her seductive domineering tendencies. In addition, much of the ho's wish to dominate and much of her sexual drive is dissipated by her mental and sexual exertions with tricks. The result is that she is always near mental and physical fatigue from maintaining dominance over her customers, and should be quite content to be docile and dominated by her man.

In an ideal, mythological state of nature, man and woman should function smoothly as a unit. Woman should please man, rear his children, help provide for them, and find her satisfaction in attaching herself to a man of great beauty and knowledge. Man should give direction and purpose to the woman, share love with her, and spend a great deal of time adorning his body and pursuing manly activities such as sports or the arts. He should not be expected to be the principal provider; it is enough that he gives the woman a reason to live and provides for her the meaning and structure of her universe.

But this ideal exists nowhere in the Western world, although several tribal peoples approximate it. Years ago, for instance, Margaret Mead reported on a Pacific people, the Tchambuli, whose men spend hours on their toilette each day and pursue artistic ceremonials, while the much drabber women work hard at fishing. Certain African cultures also approximate to the pimp's ideal. But in our own culture, where men and women have "forgotten" their essential natures, there is a constant battle of the sexes for the upper hand. Neither men nor women can be happy so — long as this

battle rages, since both cannot win a dominance contest. And if woman wins, she loses.

## **“We Have Lost It”: The Abandonment of Natural Sex Roles**

To a man, the players agree that men and women have forgotten their essential natures. The abandonment of the smooth and ideal functioning of the sexes, as depicted above, is the player's Paradise Lost. Constant battle between the sexes and redefinition of their roles is contrary to the ordained order of things. According to their conception, the nature of man and woman is basically as immutable among humans as among animals, and cultural failure to confirm to these absolutes is responsible for the current turmoil:

JAMES: If the most weakest lion is a male and he's not ready to control the pack, he's got to go out there and assume responsibility anyway whether he's qualified or not. Even the little young punk lions when the big daddy gets killed off or died or something, the young one's got to go out there. Even though the lioness may be older and more wiser, they got to get in front anyway and try and make it. That may be rough on the pack [laughter], punk young lions in the jungle may be a bad scene, but that's the way it goes. Now, the lioness is better at hunting than the male; she's faster, she's better at it. So she goes out and brings it home to him. And she won't touch it, and she won't let her cubs touch it before her king is through eating. King and queen. Man and woman, the same way. And we lost track of that somewhere in this country, we have lost it. And girls are becoming men-women, they're becoming freaks. They're freaking off like mad. They are freaking heart and soul, and they don't know which way to go.

They don't know the dick from the pussy nowadays. And that's sad when you can't see one protrudes and one goes in.

They're made different, one's inverted and one's extended.

Without their relationship to her, the pimps believe a ho would become wholly mannish and confused about her sex. When a woman finds she can easily dominate many men and extract money from them, she is lost without a "real man" to give the money to. This belief is borne out by our observations; many of the hos who had poor relationships with their pimps did indeed turn to other women for sex and companionship.

**the fall from grace: adam was the first trick** Constant turmoil in most man-woman relationships is attributed by the players to the abandonment of natural sex roles by our culture. The domination of man by woman is the original sin, and the fall from grace is nothing more nor less than the shift from male to female control:

BROCK: Pimping goes back to the man controlling the situation, directing things, before Eve bit the apple, see, and brought him down to her level and stuck the apple in his mouth. In the beginning God created earth and he created Adam. Took one of Adam's ribs and he created Eve. Eve infected Adam when she stuck that apple in his mouth. She was actually rebelling against Adam's authority, you know. She didn't know what she was doing, but by instinct she was rebelling against authority, and she actually originated from Adam.

And woman throughout time is gaining more points. When Adam let Eve tempt him into taking the apple he gave up his manhood, and right now, today, man is fighting to regain it.

We heard similar versions of the Adam and Eve myth from several players, and were struck with the consistency of their interpretations as well as their uniform conviction that Adam was not the first man, but “the first trick.”

Of course, the commonly accepted interpretation in our culture is that Eve tempted Adam into having sex, and that for eating of this “forbidden fruit,” Adam and Eve were punished. With the player’s insight, it is easy to see how such an interpretation may have stemmed directly from square mothers’ attempts to discourage their children from having sex: “Adam and Eve were living in sin so the Lord punished them.” In teaching this version of this story, of course, Mom perpetuates her control over sexual behavior, which is the very thing the story really warns against!

It is remarkable how well the Bible lends itself to the players’ interpretation. In creating woman out of Adam’s rib, the Lord says, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (our italics), that is, a helper designed especially for his needs. But before long, Eve is less interested in Adam’s needs than in her own. The serpent tells her that if she eats of the forbidden fruit, “then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods,” that is, she would realize that she could control her god, which was man from whom she was created.

She knew that the fruit tasted good, and that the “tree [was] to be desired to make one wise,” and when she “wised up” she not only ate of the fruit but “gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat.” At this point the man suddenly realized he was “naked” and defenseless, which he had never realized before; “and the eyes of them both were opened.” For Adam knew that he had lost control, and he knew that Eve knew that he had lost control, and she knew that he knew that she knew.

The divine principle in man, The Lord, then seeks himself to

discover that he is hiding, cowering behind a bush with a few hastily thrown up defenses around his maleness. When the now submissive man declares he is afraid to stand tall because he is "naked," the Lord asks (incredulously?), "Who told thee that thou wast naked?" Who told man he had to let woman control him? He is then asked whether he takes the responsibility for directing and controlling his actions – "Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" – and he simperingly replies: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."

Thus did the battle of the sexes begin, as well as the first "chump job." From now on, says the Lord to Adam, "because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife. . . cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and. . . in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground" (our italics). And the primal couple was expelled from Paradise.

Before referring back to Scripture, we had almost forgotten that many pimps, like many Black people, were raised in fundamentalist Christian homes. Although Momma may have put a different slant on the story, she certainly made sure her children knew their Bible.

**battle of the sexes** If the player is truly skilled in the art of controlling women, he can manipulate her natural biological drives to keep her content in her womanly role as provider. But there is always the danger that a ho will use the knowledge that her pimp gives her against him.

Every pimp is aware that his ho will delight in taking every opportunity to test her man to see if she is "slick" enough to put him in a "trick bag." Therefore, he must be ever vigilant and must

always keep a step ahead of her. "If the man doesn't keep the upper hand," said Iceberg Slim, "then the woman will take over. And then she doesn't want him anymore; she wants to try another challenge. Once she's sure, once she's ever sure of you. . ."

One night a White ho entered "The Player's Inn" in tears. She seemed frightened and in need of comfort. When her man asked her what was wrong, she told him between great piteous sobs that she had just been robbed by a trick. Later it was revealed that she had concocted the whole story so that she could go home early because her earnings were below the mark.

Often hos "hold out" money to see if their man is sharp enough to get all of it from her. Sometimes a ho will feign illness in the hope that she won't have to work that night. Tenderloin Tim explained that since her illness is only pretended, his normal rejoinder is, "If you ain't sick enough to be in the hospital, baby, then git down or I'll put you in the hospital quicker." In the world of game, hos constantly try to game on their pimps, just as tricks often attempt to game on the hos.

The battle of the sexes takes many forms for the Black players. Race enters the picture, for there are differences in the battle as it is waged against White woman and Black woman. Family background also is significant, since for many the battle originates between mother and son, and is then prolonged throughout life as other women replace the mother as the man's provider.

Pimp philosophers would argue with the sociologists who label ghetto society a Black matriarchy as opposed to the supposedly male-dominated households of the majority. Although the ghetto leans towards matriarchy, players admit, it isn't as all-pervasive or as smoothly functioning as the White matriarchy of the majority. For the White man is not even aware that he lives in a matriarchy, while Black men are becoming more sensitive to being pimped by

both White society and their own Black women, and are now actively concerned with their manhood. White men, like Samson, are still sound asleep and unaware that Delilah has cut their hair.

One result of this awakening of Black men is that they have become more sexually secure and attractive to White women. According to the pimps, Black women are more difficult to control than White women because they have lost respect for Black men; they imitate their mother's domineering attitude towards their brothers and fathers. White women, on the other hand, have more difficulty in equating a Black man with their brother or father, and therefore accept his leadership and control more readily. Some pimps have also agreed that White fear and guilt, as well as Black bitterness, help them to control White women more easily. One reason the Black woman is said to be more difficult to control is that she will often seek to keep her pimp dependent on her so that he will not leave her behind. Black hos may have seen their mothers repeatedly abandoned by men, and have great fears of being deserted. Giving a man money, they believe, is a surefire method of keeping his attentions.

Tenderloin Tim told of how he and his partner had run a successful legitimate massage parlor for a while, until his partner's Black ho wrecked their business. She began to hang around the office "bad-mouthing" the customers and interfering with the operation in every way. He and his partner were drawn into constant arguments over her presence at the studio, but the man could not control her meddling. Finally, they lost all their masseurs and customers.

Apparently, this woman could not stand to watch her man become financially independent, for she feared that his success would mean the end of their relationship. Tim concluded that the old way of "pimp or die" was for him from then on. The experience

intensified his hatred of women and his fear of failure in legitimate business. "From now on," he said, "I'm going to be a museum piece in pimping, like the dinosaurs. Yeah, pretty soon you'll have to go to a museum to see a real pimp" (one who enjoys degrading women and refuses to accept money except from women).

The ho walks a tightrope where a misstep costs her the esteem and affection of her man, who doles out his favors in return for good behavior. In the beginning she may have only love for him and will hope to prove her worthiness. As time passes she also begins to feel hatred if she becomes frustrated in her hopes, but inertia, perhaps some masochism, and the security of knowing that he is at least dependent on her keep her walking the line.

Finally, one of the sole areas for the vindication of her self-esteem may become how well she does her job. It is as if she says, "Well, you won't admit that you really love me for myself? Okay, then, I'm going to make so much money that you will have to praise me and respect me whether you want to or not, because that is the code." At least, that's the way Li'l Bit plays the game.

Li'l Bit is, as her name implies, a small but perfectly proportioned Black girl of about twenty. She is known for her violet-lensed granny glasses, her reliable "takin' care of business" personality, and her devotion to her man and their two children. She is a proud woman who wants to get out of The Life as soon as possible, and believes that she and her man are laying the groundwork for a comfortable and respectable future. She is a hard worker, "a real money-maker," who is treated fairly and lovingly by her man. Because of that treatment, she thinks of herself as being in a class above the ordinary streetwalker, whose men she generally considers intolerant and unmerciful. Li'l Bit is too monogamous to tolerate another woman in the picture, and so her man seems happily resigned to being a "one ho pimp."



Li'l Bit told us how she got back at her man by making a whole pile of money for him! She had been angry with him earlier in the day and decided to do something to force him to respect her. In general, her relationship with her man was better than many; she did not have to work when she felt sick, was menstruating, or was visibly pregnant. At these times, she proudly declared, her man was willing and able to support her by doing some hustle on his own.

Now on this particular night she had made enough money to quit and "be cool" by 2 A.M., at which time her man drove by to pick her up. But Li'l Bit declined to stop working and told him that she hadn't made enough money yet. He urged her to quit for the night, saying that whatever money she had made was cool with him, as he wanted her to come "party" with him and some friends. She coldly refused and told him to meet her later at the same corner.

When he returned at about 4:30 A.M. he had another couple in the back seat. Li'l Bit got in and listened for a while as the other pimp praised his lady for bringing in over two hundred dollars. Then Li'l Bit asked her man if he wanted to know how much she had made that night. He asked her and she replied apologetically, "Well, Daddy, I didn't really make enough, but I hope you won't kick my ass," as she began pulling out twenty-dollar bills and a couple of fifties which she had purposely broken down so that it would seem like an enormous roll of money (in fact, it totaled three hundred and twenty dollars.)

Li'l Bit giggled and laughed as she recalled how "cool" she had been and how her man's eyes had widened to see the money and how he had enjoyed her clever put-down of the other pimp. Of course, the real put-down was directed by Li'l Bit at her own man, and the other pimp's involvement was quite secondary. Nevertheless, she also enjoyed their joint triumph as a couple

because of the intimacy between them it promoted: the incident implied a backstage alliance of the two of them as a performing team with the other couple as their audience. Still, the main point was to compel her own man's respect, appreciation, and admiration.

The moment when she refused to come in after he had excused her from working was Li'l Bit's moment as a "bad bitch." She had answered his goodness with "badness" by being the "baddest" ho on the street, which, of course, made her good and put him down for being bad to her earlier and making her angry. These are some of the forms the battle of the sexes take among pimps and hos who are solidly into the subculture.

Dominance-dependency games start, of course, with Momma. Most often the ho is called "Momma" affectionately by her man, and "baby" less frequently. She in turn calls him both "Daddy" and "baby," which is an indication of his dual role in relation to her. Several pimps asserted that pimping comes from Black men being supported by their mothers as kids and deciding to continue the arrangement. If Momma cannot be coerced into providing for the adolescent boy, he goes out and finds another lady who can be more easily dominated. Pimping therefore contains elements of a rebellion of the son against his mother, as well as attempts to continue aspects of her sustaining role with another lady.

Most pimps, however, believe they were raised by their mothers not to be pimps, but to be tricks. "Trick marriage" is seen by the pimps as a man's servitude to women in exchange for "her pussy." That this so-called normal and moral marriage is aberrant is proved to pimps by the many husbands who pay hos for sex they cannot get at home, which they point to as the final degradation of the American male under the heel of the almighty bitchy American wife. She not only doesn't give him what he is paying her for, but

forces him to go out and also pay some other woman if he wants sex. Often he pays another woman only to have a shoulder to cry on, because the wife loses respect for a man she can dominate and is unhappy in her unnatural, unwomanly role as boss. Consequently, the man is miserable and in great need of feminine sympathy, even if it has to be bought and paid for.

The square wife who puts herself morally above a ho is therefore the object of great disdain, because she has never proved her love by complete self-sacrifice. Although merely hoing for a pimp is not enough to win his respect, personal qualities in a straight broad are not enough to merit respect either; she must ho for him as well. If she will not, then he must conclude, according to the pimp's worldview, that she is trying to make him her trick, which is of course intolerable. There are only pimps and tricks in the world, and pimp lore is full of warning tales about the pimp who "got his nose opened by some square broad" and lost his entire fortune by becoming her trick.

### **brainwashing: tricks and hos are trained by mom**

"A man doesn't get his freedom," a pimp asserted; "he has to take it." In the player's view, both Black and White males in this country are raised to be tricks, not "real men." Many pimps in our sample tried to do it "Mama's way," only to be hurt and disillusioned when their attempts at square marriage failed miserably.

Brock was brought up to be the ideal trick husband, he says. Although he retains a deep and genuine love for his mother, he believes that under her tutelage he was "a fat calf raised for the slaughter." Since Brock is so insightful and articulate, we will turn

the remainder of this section over to him:

BROCK: What's wrong with most men in America is he's really been brainwashed. Since he was a child, they have been brainwashed to be tricks. An average man, White or Black, is a trick, see, and that's where The Game has its discipline, to turn it all around, you know. From the time you're a kid, man, your mother, you love your mother. Most males, they go through a period where they're very very close to their mothers and whether their father is the same or different from him, they don't quite dig Dad. Dad is sort of interfering in the relationship between you and Mom. So you put Dad over here, to the side. If Dad don't come home from work till twelve at night, it's cool, I'll be asleep. And if he leaves in the morning 'fore I get up, that's cool too, you know. And Mom takes you up under her wing and what does she do? Don't pull the little girl's hair, don't punch her in the eye, she's a little girl, you know. They're taught to be gentlemen.

Now this turns the whole thing around 'cause the mother is going to give it to you from her standpoint of view, not Dad's standpoint of view. Mother's not going to tell you that she's frigid. She's freezing Dad out on the nights when he comes home hot and panting. She's not going to tell you this, see.

So she is, from the time you are a kid, understand, giving you a certain set of values which in reality is a woman's set of values. She is brainwashing you to the extent of how to treat a woman. She is not teaching you how to be a man. In fact she actually keeps Dad pushed off in a corner away from you so you cannot really get a man's perspective on it. You can't really be taught what a man thinks about what Mom has to say.

Now if you are a boy, say twelve years old, and you see Mom and Dad fighting you naturally come to the defense of Mom. You never think that maybe Mom took Dad's check and went and fucked it off on a new dress or

something else frivolous, you know. Or that she said something derogatory, she insulted his manhood, she was doing something which was degrading him. This thought doesn't enter your mind. The thought that enters your mind is that Mom's the one who you sucked on her titty, got the milk out of it, you came out of her womb, you know.

And from the time you were young, she's the one who changed your diapers, bathed you, made sure that you were clothed and shoed and everything else, so you naturally come to the defense of Mom. And you forget entirely the fact that Dad was the one who made the money that put her in the position to do all these things in the first place. So when you become a man and encounter a woman you automatically accept the values which were taught to you here.

My mother taught me to be a trick really. It's what it amounted to. I think I was twenty-one when I woke up. I was married and I was trying to be just a straight and narrow dude and this was just not me, you know.

And there are things in me right now that I can't help that have been conditioned over a period of time. I do things automatically, you know. I open doors for old ladies and if I go through a doorway, I'll hesitate and let the woman go first. I do it and then I catch myself. I'll think about it as she's walking by, you know what I mean? "Wow, what are you doing, cat?" But these are the things that are just bred in more or less over a period of time. When I sit down and eat [makes a gesture as if pulling out a chair for a woman to sit down first]. . . It's just certain little mannerisms that she conditioned me to be an out-and-out trick. This is what it amounts to. But I was raised primarily by my mother because my step-father was mostly away, you know.

## Race and Sex

Now that we have explored the players' overview of man and woman in America, let us focus on their view of some of the specific man-woman games connected with racial stereotypes.

Black-White unions work well, according to the players, because both sides try harder than they would with someone of their own race whom they could have any old time. They explain it as cherishing the possession of that which is forbidden. On the other hand, we found no evidence that simple pimps treat their White hos any better than their Black hos. Boss players are generally more gentle and "for real" with their women, and it is they who speak of cherishing. They say the interracial couple feel they have achieved something by possessing a lover of the "opposite" race. A White woman particularly is said to feel especially valued from the very first moment on. Of course, those very feelings of achievement on the part of the Black man and of being valued on the part of the White woman are actually expressions of racism, rather than of liberation from inferiority-superiority games.

Sexual attraction between the races is often accompanied by constellations of social factors and stereotypes. First, there is the ever-present myth of Black sexual superiority.

HARRIS: And that's why all that, as far as like having bigger sex organs, you got to know that's one of the biggest myths in the world. 'Cause, man, like I've seen some Colored guys that could take a magnifying glass to find them, Jack, uh, you swear they a lesbian. Oh, so that goes just to show you, man, like it's a big myth. Yet I remember seeing one cat, man, a White cat, oh my God, he was hung down to his knees. I don't see how he could get it all hard at one time, got to get it hard

in sections.

Whether Black hustlers believe the myth or not, they are quite willing to use it to advantage in *The Life*. The Black pimp uses the myth (sometimes explicitly) to attract White ladies, and Black has use it to attract White tricks. Some tricks will even date a White ho in order to question her about the sexual prowess of her Black old man; the more graphic her narrative the greater is his arousal.

HARRIS: And you ever hear the way some of these tricks talk to some of these girls? "Bitch, I'm going to put the best fucking on you you ever had and I know you're working for a nigger," or something like that. And he go to the same old "Why do you girls like Black boys? Do they ball better than White men?" You know it goes back to the same age-old myth, you know. The myth they themselves created, you dig?

The myth can work in reverse, for some tricks would refuse to date a White girl if they thought she were attached to a Blackman.

**forbidden fruit** According to the pimps, the only two free people in America have been and are still today the Black woman and the White man. The "times may be a-changing," but traditionally it was the Black man and the White woman who were kept cloistered away from each other by the White man who was then free to associate with the Black woman. But the enforced separation created a strong taste for forbidden fruit:

HARRIS: Woman is like a G I soldier. Anytime a G I soldier see a sign OFF LIMITS, man, he's going right there 'cause he figures something good back there. It's like keeping a baby's milk from him. The White American female has been placed

so high on a pedestal by the White American male for so many years and says, "Don't you dare look at old John over there plowing out that field. He see your White toes and he becomes stark raving and he goes to foaming at the mouth, you know. And he want to put his big Black thing between his legs in you. Oh my God, it stops my heart to see him put that big Black thing in you. Will kill."

But meanwhile back at the ranch, you understand, miscegenation had to have a start somewhere, you dig? While he was telling Magnolia 'bout big John, he was going to see Johnnie Lee, you dig, and that's where it started at. That fallacy, that age-old myth. But it boils down to one thing. She began thinking, "Why is he trying to keep Big John away from me? Now I've got to find out why." So she's going to tiptoe down to Big John, she gone tell Big John, "If you don't fuck me, I'm going to holler rape," you dig? Big John knew what the consequences are when she say that one word, that magic word "rape." So he go through his thing and he too want to touch this untouchable thing.

He can't, it's like a dream, he can't believe that he is laying on this thing and something he's been wanting to do for a long time, because he's been bereft of this chance for so long, you understand, and now it has become a reality and he goes through his thing.

CHRISTINA: But did you actually meet any Big Johns or are you just assuming them? HARRIS: Yeah, oh yeah, I have met some in my life, yeah, yeah. Down through my running around in the South, even in Jacksonville, Florida. They got a little school there, I can't remember, some junior college, and like at night you know, you see these girls. They might come in cars across the



track. "Let's get together, you know, when the lights go down low, and baby, you know."

White college girls going "across the tracks" in their cars is an example of the increasing liberation of the American White woman. A few years ago, such liaisons would have been unthinkable, although the White man could carry on interracial affairs with impunity. In the past the White woman was not free to associate with the Black man under any circumstances, whereas the White man and Black woman have always associated under certain circumstances.

Continuing "liberation" of the White woman has given her greater responsibilities and privileges in areas which were exclusively the province of males. Consequently she is freer than ever before of society's restrictions on her interracial associations. At the same time, her "liberation" has caused her much confusion; she has begun to lose respect for the White man, and may turn to the Black man in an unconscious effort to re-establish her own femininity:

**BROCK:** The White man is pushing the White woman farther and farther away from him, you know. He's letting her have more and more of the responsibility. She can vote now, she makes political decisions, household decisions, she might work right next to him in the office, she races him to the office every day, and her boss might even fuck her, and her husband don't know a thing, you know what I mean? He's let her have more and more of the manly duties and privileges. But the same White man will take a nigger woman and cherish and keep her. He might have a White wife and ten kids, but he'll pay the rent for this nigger woman and keep

her as his own cherished little thing. Same way a Black man will take a White woman and cherish and keep her.

If he is a pimp, he can exploit her feelings of oppression in the business world of competition with men ("We want equal pay for equal work," "We want to be hired on an equal basis with men and not discriminated against," etc.) and utilize her desire to achieve in the financial world while at the same time fulfill her motherly need to serve and sustain, her sexual need to be desired and gratified, and her womanly need to be directed and given security goals to work towards. It is significant that the Women's Liberation movement feels a kinship with the Black militants as oppressed classes. If the pimp's analysis of today's women is correct, perhaps good advice to the pimp starting out is that fine candidates for prostitution are to be found by hanging around Women's Lib meetings and just waiting to be chosen. He can quickly screen out those political women who are concerned with saving their sisters from those women who are interested in saving themselves first, and these would be his prime candidates.

There seems to be a general misconception that only the most docile, servile, easily dominated women will be attracted to Black pimps. While a fair share of these women may choose Black men in The Life, there is also an attraction for strong, rebellious personalities:

BROCK: You see, the White woman really won't go out to please a White dude, you know, because she can just have him. But a Colored fellow is demanding, see, 'cause she's got to cross the line, she's got to about-face on her family and the public and everything else, you know. She has totally slipped over and become a rebel against society, and this challenge is

what makes it or breaks it with her. This is what she has to face, but a White fella can keep a Colored broad and he doesn't have to marry her, keep her for twenty years, you understand? He can die and leave her his property and everything and it don't make no difference to him, he's dead. And his friends and nobody might not ever know about her. But the White woman has to cross that line and everyone's got to know about it.

Strong taboos against the White woman-Black man combination date directly back to the period of slavery. If this forbidden relationship was symbolic of the social structure during slave days, then it stands to reason that in seeking the forbidden fruit, the Black man seeks to assert, announce, and proclaim his freedom. Almost every player agreed that the White woman is the badge of freedom for a Black man. As Harris put it:

**HARRIS:** Any bar I go into on this street they all give me respect for two reasons: because I'm the first Black [names his business] owner in this city and 'cause I got two White foxes. My buddy over here is a Mexican and he is really fucked up over White women. He hangs on me because of what I have. He could have it too, man, if he played a mental game, but he's too hung up over that pussy.... You see, 'cause the Black man's mark of freedom is the White woman. 'Cause the Man said, "Well, you could own real estate, you could have money, but don't touch that woman." He puts her up on a pedestal. In some towns in Tennessee where I grew up they cut a guy's nuts off for messin' around with a White woman and rub salt in it. You could get yourself in jail for indiscriminate

eyeballing. But that woman, that woman is the mark of freedom.

**interracial sex fantasies** Pulp novels in which Black male slaves conquer and win the affections of White Southern belles are devoured by some White hos with Black pimps. Shannon expressed

her fascination with one such novel called *Black Love*, in which the wife of a cruel plantation owner runs away with a Black slave into a swamp freedom village and “discovers her true womanhood by

submitting to the first real man she has ever know.” Shannon said she identified strongly with the White girl in the book. We have seen much of this type of reading matter (*Slave Queen*, *Mandingo*) in the homes of players, and have often heard pimps make reference to the sexual relations between the races during the slavery period.

From a study of these pulp novels in conjunction with many observations and conversations with interracial couples in *The Life*, we realized that there are two basic paradigms of interracial sex fantasies which exist submerged in the American psyche. The outlines of these can sometimes be glimpsed in folktales, myths, fantasies, dreams, fears, and hopes.



*Recent Popular Fiction with Racial Themes.* On the covers of these works of pop culture, one can see graphic evidence for the existence of racial sex-fantasy archetypes, as discussed in the text. *Slave Queen's* cover and blurb is the archetype we call "Poor Princess Afro and Big White Charlie," while *Falconhurst Fancy* nicely illustrates "Poor Miss Betsy and Big Black John."

Myths to members of the other race, fantasies to daydreaming young ladies, hoped for by some, feared by the men of their own race. The first paradigm has often been articulated. Let us summarize it as:

Dime-Store Novel #1:  
Poor Miss Betsy and Big Black John

Poor Miss Betsy is all alone on the plantation one day. Her skin is so fair, her hair so blond, her eyes so blue, that she has attracted the attentions of Big Black John, the lowly field hand. He waits for her to pass the barn with sweat glistening over his Black, well-muscled body. As she passes, he claps his big Black hand over her ruby-red lips and, using his brute strength, forces her to submit to his lust.

Dime-Store Novel #1 is the myth which makes White boys everywhere rage and rally to the “defense” of their sisters and wives, but it also exists in the minds of many young White girls as an exciting sexual fantasy. Many middle-class White girls entertain a form of this fantasy and, first chance away from parental eyes, pick up a young Black stud to act it out with. Hip Black men know this and may use it to their own advantage and for the purpose of acting out their own half of the fantasy. Robert H. DeCoy, in his *Nigger Bible*, exhorts his fellow “nigrates”: when enjoying “cohabitation with a Caucasian woman, remember to maintain all of your natural Niggerness. She has her choice and chance of bedding with men of her own race. . .” But now what of the Black side? Is there a comparable sexual myth, fantasy, fear/hope? There is, and we may call it:

Dime-Store Novel #2: Poor Princess Afro and Big White Charley

The beautiful Black princess Afro has been captured and bound

and sold into slavery. Her hair is natural, she wears gold hoop earrings, and her body is lithe, very black and incredibly voluptuous. Her captor is Big White Charley, who laughs loudly and wields a big leather whip. Although he is socially below her (she being of noble birth), he has all the force at his disposal, and she must submit to him on pain of death. He uses her cruelly.

Here, we find the exact counterpoint to the myth of Poor Miss Betsy, but one that may come as something of a surprise. When the Panthers and the Muslims talk about "protecting our women" they are reacting to it. In truth, they have good justification for such reactions, since this one has often come true. Many were the Black women who were cruelly raped by White men, and many more continue to be more subtly abused by them. But there lurks the fear that when the Black woman was raped, in some cases, she may just possibly have enjoyed it. For we have seen this fantasy to exist in the heads of Black women as something exciting, forbidden, but sought after, just as Poor Miss Betsy frequently dwells in the daydreams of White girls.

What do these two "dime novels" have in common? First of all, in both the girl is forced against her will to do something forbidden. This is the familiar guilt-relieving device which underlies all sexual bondage fantasies. When the fantasy actor is tied, chained, or threatened, he is freed from any responsibility for his actions, and so may enjoy them without guilt. He is both "punished" in advance and incapable of changing the situation. He may even cover his "sinful" enjoyment by pretending it is an unpleasant experience.

Secondly, in both scenarios, she, a female, is being completely dominated by a male, something she obviously enjoys.

Thirdly, in both scenarios, the man is actually below the woman in social caste. In other words, the experience is especially exciting

because the social "inferior" is a man capable of such domination. As part of this, the woman-actor must appear as "refined," while the man is "crude." Refinement may be taken to represent "superego" standards fostered by the family and "crudeness" the raw urges of the "id."

Natural dominance is rare enough among individuals. It is understood that a man must have some balls to rise to the top of his own group. But the man in both of these fantasies is super-dominant. He crashes through boundaries of institutionalized dominance and makes men of higher institutional rank his inferiors. This dude is a motherfucker!

In one variety of expression of this fantasy a girl will encourage and tease a man of the other race, but will cut him short when he actually makes serious physical advances.

Perhaps the most important common element in both stories is that by implication they emasculate the men of the dominated woman's own race. To Poor Miss Betsy, Big Black John is more a man than any of her White beaux could ever hope to be. The reason, perhaps, is his outpouring of raw gut emotion into his fucking. Compared to him, her "refined" White Boys are sissies, and this, of course, is what incenses White men when the myth touches them. To Princess Afro, Big White Charley is more of a man than any of her Black beaux could ever hope to be. The reason, perhaps, is that he commands a superior power and authority which could subdue the best of them and turn them into grinning Uncle Toms, and this, of course, is what incenses Black men when this myth touches them.

If Poor Miss Betsy and Princess Afro ever met in that Valhalla which is reserved for important mythological personages, what will they say to each other? Miss Betsy will say, "You can have all those soulless honkie pasty faces, Afro, just gimme some of your fine



Black bucks" (CHORUS OF WHITE MEN REACH FOR THEIR GUNS). And Princess Afro will say, to Miss Betsy's great surprise, "You can have all them buck-dancing niggers, honey, just get me a Great White Bwana or two" (CHORUS OF BLACK MEN REACH FOR THEIR GUNS). The ultimate satisfaction for both women is, of course, when they tearfully tell the men of their own race what their cruel sexual master did to them and then watch the carnage of retribution against their hated lover of another color.

**black on white makes green** Besides the fact that a pimp feels that he can more easily dominate a White woman and that she is his badge of freedom, he will also insist that a White ho can make more money in prostitution than a Black woman. The primary reason is the White lady's ability to go unnoticed by police, particularly in hotels. If she is only streetwalking, a Black ho has equal potential to a White; players attest to the fact that there are droves of White "hawks" who will pass up fifty White hos to "taste the Black fruit." But for the big money they say that "Black on White makes green."

A White woman is associated with the upper-class trade in the pimp's mind whether his White ho has "class" or not. If she is intelligent and has good taste in clothes, she is qualified to graduate from the street to the finest hotel trade in the city or she may become a call girl. A Black ho with these personal qualities must have twice the poise and beauty of the White ho in order to pass muster. When attempting to enter an upper-crust hotel at night she must resemble a show-business star or top model or she will be stopped by the house detective. Many Black hos won't even try to risk it.

BROCK: A White girl can get from a third more to double

the money that a Colored girl does in half the time, you know, 'cause she can get to the top echelon of society. Now if I see a sharp White girl and a sharp Colored girl, I'm gonna accept the White broad, 'cause she can go to the Fairmont, to the Top of the Mark, and so forth, you know. If she is prepared properly with the mink stole, the mink coat, the evening gown and everything else, she can get two hundred dollars or more. But a sharp Colored girl might work all night for the same price. She may turn, say, four or five tricks getting her two hundred together. Where a White girl if she is properly dressed can get two hundred for maybe two buddies from out of town, say two doctors in for the American Medical Association Convention.

Brock went on to opine that a Black ho must resort to theft in order to break even with her White sister.

BROCK: A sharp Colored girl, she's got to turn twenties to fifties, you know. . . and so she usually turns out with more games because she has to in the competition. She acquires the abilities of a pick-pocket, etcetera, you know. To play a guy into the bathroom, act like she's going to give him a bath, find out where his wallet is, and while he's in there she comes out the bathroom to get her cigarette, grabs her coat and tucks her things up under her sleeve and sticks his wallet back in his pocket and splits with all his money. The dude comes out the bathroom, pats his pocket and feels his wallet still there, and he goes to bed, wakes up the next morning and finds he ain't got no money and the broad is long gone.

Many hos get their quota for the night without leaving the

barstool and we observed them in this type of action night after night. The visibility of the Black ho makes her more paranoid. She is frequently so afraid to make a move which might expose her to arrest that she will resort to picking pockets in the bars rather than risk getting into a taxi with a White trick or walking into a hotel with him, even if she is honestly willing to earn her pay.

**the white woman as buffer** Hotels are not the only places White women can enter easily. They can cash checks and use credit cards with a fraction of the difficulty a Black man or woman would experience. They can rent apartments more easily. In fact, the White woman is in general an excellent buffer between the Black man and society.

Players have explained to us that all women, as part of their feminine natures, possess an amazing chameleon-like versatility; they easily blend in with different backgrounds. By virtue of this ability, a woman is well suited to be an emissary between various social milieus.

The ho is similar in her role to the hippy chick who holds down a straight job and puts on her neat little dress and makeup in the morning to go out and face the working world, so she can bring home money to her long-haired "old man" who is completely undisguisable. Perhaps he is a rock musician, or artist, or astrologer trying to get his "thing" together, and she is dedicated to helping him achieve his goals in the same way that the ho is dedicated to her pimp. Often the ho carefully dons a neat and conservative outfit, too, while her man dresses flamboyantly. Black or White, she could pass for a secretary walking down the street, but her old man could never pass for a white-collar worker! Like the hippy chick, the ho acts as an emissary between her old man's kingdom and the world outside.

We heard countless stories of Black men who confronted “no vacancies” in apartment buildings, only to get the apartment when they sent a White woman alone. Of course, when the landlord discovered the White girl frequently had a Black male visitor, she was usually evicted promptly on some trumped-up pretext.

One night we stood on Broadway with a Black player. We were headed for his apartment and decided to take a taxi. When we found a cab stand, the Black man put his hand on the taxi door handle, and the driver, fearing robbery or assault if he ventured into the ghetto, immediately pulled away. The player turned to us with an embarrassed expression on his face and said, “It happens all the time.” He then asked Christina to hail a cab, and the strategy worked.

Tim thought that because the White woman and the Black man especially have been kept in chains they have a common bond: they are more keenly aware of the games associated with their roles in society. Once they became aware of this bond, he added, it was natural that they should join forces and profit from these games. It was his contention, therefore, that a Black man and a White woman is the best possible combination for survival in this society, since a White woman is the best emissary for the Black man. Doors which are close'd to him are held open for her.

**soul brothers, stick with your sisters?** Several times, when in the ghetto, we observed bumper stickers which read: SOUL BROTHERS, STICK WITH YOUR SISTERS! Apparently there is growing concern in the Black community that too many Black men are ignoring Black women in order to pursue White women.

In his book, *Soul on Ice*, Black militant Eldridge Cleaver castigates the Black man's current preoccupation with White

women at the expense of his soul sisters. One of the most striking passages in his "Allegory of the Black Eunuchs" begins when "the Accused" says (pp. 158-160) :

Black women take kindness for weakness. Leave them the least little opening and they will put you on the cross. I hate a black bitch. You can't trust them like white women, and if you try to, they won't appreciate it and they won't know how to act. It would be like trying to pamper a cobra. Anyway, every black woman secretly hates black men. Secretly, they all love white men – some of them will tell you so to your face, the others will tell you by their deeds and actions. Haven't you ever noticed that as soon as a black woman becomes successful she marries a white man? I'm going by what I know. I know one black bitch who always says that there ain't nothing a black man can do for her except leave her alone or bring her a message from, or carry a message to, a white man.

There is no love left between a black man and a black woman. Take me, for instance. I love white women and hate black women. It's just in me so deep I don't even try to get it out of me any more.... Sometimes I think that the way I feel about white women, I must have inherited from my father and his father and his father's father – as far back as you can go into slavery.... Yes, I want all the white women that they wanted but were never able to get. . . . I know that the white man made the black woman the symbol of slavery and the white woman the symbol of freedom. Every time I embrace a black woman I'm embracing slavery, and when I put my arms around a white woman, well, I'm hugging freedom.

The subject is a touchy one with the Black players. Although we

met some who had long and successful relationships with Black women, many offered various reasons why they definitely preferred White women. We once asked Harris if he thought it true that Black women preferred White men. His reply:

HARRIS: Yeah, they really go for White guys. I had a Black ho confess to me one night (she was drunk as two dogs) that what she loved was having some White meat. Having a White cock in her mouth and having his come in her mouth, that was her power trip, she thought that was the greatest thing. Yeah, well all right, it's together! Right on.

CHRISTINA: Do Black hos work for many White pimps? HARRIS: I know one. He's got three Black women. But I don't mess with them 'cause Black women will 'cause you more of a hassle. They give you twice as much bullshit as the White. It's 'cause they lost their respect for the Black man when the White man used to come and fuck them while the Black man was sitting off whistling his African tunes. You see any Black chick making it big in show business and what'd they got? RICHARD: A White old man. HARRIS: Yeah. Eldridge was right, man. He wrote it in his book, *Soul on Ice*. That White woman is the mark of freedom. Brock at first denied that he really preferred White girls to Black; it just seemed to work out that way: BROCK: I have to play the people who appeal to me and whom I appeal to. You see, I can't go down and talk to a young suede broad in the ghetto, they don't dig me. CHRISTINA: They don't? BROCK: No. See, they usually put me in that bourgeoisie thing, that category where they put me over to the side and say well, I'm an uppity nigger. This is what it amounts to. CHRISTINA: Well, what are they looking for? BROCK: When I step out of my car the whole thing starts. "Here come this slick-talking motherfucker." I know it before I say a word out of my mouth they already stuck me in the category. RICHARD: But the guys

in the ghetto, all they want is to look just like you in the car and the whole thing. BROCK: Right. But what they don't understand is this, it is easier for a dude to get rich without a car than it is to get rich with the car (if he don't fuck off all the money). See, the car is power. A ghetto broad is afraid of power, see, 'cause every ghetto broad wants a dude she can dominate. She will never admit this, but every day she will play for points. She will get a point every day trying to dominate you and it is her nature to try. When I step out that car, I create instant fear among any individual who is, say, not too well off, because they don't understand this.

Although race and class both influence mutual attraction, Brock reveals the most critical factor of choice in his explanation of the female's urge to dominate. A ho will choose a pimp with whom she is assured of an evenly matched battle of the sexes. Whether the pimp or the ho is the boss is actually a matter of personal accommodation, as docility of the female temper is independent of race or class or level of game. The ghetto broad who rejects Brock out of fear will look for a man who gives her a better game, much as the pool or card player looks for a partner who can provide an exciting game. The boss player and the simple pimp each look for a lady on their level of game.

The Black pimp has stereotypes of the sexuality of Black versus White women. On the one hand, possession of the White woman excites him sexually and gratifies his ego, but Black women he believes, are super-sexual. This is one reason that he stays away from them.

STEVE: We have found out that the Black woman fucks so goddamn good, you just got to stay away from her. Oh you got to. That's one woman, no matter . . . you've got to stay

away from that woman. I mean that's all there is to it. When you find a Black woman that can just lay up in the bed and just fuck you for about thirty minutes straight, I mean satisfy your needs, you got a bad woman. And see most of them get turned out so early, to sex, this is why the difference. They feel that they got to dominate the man. Domination of the man is their dire need. And if they're halfway slick and attractive then they put that front thing up there, you know, their "I'm prettier than you are" thing. Black women just love to be go-go dancers. They like to get up there and shake their ass, they're good for that. They shake their ass every day in the week. Like I say, the Black race, we're clowns, really. We're clowns. We're good showmen. And the average Black woman that's a go-go dancer, uh, music hath charms to sooth the savage beast, and that beast come out in her, you can see it when she dances. And you can just imagine what you'd have to put up with if you had to live with that, or try to get your money right with that. It can't be done. I have done it, but I'd rather not go through it again!

He also mentioned later that many Black girls have strict religious upbringings, and could never be "exhibitionists," like the go-go dancers.

Steve went on to say that Black women are turning on to White men because White men will indulge them with oral sex (cunnilingus), while a Black man "won't do that," because it's too submissive a role. Much teasing occurs on the subject of oral sex as a sign of being a trick. The following is a typical example.

ELDORADO EDDIE: Man, it sho is nice having your dick sucked. It's better than fucking. Ooh, it feels so nice Jerry, do you think it feels as nice to a bitch when she has her cock sucked?



TENDERLOIN TIM: I guess so. ELDORADO EDDIE: He guess so. How do you know, have you ever eaten pussy? TENDERLOIN TIM: Yeah, I eat pussy, man.

ELDORADO EDDIE: He eats pussy! I don't. Man, I won't eat pussy unless I get well paid for it. MOJO: What you trying to tell us you don't ever eat pussy less you get paid? Jive-ass motherfucker, you love it like an ice-cream cone. ELDORADO EDDIE: Nope, never eat it. I don't eat no pussy.

MOJO: Do you lick your lips before or after? ELDORADO EDDIE: Before or after what? MOJO: Before or after you do that thing you say you don't do.

ELDORADO EDDIE: I don't understand. What thing? MOJO: He don't understand. A little kid understands, but he don't understand. Then what's all them hairs between your teeth? ELDORADO EDDIE: Oh, oh, hairs between my teeth. You goin' back to the six grade now. I have made my statement.

TENDERLOIN TIM: You don't eat pussy. ELDORADO

EDDIE: For free. MOJO: Well then, did you ever do it for money?

ELDORADO EDDIE: Well, once a bitch wanted me to eat out her pussy and she was going to pay me two hundred dollars. But I didn't do it, 'cause I got the idea she didn't just want to pay for pussy-catin', she wanted to buy her a little manhood, dig?

Since a good number of tricks, according to the hos, prefer oral sex because they say they can't get it at home, the pimps distinguish themselves from the tricks by disdaining this form of sex (referring to cunnilingus only). Black hos have reported that a high proportion of White tricks enjoy "humbling" themselves to Black girls in this fashion.

In this dialogue between Soulful Spider and Tanya the matter of mutual lack of respect between Black men and women is a recurrent theme. Not only do they discuss this theme — they actually act it out.

CHRISTINA: Have you ever thought about why the Black man always wants a White woman? SPIDER: Because the Black woman is always so hard to signification [a trouble maker] and so jive to society [puts on airs]. TANYA: Right, and you know what? The Black women, I'ma tell you. . . SPIDER: [Interrupting her] And so domineering and possessive. . . TANYA: [Insistently interrupting him] I'ma te-ll you, the White woman when she gets a Black man, she treats him like a king and he likes it. But he doesn't catch on [to the reason she treats him well]. The White woman is afraid of the Black man. SPIDER: And you ain't, that's for sure. TANYA: That's exactly right. The White woman is afraid of the Black man. This is why she kisses his . ass. But see, a Black man can't do this to a Black woman 'cause she'll cut his throat just as quick as he'll cut hers. The White woman is "Okay dear, anything you say," you know, and if he yells she like goes into convulsions. SPIDER: It's just that brother-sister thing that we have, that understanding, you know, don't put on no act with me, because your father works at the railroad just like my father, your momma is my momma and if I get down wrong at your momma's house she gon' whup my ass just like my own momma would. It's just that brother-sister thing.

Since a player should be an actor twenty-four hours a day, to play by *The Book*, it is more difficult for a Black man to maintain this front with a woman of his own race. On the other hand, Tanya reveals in the following that she accepts Black men as sexier and feels little sexual attraction to White men. Because her mother is White and a Black "convert," she understands a White woman's attraction to Black men, but feels that this usurps her rightful role. The real problem between Black men and Black women, she reiterates, is a lack of respect for each other.

TANYA: My mother, now she's on a trip, Jack, she gets high, she gets down. CHRISTINA: Yeah? TANYA: Yeah, she's pretty funky. She's White but she's a groove. CHRISTINA: What do you mean by that? TANYA: Oh, she's the type that she'll call you a bitch, boy, in a minute. Me and her can be in an argument and she'll say, "Now look, bitch," and she'll call me a ho, bitch, anything come to her mind, you know, in front of anybody, she don't care. CHRISTINA: How did she get hooked up with your father? TANYA: Oh, he was in the Service. And before him she was with a Colored cat and she just been around Colored people most of her life, like she live with us. SPIDER: You know that's a strange thing about White girls. Once a White chick ... TANYA: [interrupts him to finish her statement] You know her best friends are Colored. SPIDER: You just gone drive all over me, huh? [Taking offense at Tanya's interruption as disrespect] Once a White girl goes with a Black man the first time, it seems like she's always with them. She never goes to a White man afterwards. TANYA: Right. CHRISTINA: Why is that? TANYA: Because the Black man is just so out of sight to the White woman, she just can't go back to the White man. For one thing, to me, a White man's sex is just zero. So she's digging on the Black man's sex and just him, period, just him being Black excites her. Opposites attract. If she digs it, whenever she turns that corner she gone be there. When a White broad crosses over to the Black people, if she does want to come back she doesn't even think she can. RICHARD: What if you're born Black and you act White? SPIDER: You're Uncle Tomming it to death. You're betraying. RICHARD: Well, what if you're White and act Black? TANYA: Well, if you're White and you're acting Black then you're trying to be Black. CHRISTINA: Like your mother. TANYA: Right. Now see my mother is Black. She's White but she's Black 'cause she's got so much soul till she can't help but be Black, you

know, she just got that soul. CHRISTINA: Do you dig White men at all? TANYA: Well, I like the fact that they seem to be more polite, like they have respect and manners. But on the sex side I can't seem to dig them, no, I have to have a Black man because their ways just excite me more. But a Black man won't often do the nice things like open the car door and things like that, they just don't have that respect for a woman. CHRISTINA: Do you think they have more respect for a White woman? TANYA: No. They just don't have respect, period. But the White woman is stepping on the Black woman's toes. And the Black women are changing. The Black women are getting theyselves together so they say we gone take a different technique and treat they husband nice and if he say something all right, but they not gone let them go too far. And this is the way I feel 'cause when I love someone, I love and there's nothing in this world that I wouldn't do for that person, you know, as long as they gave me the same respect and they love me. CHRISTINA: Would you turn out for them? TANYA: If he asked me to, if we needed the money and he was trying his best, I'd get out there and try my best. I'd sell myself in a minute and wouldn't feel a thing. CHRISTINA: If he didn't lose respect for you. TANYA: Yeah, but this is why the White woman and the Black woman are like they are, because they're afraid to do anything [sell their bodies] 'cause they're afraid that the Black man is not going to respect them anymore, you see, you understand?

**pimping, "rep," and black manhood** Manhood in a minority group which is defined by the majority society as "underdogs" is bound to derive much of its meaning from its relationship to the majority society. When relative poverty has been the lot of the "underdogs," wealth is bound to be an important goal. When subservience has been the survival strategy, defiance is bound to be admired by psyches which have long dreamed of revolt.

When the majority culture has associated Black with "dirty" and "evil," it is not hard to understand how "badness" could be redefined as "goodness" by people searching for revenge as well as a separate opposing identity. In Black pimping "badness" is directed at Whitey which makes it especially "good."

The pimp's dominance over women and his reputation as a lover are especially strong indicators of manhood to Blacks, for they are inextricably associated with a casting off of slave shackles. One must never assume that history is dead for Black Americans. On the contrary, the rape of Black women by White slave owners; the compliance of some Black women with White men to gain a favored position; the always relatively safe position of Black women during slavery and afterwards when they were able to find jobs more easily than their men; the social castration of Black men by White slave owners who denied them the position of head of their own families, who not only encouraged their women to disrespect them, but also denied them access to White women; the perpetuation of the strong Black woman – all this is very much alive in their minds. Dominance over women, both Black and White, is therefore a strong source of manly pride. Traditionally, sex was one of the only spheres remaining in which the Black man could exercise his manhood, and "the mythology and folklore of Black people is filled with tales of sexually prodigious men" (Grier and Cobbs: 64) . The pimp is a modern hero in this tradition as well.

History is alive to Black pimps and its "reversal" is their deepest desire. This is one reason why Black pimps are so hated by Whitey and applauded by some Blacks: they have "reversed history." They dominate Black and White women ("White slavery"), they profit financially from Whitey's "slaving" because they get a part of his paycheck through their prostitutes, and they have the compliance of White women in putting down White men. They feel therefore

that they have undermined the White man's family structure and robbed him of the respect of the women of his own race; they have also won back the respect of their own women by "putting down" the powerful White man. One major flaw in this viewpoint is that Whitey is still powerful enough to crush any pimp for life. This realization is the basis of the essentially revolutionary cry of the traditional "Pimp or die," which is akin in fervor to "Give me liberty or give me death."

But the pimp is not an organized revolutionary; he is an individual one. Boss players who thoroughly embrace their personal revolutions seek to become so respectable that Whitey can't touch their game; they intend to "pimp and live." The boss player doesn't want a fantasy of being "top dog"; he really believes that he is destined to be a "top dog," whereas the simple pimp believes "every underdog has his day" and when it's over, it's over. What else can an underdog expect but a moment of glory? The boss player wants that moment to last a lifetime. His new use of the Player's Book for transcending pimping reflects a trend in Black culture as a whole towards greater hopefulness that manly behavior will not always result in defeat, incarceration, or death.

Black pimping is also a culturally defined rebellion against the Black mother who is both loved for her sustaining role and hated for her role as mediator of society's rules which prepare "a Black boy for his subordinate place in the world. As a result, Black men develop considerable hostility towards Black women as the inhibiting instruments of an oppressive system. The woman has more power, more accessibility into the system, and therefore she is more feared, while at the same time envied. And it is her lot in life to suppress masculine assertiveness in her sons" (Grier and Cobbs: 63). The pimping subculture can be seen in this light as both a rebellion of the son against the mother's suppression of his mas-

culine assertiveness and as his utilization of the female's power and accessibility into the system for his sustenance. He is sometimes sadistic, sometimes loving towards the Black woman in her dual role as protector and emasculator.

His role as the super-masculine pimp is an ingenious compromise between manhood and infantilism. He is both "baby" and "Daddy" and his lady is both "baby" and "Momma."

In *The Game* one must be an actor at all times, and fantasy is employed so freely that often the actors lose sight of reality. They all know, however, that the curtain can fall at any time to end their act, and so they are out to play it for all it is worth while they have the stage. The pimps' and the hos' lives can seem very dramatic and a swift way to make one's mark in the world.

Black ghetto society thrives on gossip about who did what "crazy" deed. "Fame" and "rep" (reputation) are established by a person's individual qualities, not by what he does for a living. *The Life* is set up to focus attention on the personal qualities of the players precisely because they don't "work" for a living, but gain money through sexual or personal attractiveness. Going into *The Life* is a way to achieve instant recognition, notoriety, and comparison with other "famous" characters in the ongoing ghetto folklore of heroes and martyrs which is generated by everyone and enjoyed by all. While everyone in the ghetto is an actor and a spectator in the soap opera, some are major characters. If one is a former major character, one is still remembered by the audience in the role that made one "famous," and so having fallen does not mean one is a nobody; in fact one may have acquired more "soul" in the process. To succeed in the ghetto year after year is somehow less "soulful," and the audience is respectful, but a little bored. To be entirely successful like the boss player and leave your ghetto audience behind is unforgivable, unsoulful, worth a few boos, and

then final failure: to be forgotten in the mythology of your own time.

## **Sadism, Masochism, and Violence**

Harris reported that a trick paid his woman thirty-five dollars extra to scream out and struggle as if she were being raped. He said, "This meant more to him than balling her because it was like he was dominant, you know. At home he's probably so passive, the Milquetoast type, you dig?" Steve said it is difficult for a ho to tell whether a trick is violent or not as one of his women went all the way through a session only to have a White man pull a gun on her. Although he didn't use the gun, the man kicked her in the stomach "calling her 'you fine Black bitch, you have such good pussy' and let her go." Every ho fears meeting up with a violent trick, for beatings and even homicides are not uncommon. During the study one ho was thrown out of the window of one of the best hotels in the city. Naturally, sweet little old men are the most prized customers. Although San Francisco and the whole West Coast is called the "slow track" and its players "sweet macks," The Life here has its violent side. Madame X said, "Maybe one pimp out of a hundred will treat a lady right."

HARRIS: You know the biggest asset of a player is the way he handles his women. Some, oh I'd say ninety-nine percent of every player is a sadist or has sadistic tendencies. Ninety-nine percent of your queens are masochist or have or lean to masochistic tendencies. Yeah, you've got to have sadistic tendencies. Like you beat a woman like you make her bow to you. You say "bitch" this and "bitch" that, you know. "Bitch, you better get off your ass and go out there and get my money together," you know. Or like if



you're home waiting for her and she call you and she says, "Can I come in now?" Well, she know what is cool, you know, like you got your price. Say if you know she's capable of tending two hundred dollars a night, she knows that's cool. That's the cool mark. If she say, "No, everything isn't cool," you say, "Bitch, you stay out there till everything is cool." Man, like I have seen queens and ladies standing on the corner, it's cold, man, you know, 'cause Jack Frost bobbing up all over the ground, man, slap you right in the ass. It's cold. Jack Frost kicking asses and taking names, man, but these chicks be out on the corner, Jack, doing their thing. If they go to goofing off, man, they look around the corner, see that Cadillac coming, they recognize that Cadillac, man, they be right with it, yeah.

The pimps in San Francisco are often from elsewhere. Some say they come here because they can't make it anywhere else, so the amount of "sweet macking" is balanced by a generous amount of "gorilla" pimp tactics. Once Eldorado Eddie argued heatedly with a simple pimp (Velvet) who was "mouthing off" his physical dominance over his ho. Eldorado said he thought a man should never have to beat his women to keep them in line. "I want my women to love me, to say every day, 'I love you.'" On another occasion Eldorado Eddie was seen slapping his ho around, just like Velvet.

Frequently, there was violence between couples who seemed genuinely to care for each other. Shannon is constantly trying to retire from The Life and get a job as a dancer or cocktail waitress. On one occasion she complained to Mitchell that she was tired of hoing, so he beat her up and shaved her head (a traditional pimp punishment). And on the very day when they came into the club together on a night off and she proudly "styled" by displaying her

engagement and wedding rings (they hadn't married yet but were planning to) Shannon had bruises on her face and admitted that Mitchell had beaten up her and her sister the night before.

Shannon told of a physical fight in which she said she purposely didn't try to win although at one point she felt she could have, because she didn't want to disgrace Mitchell's manhood. Shannon accepts The Book's code of male dominance while she tries time after time to win Mitchell's love on a "square" basis. Pam Pam had bruises on her face when Christina visited her at Mojo's apartment, and she swore vengeance on the person who had told him that she was drunk and not taking care of business. She never questioned that she deserved the beating, but the person responsible was the one who "ratted" on her, not her pimp. She too accepted the code.

Brock declared that he would never "mess" with a masochistic ho because sooner or later she will turn on you.

**BROCK:** This is something that I try to keep out of my game because I just feel that a masochist eventually will turn on you, you know. They will reverse its masochist into sadism. Some broads actually bust nuts [achieve orgasm] when you're beating them. These same broads might wake up one night and start beating on you so you'll get up and beat her up. She'll shake you, bite you, cut you or something to intentionally make you mad.

**RICHARD:** Are you talking in general or from personal experience now? **BROCK:** I've been through it, you know, but like I said, I got to the point very early where I delete all this from my personal thing. It all depends on the type of game that you want to have, see. If you want a ho game then "bitch" is the word you use out your mouth every time and the broads you catch are going to be masochist. Broad's are really gluttons for punishment,

you know. But if you want to have a prostitute or call-girl game, you would treat them as ladies as long as they keep themselves in that position.

But even the most gentle of players may find himself in the position where he feels physical dominance is necessary to engender respect in his women. Many players say, "You must hate to be a pimp," even a sweet pimp. Tenderloin Tim once replied, with a big friendly grin on his face, when asked why he pimped, "I get a sadistic thrill out of getting women to sell pussy for me." In this matter the sometimes clownish Black pimp, with all his theatricality and entertaining wit, is not joking at all. Many pimps do have hatred for all women and for Whitey as well:

HARRIS: One time I was up to a friend of mine's house and he's got like four ladies and he was telling them like he was giving them the thing. He says, "Don't you mind what happens to me. Keep on going and making that money. If I get busted and they put me in the joint, forget about me and keep on doing that thing. Get the Man," you know, "get him." That's what he really cared about.

The Hippy Pimp, whose manner towards everyone, White or Black, is jovial and disarming, admitted in so many words that he hates women and he repeated this statement several times with conviction. He dates this hatred back to the time in his life when his wife, taking his paycheck and his twin daughters with her, left him working two chump jobs, one of which was cleaning hotel rooms. "The only rooms worse than the women's were [those of] the winos." He claims he was tricked by women many times before he "caught on," and he has had to learn to hide his bitterness. When

he wasn't skilled at controlling his hatred, the following incident occurred.

HIPPY PIMP: I was down on my luck and living in a funky hotel room. Two dollars a day, you know, it was bad, and I didn't even have the rent to pay. So I met this Black broad and I gave her some dick for free. Whew, I made her come twenty times and I told her not to come back without some money. She come back with nine dollars. I took her in the room, took off her clothes, and whipped her hard with the hanger. She ran out of the room naked so I threw her clothes out after her and I said, "Bitch, don't come back till you got your money right." She never did come back and now I'm sorry 'cause I could have turned that bitch out if I'd a had patience.

Women don't always respond to physical dominance, so a pimp has to be an excellent judge of what degree of it to apply and at what moment it is appropriate. The Hippy Pimp reports that one of his present women sometimes asks him to whip her bottom with a hanger during sex, so they seem to be a well-matched sadomasochistic couple.

One ho known as Birthday Cake said she worked for a pimp for four years, gave him a new Cadillac every year, and one night came home from work with her money "funny" and got the beating of her life. She walked in and handed over her money; he counted it and said, "That's all right, honey," drew her a bath, laid her down afterwards on the bed, went to the closet and got a tire iron and beat her senseless with it. She showed us the long scars which required hundreds of stitches and demonstrated her permanent slight limp. Horrifying as this seems, it should be noted that Birthday Cake continues to find herself with men who specialize in physical punishment, and often tells hair-raising stories about such

incidents with a matter-of-fact "ain't I soulful" air. The other girls like her and listen politely to her stories, although they think "she crazy." Some women in *The Life* can't take violence while others ask for it and like it. Some are so starved for "love" they would prefer any physical beating to being abandoned by their man. Tanya had difficulty understanding why they stay for more and concluded that it is part of being "born a ho" (a traditional description).

TANYA: My brothers, they told me, they says, "If you go somewhere, don't you even talk to a pimp 'cause they gone charge you," you know, and see, I don't be paying nobody. And some dudes come up to you and say, "Who you paying?" I said, "I'm not paying, I'm charging." shit. But it's a cold bag, that pimping thing is cold. I mean those broads out there just doing her thing, trying to get money for her man, and he's just laying back getting the money and doing what he wants to do. And you know: fuck her! And kicking her ass and she look ugly after a while. SPIDER: They do it. TANYA: They dig it! And the more you do it, the more they dig it! CHRISTINA: Why is that? TANYA: They some cold-blooded broads, they coldhearted. They some cold-blooded broads. I can't understand it. My brother kicked his woman down three flights of stairs and she gets back up and says, "Baby, I love you." Now you know that broad's cold-hearted. She ain't never been treated nice. Now that's what you call "born a ho." CHRISTINA: This broad told me the other day, she said, "These hos out here think they hos; they ain't no hos." She said, "You don't learn how to be a ho, you be born a ho. And I was born a ho." There's some cold-blooded things they go through.

TANYA: Yeah. My cousin has two White women and he treats them like dogs. And most pimps who have White women you'll find that they treat them like dogs. But then some again treat them nice. but my cousin even treats his wife like a dog and she's Black, but she got out there and hoed for him. As soon as you go out there, the man loses respect for the woman and starts kicking your ass. I swear I don't understand it, how they put up with it. They just be born a ho.

Sunshine, it seems, was "born a ho." A beautiful but tough nineteen-year-old who brags about having been raised in the toughest neighborhoods of Oakland, Sunshine's moods range from polite and cynically ingratiating to vicious and wild. She has been used to physical punishment all her life, and expects it from any man she chooses to be with. Her man, Canary, was happy to oblige. Sunshine's attraction for tricks was in the vaguely demonic look in her young girl's eyes. "Sex is evil," her sneering lips would signal even when she smiled. As she sat on a barstool waiting to be approached, she would finger the large black cross she wore around her neck.

Canary has another White woman, a call girl, in addition to Sunshine, who is a streetwalker; they all maintain separate apartments. Canary is a self-proclaimed bisexual, and was known to be an inveterate and pathological liar whose tales were believed only by fools. It is true, however, that he bought a partnership in a hip men's clothing store, as he was fond of boasting. In fact, he did an excellent and thoroughly professional job of providing a new look and theme to an otherwise ordinary men's boutique, but the store folded after a few months despite his efforts.

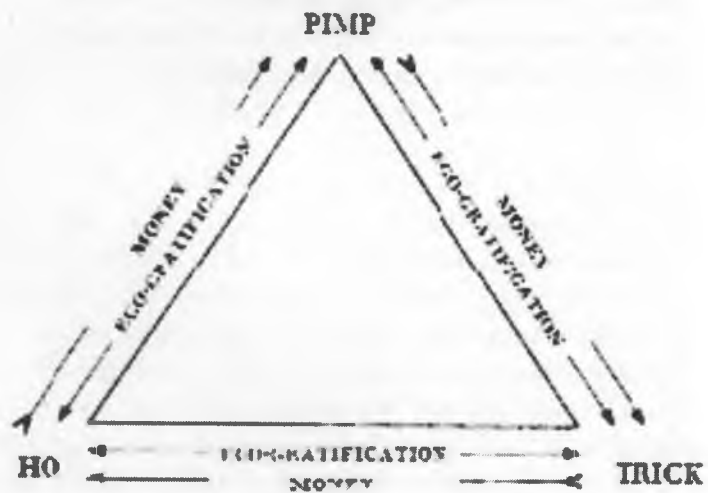
Canary wanted to go to a party with Craig, but he didn't want Sunshine along as she was drunk; also he probably hoped to pick

up a girl (or boy) at the party and chippy all night. Sunshine knew his plan and refused to leave the car, so Canary dragged her up to her apartment. She kicked and screamed all the way up four flights of stairs. When they got inside her apartment she picked up a metal candelabra and attempted to hit Canary over the head with it. Without hesitation, Canary knocked her out cold and left with his friend for the party. The extent to which violence is an accepted part of day-to-day living in the subculture is illustrated by the following excerpt from our field notes:

The other day I [C.M.] fell over some packing crates while we were moving out of our apartment. That night when I went to work there were visible bruises all over my legs. During the evening while I danced various people made comments about my bruises, and all of them, to a man (and woman), refused to believe my story about tripping over the boxes. "Oh yeah, she tripped over some boxes. Well, you better watch your ass or Richard'll really whup you next time!" [Laughter]

Chapter Seven

# The Pimp Game as a Model of the World



*The Triangular Exchange of Money and Ego Gratification.*



## The Game of Life

**all life is a game; the triangle of exchange** Game, game, game. Players view all of society as a network of those who game and those who are gamed on: "There are the givers, the takers, and the givers-and-takers. After that comes the undertakers."

Everybody in his time is both a trick and a pimp, but the trick is to feel like a pimp most of the time, at least within your own value system.

HARRIS: It stems from an economic thing, having been deprived of the good jobs and the good education. He wants to feel a sense of visibility, I'd say. He wants to be recognized and so in turn being a gifted talker or rapper — as we say in our world, "he can really rap" — he raps to these chicks and he paints a kaleidoscope of colors, you know, a kaleidoscopic picture, a beautiful picture. He make them believe he's fighting the Man in his way, you understand? This is the only way we can get back at the Man, you know. You rob him of his love, you dig, yeah, and his money. And in turn you're going to do this or that, but in turn it goes right back to the Man in far-out clothes, fancy clothes, jewelry and cars, see? So it's like a triangular thing, you know, from the Man to the woman, back to the pimp, right back to the Man. So it just goes on; as long as there is man and woman, there will be players and ladies.

A trick knows he is a trick, but rationalizes it according to his psychological needs. A ho knows that she is both "pimping" off her customers and is being a trick for her man, but she also

rationalizes. Her need for a strong man, a goal, a set way of life, and love or the illusion of love, are strong enough for her to be content to be “tricked” by the pimp. A pimp knows first that he is pimping, but only a few will admit that they are also tricks for the man who sells them Cadillacs, cocaine, television sets, jewelry, and clothes. When the pimp does admit he has a “trick side,” he too rationalizes that these things are what he needs, and so he doesn’t mind paying for them any more than the ho or the trick minds paying for what they get. As Harris pointed out, the various reciprocal needs create a triangular exchange of wealth and psychological gratification (see diagram).

**everyone has a trick side** A pimp may take his desire never to be a trick to comic extremes and refuse to say hello without getting paid for it:

TANYA: My brother is such a fine nigger, he just fine, you know. He’s about six feet and he’s real light, you know, and he has this great big natural. He’s just, you know, the women just think he’s wonderful. But I can’t stand him. You know what he told me? He’s really funny. He tells me, he says one day he was standing on Haight Street and I said, “What are you doing down here?,” and he said, “I’m trying to catch.” I said, “There’s lots of women out here.” He said, “I hate, I can’t be messing around with no ho, the ho I’m looking for’s got to have class.” See, my brother thinks he has a lot of class, you know, and if the woman don’t have class, you’d like spit on them. He is, “Don’t even touch me,” you know? Now this is only for White broads. He thinks he is so superior to White broads that they should kiss his feet. He comes up to a White broad and they supposed to say “Oh no!,” you know, and if they don’t do that then he ain’t gone even speak to them. In fact, I

think my brother thinks he is too fine to speak, you know, yeah, he thinks he's too fine to speak. He tells me all about his stories and he said this White broad come up to him and she says, "Ooh Giles, I've heard so much about you." And so then this other dude named Henny was standing right next to him and so Henny told the White broad, "Do you have any money?," and the White broad say no, so then he says, "You better walk on 'cause Giles doesn't talk." I said, "You're kidding," and he said he really did this, you know. I said, "Did the broad walk on?" He said, "Naw, the broad paid and I talked to her."

This high-sidin' story is typical pimp humor in which the themes of money first, never being a trick, and male dominance are carried to ridiculous lengths. "I don't do nothin' lessin' I get paid!" is a common boast ending a story about The Pimp. The Pimp is a humorous character precisely because it isn't possible to always pimp and never be a trick:

HARRIS: You know, the way I look at it, man, like every man is a trick. Even you and I, although we have had skirmishes with the sweet life, you dig? You and I are tricks because we are human and we are susceptible to human frailties, now aren't we? The average player thinks he's so strong like he can't be moved. Man, I have seen a rock roll down a mountain without the aid of hands, man, and chop the golden image down, baby, chopped him down. One of the biggest players in the City of New York when he was young was a dude I knew out of Miami, Florida, and man, like a chick came and hit him right in his most vulnerable spot, Jack, right in the heart, man. And a blow to the heart kills.

Man, this cat went through a quarter of a million dollars

in less than two years. I mean cash money, you dig, in two years. And it wasn't no slickin' chick, man, like it was a country chick, yeah. He thought he was playing her, man, and she wound up playing him. Made him a trick, you dig?

Pimps are not only occasional tricks for Cupid, as in the above example, and for the Cadillac and clothing salesmen, but also for their fellow hustlers who sell them cocaine and other illicit commodities. James saw the hustling of the hustlers as a natural and acceptable part of life:

JAMES: Everybody has to be hustled. The hustlers got to be hustled, they got a weakness too. And they enjoy the weaknesses they have. They got to play the game by the rules and so they do that, and they enjoy that. Everybody makes some money or robs something or some emotion off everybody else at one time or another, at one place or another. But while constant gaming and hustling is accepted as the natural order of things, every player was careful to point out the abuses of the hustler's ethic. By virtue of his profession and his view of the world, the boss player is attuned to recognizing games when he sees them and can therefore know when he is being "for real" and when he is gaming: JAMES: Slick people, slick, you know, use each other, exploiting each other's emotions and needs to their own advantage. That's just another whore-trick game. If you're into it you can see what it is and recognize it when you see it. Therefore, you can walk around it, and you can get off your fucking job and be for real for a change. That's the essence of it, and that's why it's so fucking beautiful.

There aren't too many cats hip to it, but young cats who see it

know that's where it's at. Rather than playing a game, put on some tennis shoes, and get a goddamn tennis racket and go out and play tennis with somebody. 'Cause I know that's [unrelenting hustling] not where it's at. It doesn't bring no happiness or satisfaction. It don't make their heads right. Where's the peace of mind, where can you relax, where can you be at home at, and who can you be at home with?

One of the basic problems in American society, according to the players, is that most people are totally unaware of the games they play every day. The clergyman is so puffed up with pseudo-morality he cannot see the nature of the game he runs on his congregation; the housewife is unaware of the game she runs on her "trick husband" every payday. Most people cannot come "off their game" and be "for real," since they cannot tell when they are playing a game unless they have a tennis racket in hand.

Players believe that being in an "illegitimate" game fosters greater awareness of game behavior. "Legit" members of society are blind to their own games and those of their fellows precisely because they are considered "legitimate" by the majority. To take an extreme example, if killing is "legitimate" in wartime, then the killer has less awareness of what he is doing than the man who kills "illegitimately" and knows he will be considered a murderer.

**the legit game** A local Cadillac dealer was rather unsubtle in his pimping off the pimps. Whenever a richly-dressed, hip-looking Black man presented himself as a customer, the dealer would size up the man and ask, "Are you an entertainer or a player?" When the Black man asked why, the reply was, "Because the down payment is two thousand dollars if you're an entertainer and two thousand five hundred if you're a player."

The boss player recognizes that the Cadillac dealer is pimping him, so he seeks to break the triangle by going legitimate. Since working for Mr. Charlie is unthinkable, he opens his own business or begins his own career and works for himself. Of course, "going legit" is no more than a compromise because the boss player recognizes that everyone, Black and White alike, is a trick for someone or something, even if it is only the Internal Revenue Service. Therefore the players claim that going legitimate really means switching one trick bag for another. You are on a "higher level" with new pimps gaming off you and making you another kind of trick, but at least you have a chance to escape prison or poverty in your old age.

Since there are pimps and tricks on every level of society, and no individual can escape being gamed on by somebody in his life, he must decide whether he wants to be rich today and poor tomorrow or rich today and rich tomorrow too. To some pimps it is winning the game to have money in your pocket in the morning; to others winning the game means having money in your pocket every morning till you die:

BROCK: To me the game itself is basic. I personally believe that in this society and this country, just sticking to the basics, we have two different individuals. The haves and the have-nots, you know, and each individual has to decide who they intend to be, a have or a have-not.

One informant disliked Iceberg Slim's book because it was only about "the old game of survival and that's just not what's happening today." He said, "After you've been in The Game for six months, you ought to have survival down and be able to go on to higher game." If you buy a bar or restaurant,

you may get pimped by the police or the fire inspector; but it won't matter so long as you can be rich tomorrow as well as today, for the "break-even" game of survival is harder to play the older you get.

Every American major institution, from the law courts and the business Establishment to the Armed Services, is viewed by the players as a pimping situation. They see society itself as a network of people gaming off each other for money, power, or some kind of ego-gratification. The preacher is a pimp gaming off his congregation, the politician is a pimp gaming off his constituents, the law-enforcement system pimps the lawbreakers, the wife is a ho gaming off her husband who is her trick, the employer games off his workers, the Whites pimp the Blacks, and the federal government pimps everybody! This view, widely held throughout the ghetto, has recently found expression in the writings of Black militants and is one of the few areas in which pimps and Panthers seem to be in perfect agreement.

The player conceives of himself as a small businessman within the capitalist tradition of free enterprise and considers himself to be no more corrupt in his methods than the legitimate businessman trying to get ahead in a ruthless, competitive, materialistic economy.

BROCK: See, a player, pimp, a prostitute, a ho is actually striving for the same things that a square is striving for. Ultimate security, Utopia, annual income, everything else, you know. Like I said, the ultimate thing for every player really is the point where they can go legit. This don't mean he's going to be one hundred percent legal. He's still going

to be a player. Even the Mafia puts its money into legitimate business.

**a hierarchy of game** As we have seen, the concept of “game” is extended by the player to construct a coherent view of the world; it is by no means restricted to prostitution. A boss player is anxious to move on to “higher” game, but his basic attitude towards “playing” remains the same:

BROCK: A good businessman has got to be a player, a salesman got to be a player. Pimps aren't the only players, pimping is just a phase of The Game, it's like a branch, you know, and you just have to gain enough knowledge to branch out to something deeper, more profitable, more steady, but it's all still game. When you hear people talking about The Game first thing come to their mind is pussy, pussy, pussy, you know. That's just a small, minute part of The Game' cause once you get in The Game it gets in your blood and it does not get out. You will play for something for the rest of your life. It might be that building across the street. Let me go take this guy to dinner, and dine with his wife at some country club, and you might have already sold the building before you even buy it, but you're still playing, see? When you Hip over onto your square things you're not going to be just a normal everyday square that goes to church every Sunday, you know.

The hierarchy of game is based on the degree of security and reward, as well as on the amount of finesse involved. At the very highest levels are games which are considered respectable and legitimate outside The Life.



Very low levels of game are characterized by degrading tasks, and by a built-in guarantee of self-defeat. "Git the money any old way and run" games are at this lowest level. As one woman expressed it:

L'L BIT: This is why the Black men can't come up because all the time he's gaming, he's gaming on himself, you know. See, 'cause the Black men are out for the snatch and grab. He's not thinking about the future. They talk like they thinking about the future, but they're not. That's just what they tell their hos.

You see, like I know a lot of hos and they cheat their-selves out of money. Like they might get a trick and go on and ho and steal the dude's money where all she had to do was get the dude's phone number and, shit, get her a book [of phone numbers in order to become a call girl with a repeatable, carefully screened clientele].

So all this that she's fucking up 'cause she stole the man's money and if he finds her, he's probably gone kick her ass. See, all they think about is the snatch-and-grab game, get the money and run. So the money's gone tomorrow and pretty soon you're gonna run out of men and then the game is just gone be dead.

The gradations between high and low game, based on conversations with many informants, looks approximately like the chart facing, in ascending order.

**money, power, and race** J. Paul Getty, Howard Hughes, and Aristotle Onassis are considered to be boss players and more powerful than the presidents of the United States and Greece. Harris said that while reading *The Selling of the President* he

realized that all the votes in the country could be bought by money, which reaffirmed his belief that money really rules, not politics. Harris also believed that John F.

Kennedy might have bought his majority despite his popularity. Bobby Joe expressed the idea that money is the ultimate ruler:

BOBBY JOE: There are more powerful men than the President, because the President doesn't have that much money and he can't go around telling all the people with more money than him what to do. He doesn't rule all the states because he doesn't have financial interest in all states, but there's big men like Hughes who have a business in every single state, oil fields in Alaska, etcetera.

In every single state he's got some finger in it and he controls the economy and therefore he actually rules

the country. He sends messages to Nixon saying, "Hey, you can't do that because this is gone do this to me." And so, pretty soon, there won't be no President because people, the new generation, are getting hip to the bullshit that they're trying to brainwash your mind with.

This same young man stated that there are only two things that are respected in America today: white skin and money. We disagreed and asserted that a white skin and no money won't get you anywhere.

LEVELS OF GAME

PIMPING	PROSTITUTION
A politician, religious leader, or wheeler-dealer businessman who "pimps off the public at large."	The highest level of prostitution is — the wife!
A man who marries a rich woman.	Mistress, kept woman.
A man (gigolo) "kept" by a rich woman.	Independent call girl with established book of regular tricks. Can move in any circles, including "upper crust."
A full-time pimp with one or more women working for him.	High-class hotel call girl.
A man who works a straight job (cab driver, hotel employee) and pimps women on the side.	Woman who works straight job (secretary, receptionist) but turns high-priced tricks on weekends and vacations.
A man who sends his woman out to work a square job while he does nothing.	Streetwalkers, bar hustlers.
A man who gets "short stop" money or portions of welfare checks from a girlfriend, or several girlfriends.	Whorehouse girls, "flat-backers."

Bobby Joe liked that, agreed that the main thing is to get money, and added that when you are starting out you have to be tough and step on some people to get it. Steve said the following about race and money:

STEVE: Everybody hates pimps, but they hate Black pimps even more so. Because they've got their game laid and it's a game that Whitey can't come into, no bullshit. But see, that's where Whitey had it made when he started out pimping, because he had that going for him up until now. He is White and he can go anywhere. Whereas now the Black man can go damn near anywhere he wants to go, all he's got to do is have the money. See, it [pimping] used to be one-sided, now it's a two-sided game.

Players like Steve would like to believe that money rules over race as well as politics, but the notion that Black skin and money will get you through any door is simply not true. It is a hope which disregards current realities. Nevertheless, if the players didn't believe absolutely that money runs the world, there would be an empty victory in trying to accumulate it. While Steve asserted that "If you play, you got to pay" (meaning payoff), his version of the following embezzlement case shows his understanding that white skin nevertheless is a big asset.

STEVE: Ninety-nine percent of us are behind those bars because we haven't learned yet, if you're going to play this game, you've got to pay. That's the only way you can do it. Bobby Baker did eighteen months. Where? In his home. Eighteen months in his home. He's a big White player so he did time in his home. Now you let me steal six hundred million or three hundred million dollars and they'd send me to the electric chair. I figure he got a good take out of it. I

know he got a good take. I think he stole six million and he returned three million. So half that money that he did spend, I'm willing to bet that he put at least one and a half million in foreign banks, and they're trying to stop that now.

His version of this case where payoffs and race are both factors in winning also demonstrates the players' desire to identify with the smart and crooked businessmen, most often White, who wheel and deal in the realm of "high game." In order to identify with them they must minimize the factor of race and raise money, in the form of necessary payoffs, to the level of an all-powerful god of Mammon in which they put their faith. It is the god of money that will deliver them into the promised land and will allow them to "play past" all obstacles in their path. In this view, the pimp expresses a common ghetto sentiment: "Fuck Black power and White power; I believe in green power."

Money is more powerful than love because love is "here today and gone tomorrow" (a line from a popular soul song); it is more powerful than family because family members game on each other for money all the time; it is more powerful than religion because the Black preacher is gaming on you and Christianity came from the White man in the first place; and it is more powerful than education or the law. So it seems to the Black player that the only thing that is standing in the way of a Black man and happiness is his poverty.

Nevertheless all the Black pimps in the study have experienced situations where their faith in money to open all doors has been contradicted by racial discrimination. Even when they seek housing in a racially mixed neighborhood, the Black pimp will usually send his White ho to secure an apartment. After a few months the landlord may discover that a Black man is living there and use some pretext to evict them and they go back to living in a motel. Hippy

Pimp and one of his hos once rented an apartment in this fashion on Nob Hill and were asked to leave because no pets were allowed and she had not declared that she had a dog when she signed the rental agreement. No mention was made that she had a Black man living with her.

Rather than play this depressing game many players live in the ghetto and identify with their cars rather than with their apartments as symbols of affluence. Racial discrimination is therefore the biggest obstacle that the pimp must "play past" and Black pimping is a game which is specifically devised to "play past" it. His woman takes all the chances and uses her White skin or, if she is Black, the privilege of her womanhood to game off society and protect her man. Yet despite this implicit recognition of social reality, most players have faith that someday they will have so much money that all doors will be open to them, including the taxicab door.

**what are the prizes?** The players' view of the world is both the ultimate expression of cynicism for the American social structure and faith that money is the way to open that door. They identify with the lower-class ghetto hustler's ethic as well as with materialist goals of the bourgeoisie. They have disdain for the square way of life of the White and Black middle classes ("Ain't got no soul," "It's phony") and simultaneous admiration for their security and luxury. There is a constellation of "high-class" activities and possessions of the leisure class which the pimps all express a taste for. These include playing golf (which is also a good hustle like pool hustling if one is skilled, and one pimp was training for this) and horseback riding (nine pimps claim that these are their major recreations); a house in the country; a penthouse in the city; a private airplane (a Lear jet, a helicopter for trips from their country estate to the city), though none in our study presently owns an

airplane, but they do rent them; a large automobile like a Cadillac or Lincoln Continental or Rolls-Royce (one pimp has a Rolls), and a chauffeur to drive it (several hire drivers now and then); portable color television for the car, a phone in the car (one pimp has this), and a stereo tape deck for the car (this is standard); a butler and Man Friday; pedigreed dogs (large Afghans, poodles, a whippet, and a Chihuahua who perches on the arm of his master are current examples); Chivas Regal Scotch (even in the "funkiest" motel room this is the gracious hospitality offered); diamond and gold jewelry (pimps and hos will discuss and examine these, Haunting their knowledge of the subject as well as their possessions); and, of course, expensive, often custom-made, clothing. These symbols of the rich, aristocratic leisure class are accepted by most players as the obvious desires of everybody who has any sense. But the limbo of not having found a suitable and satisfying game to play is one of the great sources of misery and anxiety in our time, and even some of the pimps have been touched by it.

For example, Jimmy vacillates painfully between being a pimp and a "hippy." He has two women whom he genuinely loves; they bear his children and he cares deeply for his family. He does not exhibit the desire for female humiliation or the "cold-bloodedness" traditionally considered necessary in the pimp subculture. But neither does he have the "hippy" disregard for the prizes of American material culture. Sometimes he talks of getting a houseboat in Sausalito rather than a Cadillac or a yacht.

JIMMY: Who needs it, you dig? Who I gotta impress? My ladies and me, we just want to get our thing together and be happy. What do I care to highside and ride down Fillmore Street in my Cadillac for? That's bein' a trick, you dig?

When he talks like that, Jimmy is often to be found sunning on the beach or enjoying an afternoon in the public parks, associating with “hippies” and thoroughly enjoying himself. A week later he is apt to be talking of hustling, pimping, going to Reno to “hit it big.” During one such reversal, we asked him about his previous statements. “Why do you want all the stuff,” we asked, “that the White hippies are turning their backs on?”

JIMMY: What else is there for me to want? I can't go back to Africa, can't rattle a spear and sit around watching the crocodiles in the river, or watch the rhinoceroses, you dig? What else is there to want but big cars, Lear jets, yachts? That's what everybody want. Yeah, let them White boys go hippy, grow their hair long, and go without shoes. I know what it's like to go barefoot. I was born without shoes, we was all kickin' mud, you dig? Now I want all the stuff those White boys had. If they want to be kickin' mud now, it's cool with me.

On the other hand, the behavior of upper-middle-class people who live the way of life associated with these symbols is considered by the players to be phony, not “for real,” not soulful. Here lies the dilemma of the simple pimp; if he saves his money he can obtain some of these things, and can go riding or golfing anytime, but if he wants all of them he knows that he must leave the ghetto and change his way of life entirely. Instead of playing with a few baubles that money can buy while still enmeshed in the ghetto street life, he would have to change his environment and his friends and become a real businessman and acquire the skills of the higher game.



## Players' View of the Square World

To a player, the square world means the slavery of a "trick marriage" and a "chump job," which is considered a double yoke to be avoided at all costs. The two are perfectly meshed. At work the boss pimps the square to produce. At home the wife pimps him to succeed at his job.

Sales organizations and other businesses are well aware of how profitable an alliance between the wife and the boss can be. Many salesmen's wives, for example, receive books of "prizes" and are cajoled by slick promotional material to "encourage" their husbands to sell, sell, sell. And don't forget, one such brochure admonishes, to "give your husband a royal welcome when he comes home." An accompanying picture shows a wife giving her husband a sexy embrace.

**trick marriage** When a pimp gets turned out he must recondition himself to cast off his mother's "brainwashing." He does not want to be a trick like his father; instead of accepting the common belief that "it's a man's world," he realizes that this is just a lie promulgated by women, who are really in control of the trick marriage. A Women's Liberation movement is not revolutionary, say the players. What would be truly revolutionary is the liberation of men.

BROCK: When he goes on his first date, Mom buys the corsage. Mom usually drives you to the first date. Dad don't even want to hear that shit 'cause he knows, Dad's starting to get hip and see what the funk is about this. He knows what happens when the pussy grows teeth and the charge card that's flowing out. Every time she comes around there's a

mink coat coming, you know. Dad is, the disillusion has stopped with Dad, he just looks at you going through this shit, man. He wants to say something but what can he say? How can he, he's no example, he's a trick too.

Whether the men want to admit it or not, every woman is a ho regardless of what the status is housewife, nun, prostitutes, whatever you want to say. The housewife gets longevity, you know. She gets the vacation every year, she gets the security with the fella on a twenty-five thousand-dollar-a-year job. Vacation every summer, the golf club, country club, and a couple of kids. She gives him the kids, you understand, in order to lock him up, 'cause she knows once she has had one or two babies, she's going to have him locked down tight, and even if he leaves she can still get four or five hundred dollars a month, if he's making any kind of money.

If he wants an extra shot of cock he promises her a vacation to Hawaii or Bermuda or Acapulco, a mink coat, and so on. Well, a prostitute is really being more honest than the housewife because she gets hers placed in front. The guy knows he comes up with his fifty or a hundred bucks or whatever it is, and when he finishes doing that he can get up and wash off, go home, and go to bed without giving his wife a vacation for this, a summer that would cost him sixteen hundred dollars instead of the hundred he can spend for the prostitute.

This whole society is supplying demands and the pussy is the gold mine and the trick has got a burning hot fire in his loins, you know, which he's got to take care of. 'Cause his wife is pimping him, see? She gets him to get up every morning, cooks his breakfast to make sure he's good and strong, gives him his vitamin pills and everything, hands him

his little briefcase, you know, so he can go out there and get the buck so she can go play bridge, go get her hair done, understand?

Brock was once a middle-class, straight-and-narrow trick husband. He says he knows from experience what it is like to support a lady who is good for nothing but sex – and that not often or willingly enough – and he is not unique. Many other pimps have also turned out after waking up one day from a trick marriage and a similar feeling of going nowhere in the square work mill.

James points out that it doesn't matter whether or not the American woman is aware that she has made her husband a trick; the facts of the situation speak for themselves:

JAMES: Recognize The Game as being what it is, game. The American housewife in suburbia doesn't know what The Game really means and she's playing on her husband every fucking payday, she's running it on her fucking husband. Now that's a sad predicament and a sick situation. Analyze that situation. That's where the real sickness comes from. When three out of four come to divorce in the court in the course of a few years, it's sad. And what's wrong with the institutions in this fucking country, that's the question.

**chump job** According to the players, working for Mister Charlie or anyone means selling out one's manhood and one's soul. Any type of subordinate position is being a nigger, somebody's lackey, and some Blacks are understandably more sensitive to being somebody's nigger than some Whites. The puritan ethic of work is totally rejected. "Why should I work a chump job for chump change when I can make real money and be independent of the

Man?" they ask. Independence and money rather than a job identification means manhood to a player.

Brock is not a ghetto hustler with his roots in the street, but rather a dropout from the Black bourgeoisie. His reasons for choosing pimping lie not only in racism and the Black or White matriarchy, but in the frustrations of employment which many Americans face. The dilemma confronts anyone who desires meaningful, challenging work in a society which offers a surfeit of tedious jobs bereft of dignity, adventure, or respect. A significant number of American men and women feel like niggers in a Dagwood-Mr. Dithers situation, but Black men feel it worse than anybody, even Black men like Brock who could make it as a token nigger in some big corporation.

BROCK: Now what I had to adapt myself to was my own independence. This is the stick that I have to carry, this is the sacrifice that I have to make because I am an independent individual. I can find a better way of spending my life than behind Joe Blow's desk for twenty-five, thirty dollars a day, you know. And I get into a group, the same fellas, we all go home on the same bus or train or car pool, we all go to the same bar, sit and talk the same shit about how, to give you a for instance, I was in a club downtown on Geary Street the other night which is considered the legal exec type thing, you know. . . RICHARD: The Boojies?  
BROCK: Yeah. And there was these two light-complected Negro fellows come in with short hair, and I was sitting at the bar next to them and they were discussing about cars. One guy says, "Well, you know, I think I'll get uppity car this year, and I found out how I'm going to do it. I'm going to go to the bank and I'm going to borrow a couple thousand dollars and I'm going to pay the car off

cash and get a reduction in price, you know. You get the car more or less stripped down, it's not going to have FM radio in it, air conditioning, a heater, or whitewalls."

The other guy say, "Yeah, I understand, my little Fiat doesn't even have a radio in it." Then digging the conversation, man, it was going round and round about how to get Whitey, and they're already making it. They're already wearing those sixty-nine-dollar suits, strictly traditional with the shoes, complete stereotype, bourgeoisie set, you know, and they're still speaking how they can live life even cheaper!

One guy says, "One of my roommates is moving out so why don't you move in with us, save money, take it and put it down on the car." Always trying to figure out every way in the world to live life cheaper on what I consider a lower existence so they can fit into the stereotype of the young fella coming up in the office. Talking about how he can save the boss money and that promotion shit, you know.

All the time I'm sitting up there thinking about how and where I'm going to catch me a ho, you understand, to get me some money insto-presto right now so I can live like the greatest right now, not twenty years from now, you understand, when I have the gray hairs in my head, and my back is starting to slump sitting on a god-damn desk and my elbow all worn out and I got patches on my god-damn sleeve!

I'm trying to figure out right now how I can have some of the beautiful things in life. Man, these goddamn motherfuckers have been brainwashed by the masters. I'm still a puppy, in my youth and I'm enjoying it as best I can and, hey, I just love life.

But I feel right now if all this was to blow away and it could, you know, I can't think of a pleasanter way to spend

the last two and a half years. I haven't any pulled ligaments, no hernias, I still walk straight, you know. And nobody can say, "Well, damn, he died behind the plow."

Independence and manhood are why a player, if he goes on to higher game, will only go into business for himself, which of course makes him prey to all the vicissitudes of private entrepreneurship, and sometimes requires that his women return to hoing periodically during lean periods. Nevertheless, both the player and his women would rather rely on themselves than work for anyone. The pimp tells his ho that it is futile and degrading to work for a man as a waitress, secretary, salesgirl, bank teller, file clerk, or dancer, when the same amount of money can be obtained in half an hour off that same man, who is now her trick instead of the other way around. In addition, she does not want her man to be reduced to the level of working at somebody's chump job either when she can insure his independence. If she is a simple ho who lacks self-confidence she will seek to keep him always dependent on her. But if she is a boss lady who can see beyond "the pussy game," she believes that giving her man the financial basis to go on to higher game as an independent businessman will insure her own security as well. Of course, many men are waiting to exploit her and then leave her, so the boss lady must be sure she chooses the right player in the first place.

**hypocrisy of squares** Pimps and other hustlers often have strong views on conventional morality, for they are in a unique position to observe hypocrisy in action.

As youngsters, most were taught about justice for all and equal pay for equal work in the land of unlimited opportunity, only to be sadly disillusioned in adulthood. Those in The Life claim there is

less hypocrisy and "bullshit" in their subculture than in the square world. The rules, expectations, and goals are straightforward and provide the individual with a sense of security and consistency.

Soulful Spider expressed his disillusionment with the moral teachings of his youth:

SPIDER: Do you realize that society's emotions are criminal? They teach you, don't steal, don't do this, don't do that, and when a Good Samaritan family picks up a bag full of a whole bunch of money, nobody knows they got it, you know, or how they came in it, and they know these people wouldn't steal it because they ain't those type people, you know, they turn it over to the police, and the newspapers write up articles about it. But the neighbors call them such idiots, talk about them so bad behind their back, make them feel so miserable that they have to move and the reputation stays 'cause they're the chumps from then on. Now you tell me if that isn't criminal, underneath all that Samaritan bullshit they hand you?

In the following interview Brock tells of his dissatisfaction with the square sales jobs which he once held successfully and in which he achieved a promotion to teacher of salesmen.

BROCK: You have to stop and think what our individual incentives in life are, you know, what people like. I like people who like nice things, like a nice living standard, nice clothes, charge cards, whole bit, you know. Cash money jump to New York, take a plane to Hawaii for the weekend. I like money, the things that I do. I try to advocate money at all times. I am materialistic, see. Now people who don't like these things, referring to broads, ain't got no business around me anyway. These are the type of things that I talk about, you know. And ten

years from now I would like to be talking about my Lear jet.

CHRISTINA: Everything that you just said could equally be said by a square businessman. BROCK: What's wrong with that?

CHRISTINA: Well, that simply raises the question, why even bother with taking the risks that you and your women have to take? BROCK: What risks? CHRISTINA: Well, there's the constant risk of being busted. BROCK: So what? Being safe is not being rich. CHRISTINA: Well, I was just saying, why bother with The Life at all, since you obviously have personal qualities and background that are beyond most people that I see. Why don't you just go into a legitimate business and make it that way? BROCK: Well, you know I tried that and I was successful selling fire alarms, because I did believe in that, that it was a useful product for the home. But encyclopedias, man, I felt like a phony. I felt like a complete asshole for doing this. Yeah, I'd go home at night and feel just rotten, you know. And I'd be talking to people and I'd be wondering when this is going to say, "Get out of my house!" CHRISTINA: But they never would? BROCK: I'd be waiting, just waiting for the dude to say, "Cool it man, I don't want this shit, get out of here!" CHRISTINA: But they're such tricks. Hey, what am I talking about, I've bought magazine subscriptions too! BROCK: Right. Moochies, that's the word we used. Suckers. We said, "Here's a real mooch neighborhood." Same word as trick really, you know, "This one's a real moocher" like. And this dude would wind us up like toy soldiers and we'd jump out of the car running. Running! This is the total brainwashing, you know. Here you're going to get your first chance to get in the business world. Your big fat opportunity to go out and get all these moochies. "They're waiting for you with open arms," he used to pep talk us. I used to cram my mind with all this shit. I had tape recorders [sales motivation] and books. Every night before I went to bed I'd play a tape and I'd wake up in the morning and while I was shaving these things are running through my mind, you know. I knew



every rebuttal. CHRISTINA: And that's why you say you felt like a phony. BROCK: Well, I was. I'm trying to decide now what I am now. Where to go from here. I know I can't make it as a square, you know, in a relationship with a woman. Would scare the shit out of me.

It is the phoniness and meaninglessness of such jobs, besides the limited material rewards in return for hard work, that turn off a man like Brock and turn him away from the straight world.

For youthful members of a minority group, justifiably weary of being patient, the moral and social teachings of their Black religious upbringing bear faint resemblances to the world of experience. We asked Brock why it is that pimping is such a high-prestige occupation among Black youth.

BROCK: You know what I think that is? I think pimping is the supreme breach of the rules, you know. You completely turn everything around. You create a different environment, different understanding. It's like your own world, you associate with your own people, you have your own set of rules that you follow, it's a completely different society. It's weird, you know. At one time I found a lot of security in it 'cause I knew what was going on. It was laid down to me what was right and what was wrong, whereas in square society, people are always doing things that are wrong and calling it right. Just like parents who tell their kids, I don't want you to smoke, to drink, take LSD. But Momma's an alcoholic, chipping on Dad. And Dad, he's a deacon of the church and supposedly the most moral, upright citizen in the community and he's running around paying a certain girl's rent for the last ten years or he's been padding his secretary's salary with a mink coat, maybe a weekend trip. But Dad is very moral,

you know. And the least little thing you do is immoral. If you get caught smoking pot, you're totally out of pocket, you know what I mean? The audacity! But it's cool for him to sneak off with his secretary.

Brock went on from personal and religious hypocrisy to include the hypocrisy of Whites in relation to Blacks in a parental analogy. He compared the hypocritical father who is strict with his son to the White establishment which defines what is acceptable behavior for Blacks.

BROCK: To me the funniest thing about it is that it's like the difference between the two races. It's still like all these things are cool for him to do, but don't you do it. Whitey wants to set a standard for himself, but don't you try to get it. He wants to make all the beautiful things and present these things to you on TV, but he don't want you to have that. But he wants you to work like a motherfucker. He wants to stand up on top of your back, but he don't want you to have it.

Now I'm going to tell you the truth: if I was Whitey, I'd be the same goddamn way. See, that's why I'm not prejudiced, because I realize that if the tables were turned, I might even be worse, you understand? If you was Black, I might have your leg shot right now. I'd run you down in the street, wench, I'm for real! Unfortunately I came out on the losing end. But instead of me just accepting it, only thing I can do is put myself in a position where I can, anyway, you know, enjoy it, best I can, anyway. And improve on the situation.

## Pimps and Politics

Unlike the political activist who is dedicated to the betterment of his own and his brothers' lives, the pimp figures he has only one life, his own, for which to be responsible. Players deal with the givens of society and pragmatically feed off its ills in defiance of it. A militant Black man in the bar one night loudly proclaimed, "I'm gone get my piece [gun] and go shoot all the Whiteys." A player replied, "Don't do that, brother. Shit, you gonna take all my business away." Another player remarked that business was best when police came down hard on political demonstrators as this encouraged disrespect for the law, and tricks were more apt to solicit their ladies. On the other hand, when there are race riots, the prostitution game is bad because "people stay home that would be out in the streets 'cause they're scared." Whatever the climate, the player assesses it in terms of his personal gain. He is as practical as a stockbroker about the world situation as it relates to business.

Dealing with the givens of society instead of trying to change them is a relief to those who are tired of banging their heads against a brick wall. The players believe that "if you are true to The Game and to yourself, The Game will be true to you." The race problem can resolve itself without the pimp's participation in a sit-in.

BROCK: See, I let other people do the crusading, you know, about doing something. If I can't do myself some good, how can I do anybody else some good? RICHARD: You mean like the militants? BROCK: Yeah, like Stokely Carmichael, Rap Brown, Huey P. Newton. He can do that one to fifteen years for me. He's doing the things I thought about doing. When I was going to high school there was seven of us. Four of these dudes they all went into the service, to the Bay of Pigs operation. Something told me not to go 'cause I was gone get killed. Now, one of these dudes

got his leg shot off. The other three are Black Panthers. They've all been to jail a number of times. One is being hunted by the FBI right now. He was the captain of the Bay Area chapter of the Black Panthers. Now he's being hunted like a fucking dog, you know. CHRISTINA: A fugitive. BROCK: Right. One come by the store and asked me did I know where he could cop firearms, this and that, you know. He knows that I do extensive traveling around the country. But I decided to let him do the crusading. He started off by going to the Bay of Pigs thing, you know, and he was a paratrooper and he was one of the cats that teaches everybody how to make bombs. All these dudes went except for me and another dude. CHRISTINA: They joined up to go? BROCK: Yeah. They volunteered! I got mad, and Kennedy said if you get married, you don't have to go, so I got married. I said I could stand this better, I can divorce this without getting shot.

Brock and others decided at some point to deal with society as it is rather than try to change it, but pimps nevertheless remain another breed of hero. Before the rise of Black militancy the pimp had even more prestige in the ghetto. Today there are conflicting views of Black manhood which imply two opposing strategies of getting Whitey. The Black militant feels fulfilled in his manhood by confronting the Man and telling him where to get off. The pimp may agree with what the Black militant is saying, but he prefers a less visible strategy, one that has more cool, more game to it, and one which has immediate personal rewards.

BROCK: The Panther comes out like a bull. He comes out fighting and consequently he puts everybody on the defensive so they are warned and positioned. If the Panthers were to be an

effective group, they would have to stay in the background quietly and do the guerrilla thing. But these dudes don't like to be quiet and crafty, they love to shout about their manhood all the time so everybody knows where they're at. RICHARD: How would you respond to someone who said the closest thing to a man in this country is a Black Panther? JAMES: I don't agree with that. Because they're trying to define manhoodism in their attack on what's keeping them from their manhood. If you really got it, you don't have to prove it and scream, "I'm a man." BROCK: I would say that the player is a maneuverer. He takes White culture and turns it against itself and the Panther rebels against it and he more or less sticks his head in the lion's mouth. He's crude, he bucks like a wild horse. The guy gets him saddled and instead of the horse walking out real slow and calm, getting this guy relaxed and then buck and throwing him — what have they done now? They went to the extent to where they announce their acts. They announced they going to bomb the Oakland police department, for instance, and other vital installations so these people now are on extra guard. They're alert now, you know, whereas a pimp comes in the background, takes the White man's weakness and uses it against him.

So much for the politics of the Movement; personal economics are much more important to the players. And to them manhood is earned by the mastery of a mental game.

BOBBY JOE: The only individual who can be considered a man, Black, White, blue, or green, are the ones who got the ability to analyze what is being presented to them and to sit down and figure out why it is being presented to them, you know, what the objective is, the motives, and then to move on

that knowledge of the game in order to win.

Brainwashing is a frequently heard term which implies society's conditioning of the individual in order to keep him from knowing that he is being taken advantage of, that he is a pawn. To be a man, therefore, is to play past the brainwashing so that one does not remain a blind pawn, a trick, grateful for the handouts of society. In other words, to be a man is to be on top of the game of life, to be a player.

This view of the world as a pimping game was born in the ghetto of hustling parentage and slave ancestry. It is one of the two basic strategies for survival with defiance. The player versus the Panther is another aspect of the cat versus the bad nigger, the trickster versus the leader of the slave rebellion, and the two strategies are as old as these two types of personalities; both are facets of all humanity's drama.

## Chapter Eight

# The Secret America

Black players live in a secret America, in which they are secret heroes. Why “secret” rather than “hidden” or merely “overlooked”? Because there are many veils of deliberate secrecy about the players’ world, drawn by the players as well as by the “straight” world upon whom they depend for a living. True identities must be concealed from the police and the taxman. Hustlers’ language is meant to be unintelligible to outsiders. Many a player will not reveal his personal games even to his intimates; in fact, some have no intimates.

From his secret subculture, the player views American society with the double perspective of a Black man and a pimp. His vision is therefore shaped by special cultural lenses, but the picture must

have some accuracy if he is to survive. His view of the underbelly of majority culture is the pimp's secret America no less than his own hustling ghetto subculture. And he is still a ghetto hero, though few of his admirers will admit it.

## **The Black Pimp and Other American Heroes**

Why should the pimp be a hero? Beyond the surface flash, the fine cars and colorful clothes, what accounts for the player's charisma? First, the pimp hero is a trickster. By the use of wit and guile he earns a rich living and maintains aristocratic tastes without having to resort either to violence or to physical labor.

As a trickster, this modern Br'er Rabbit must learn the ways of the Fox, his cunning adversary. He must be able to observe the society around him with honesty and awareness. Con men understand human greed and pimps understand much about "race," sex, and the psychic needs of women which would do credit to a serious student of human nature. Like the sociologist and the anthropologist, pimps and hustlers depend for their livelihood on an awareness of social forces and an understanding of the human psyche. In fact, the social scientist rarely applies his knowledge directly, and so has much more leeway than the hustler or pimp in being wrong before he is out of a job.

The pimp, therefore, takes pride in his ability to face life as it is, to see things as they are, and to be honest with himself. The player also prides himself on being aware of when he is running a game and when he is not. Most people, he perceives, delude themselves about their real ends and objectives in life. While an army of hypocrites prattle about their devotion to a noble cause, their duty to God and country, their concern with the advancement of



knowledge or science, the pimp knows how overwhelming is their devotion to money, their duty to find a piece of ass, their concern with the advancement of no one but themselves. The pimp knows that he is after the money, sex, and security, too, and that he is selfish and manipulative — but he at least does not delude himself with moral soap bubbles.

Often the player's special awareness of the secret America causes him to view commonplace things in an uncommon way. Once the world, and particularly the relations between the sexes, is viewed from the Black players' vantage point, things never again seem quite the same. For example, Brock once suggested that we "check out" the culture patterns of the majority as expressed in the Sunday comics.

We noticed immediately that the comic strip heroes could be divided into two obvious groups: those who control women and those who are controlled by women. In the first group we find the likes of Superman, Batman, the Phantom. Usually, they only exercise their control by keeping the women at arm's length at all times. Lois Lane has done her best over the years to land Superman, but he always finds a way to keep her placated while he retreats into his Fortress of Solitude. The Batman has his secluded Batcave, and the Phantom his secret cave retreat; in none of these lairs are women welcome. None of them wants the problem of living with a woman (they often state this) and they are all superheroes!

Next we turned to the strips which have recognizable people in them, ordinary mortals. Brock chuckled with delight as we paused at "Bringing Up Father." Jiggs tiptoes home after a late drink with the boys while Maggie waits behind the door to ambush him with a raised rolling pin. Finally we turned to that all-American family, the Bumsteads. Dagwood tries to get a few minutes of rest on the couch but Blondie and the kids manage to con him into doing

something he hates (mow the lawn, move the furniture). Soon he is led into a series of disasters which ends in his wishing he'd never been born. For decades now Jiggs has been trying to tiptoe past Maggie without getting clobbered, and for thousands of Sundays Dagwood has tried to take a nap without interruption. They are the true antiheroes, the supreme tricks mythologized. We visit them and laugh at their domestic tortures every Sunday, but what do these comic characters do during the week? Is it possible that Dagwood and Jiggs contribute every now and then to the payments on some player's El Dorado?

Turning from the comics to another repository of American heroes, the movies, what can we learn about the heroes of the majority? How do, say, John Wayne or Steve McQueen compare with the heroic qualities of the Black player? The WASP film hero demonstrates his masculine control of six-guns or horses, motorcycles or racing cars. He might be the fastest gun in the West, or the hottest thing on two wheels, but traditionally he becomes tongue-tied in the presence of a beautiful woman. ("Thanks just the same, Ma'am, but I've got to tend to my horse.") We have already seen that the pimp's money and its source contribute to his prestige, but it is well to reflect on the most important of his claims to hero status: he controls women. Few other American heroes, secret or otherwise, can claim that ability.

## **Chauvinist Pigs, White Slaves, and Other Fables**

At the time when the cry of "male chauvinist pig" went up from Women's Liberationists, we were observing self-admitted male chauvinists who never lacked for female company. Women were

willing to pay them large sums for their attentions, sought their company, and broke the law nightly in order to bring them money. Could these women all be masochists, as some "authorities" have suggested, or are they all frigid or nymphomaniacal or hopelessly addicted to expensive drugs?

The truth is that only a few of the hos are masochists or junkies. Many are quite "normal" human beings who feel intense devotion to their men, despite the so-called experts who find it impossible to believe that any woman in her right mind would stay with a Black pimp unless she were coerced or drugged. Political radicals, conservatives, revolutionaries all agree that prostitution is an evil and all want to believe that pimps invariably put their women on heroin. To the contrary, most pimps we knew claimed that they never would want a "dope fiend broad." Jimmy explained that "if a bitch goes on narcotics you lose her, 'cause then you're not pimpin' her anymore -the needle is." A pimp wants reliability and stability in his women. Why would a girl willingly subordinate herself to a "male chauvinist pig"? Obviously, the women do not view their men in this way. Are they shamefully "unawakened sisters" or are they perhaps entitled to point the finger the other way and accuse the purveyors of sexual politics of being unenlightened? As we have seen, people in *The Life* tend to believe that the man should be the "natural" leader in a relationship, and that American men have abdicated their responsibility, leaving the womenfolk dominant, powerful, and secretly unhappy. James insisted:

JAMES: The pimp game has all the answers. You have to get your head mentally attuned to it.

RICHARD: Well, look, obviously the whole country, the ideal for the whole country wouldn't be everybody pimping

because. . .

JAMES: No, no, no, it's not a question of that. You're talking on a different level. See, the pimp game is prerequisite to manliness and womanness.

CHRISTINA: Well, after pimping, what?

JAMES: Man and woman, that's all, man and woman. And that's why it's so beautiful. You strip all the rest off, that shit, and you come out naked as man and woman and you start from there.

There is no "proof" for this belief except personal experience as a man or a woman. Since neither the pimp philosophers nor the Women's Libbers can offer up conclusive scientific evidence on the true nature of men and women, in a free society each must be permitted to live according to his or her beliefs. In the final analysis, what is important is not academic discussion of the question, but the personal happiness of individuals. Is Jacqueline, Keith's woman, as happy or less happy than Gloria Steinem? Is Brock's woman, Katherine, more or less "fulfilled" than Germaine Greer? Each must find her own answer.

Some modern idealistic revolutionaries cannot understand that their "oppressed sisters of the streets" do not want to be "liberated." Many would rather sell sex than work as typists or filing clerks any day. Like the staunchest upholders of Victorian morality, modern revolutionaries loathe the profession of prostitution and are determined to eliminate it. Their utopian vision sees their "sisters" uplifted to meaningful tasks like driving tractors, no longer "degraded" by servicing the sexual needs of men (the swine!).

In the secret America there is a great deal of moral superiority. Everyone has it. Cops think pimps are the lowest form of life, and

have a fund of stories ready to prove it. Pimps in turn have nasty stories about police behavior. Hos think they are better than tricks and often collect anecdotes about sexual degenerates they have encountered. Pimps think they are more honorable than hos. Tricks often regard both pimps and hos as "beneath" them. In the view of the larger society, of course, it is not the consumer of commercial sex but only the suppliers the pimps and hos – who must bear the stigma of moral inferiority.

Revolutionaries never ask their "street sisters" if they want their occupations abolished. In fact, one of the problems with reforming in general is that there are damn few people who would like to be reformed. Of course, it has been traditional for city police forces to act as moral wet nurses, habitually arresting drunks, prostitutes, and sometimes even tricks for "crimes" which have no discernible victim. One night the police came into one of the bars and emptied the place. "Go on home," they told the customers, "these girls are just trying to get your money, this place is a clip joint." Most of the customers left, but a wiry little Chicano perched on his barstool and squawked to a companion, "Man, if I want to pees it all away, that is my beesness. I din' ask those fockin' cops to protect me from these girls. I came in here of my own free will, and if I want to give these girls everything I own, that is still my beesness."

## **Othello and the Dope Fiend Broad**

What truly is insulting to women is the insinuation that a woman who loves a pimp is incapable of being responsible for her acts and actions. Most people cast themselves in the role of parents who feel obligated to invent excuses for the incomprehensible behavior of their errant offspring. This attitude reigns particularly if the young

lady is White and the man she has chosen is Black. With the predictability of a reflex, most people's immediate reaction to a Black pimp and a White woman is that the Black bastard must have beaten the woman brutally or strung her out on heroin to force her to comply with his wishes.

Such a point of view denies that women have any volition or any power to deal effectively with men. It presumes that women are incapable of choosing or rejecting their mates, which is patently absurd. This insult to woman-hood, however, has a venerable history in our culture.

Three hundred and fifty years ago, Shakespeare wrote of a young White woman, Desdemona, who had run away with a Black man. Then, as now, her father immediately assumed that the girl was drugged. "O thou foul thief," Brabantio accuses the Moor, "where hast thou stow'd my daughter?/Damn'd as thou art, thou hast enchanted her; . . . That thou hast practis'd on her with foul charms,/ Abus'd her delicate youth with drugs or minerals/That weaken motion. I'll have't disputed on/Tis probable and palpable to thinking."

As Shakespeare has delineated him, Brabantio simply cannot imagine it possible that

A maid so tender, fair, and happy,  
So opposite to marriage that she shunn'd  
The wealthy curled darlings of our nation,  
Would ever have, t'incur a general mock,  
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom  
Of such a thing as thou – to fear, not to delight.

Othello, of course, clears himself of the charge by explaining that

he has married Desdemona, and that, rather than with “spells and medicines,” he won her with his rap. By the hour he captivated the lady with tales

Of moving accidents by flood and field;  
Of hair breadth scapes i'th'imminent deadly breach;  
Of being taken by the insolent foe  
And sold to slavery, of my redemption thence. . .

He then produces the lady, while her father rants that “If she confess that she was half the wooer,/Destruction on my head.” Desdemona confesses matter-of-factly that she knew what she was doing all along. “I saw Othello’s visage in his mind,” she explains, “And to his honours and his valiant parts/Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate.” At this, the councilmen of Venice exonerate Othello because it is the right and just thing to do. And also, as Shakespeare makes abundantly clear, because they need him to fight their war.

## **An Unspoken Conversation**

The businessman from Phoenix finished his Scotch and looked at his tab. He rose a little from his chair to reach the wallet wedged in his side pocket. As he sat down again, he looked up and noticed Brock, who had just entered “The Player’s Inn.”

Brock noticed the man noticing him and quickly sized him up: another White trick, no question about it. “Look at you,” Brock thought to himself, “you poor emasculated bastard. I’ll bet you’re even looking down at me right this minute, ‘cause you see this Black face and these custom-made threads, and you’re thinking I’m scum, aren’t you, you poor deluded ass-hole?”

Phoenix gazed at Brock and wondered. “How the hell can a

nigger afford clothes like that? Must be some kind of gangster or a pimp, yeah, he's probably a damn pimp coming into a place like this. Wonder how many whores he's got. How does he get them to give him their money? Son of a bitch probably finds innocent young girls, gets them strung out on dope. Maybe he beats the shit out of them every night. Poor girls. They oughtta lock up guys like that."

"Bet I know everything about you, Mister," Brock thought. "I know how your Mama brainwashed you to be a poor slob who works his ass off every week, then comes home to some bitch who hasn't done a goddamn thing all day but spend your money. Does she take all of your paycheck and give you an allowance, you miserable sucker, or does she let you at least keep the illusion that you're deciding what to do with the money? Bet she's a cold, frigid bitch who thinks you're a degenerate if you ask her for a blow job. I can see your suburban house with the color TV and the Chevy station wagon. I can see her lying there in her curlers with junk on her face watching the TV, talking to her friends on the telephone, telling them about the next vacation to Hawaii and the new coat. I can also see how she would act if you lost your job and that cash stopped Howing, and how strong her love would be for you if you couldn't find work."

"How can a man be so degenerate as to be a pimp," Phoenix thought. "I would never let my wife work; it would be an insult to my manhood to think that I couldn't provide for her and the kids. How rotten, how sick – to be supported by a woman. And I have the satisfaction of knowing they're all covered by my insurance plan if something happens to me . . . Jeez, but I bet that nigger sure has some good times with all those broads, orgies and everything."

Brock thought: "He probably envies me a little, probably thinks I screw my dick off every night. He doesn't know three women can get as boring as one, 'cause each one acts like she's the only one in



your life, each one wants to own your dick. Well, none of'em own it: I do. And I give up as little as possible. This clown actually feels lucky if he can get some pussy; he doesn't know how soon you tire of it as a steady thing."

Phoenix's mind focused on the whys and wherefores of pimps; he was baffled. "How can the girls give their money to a man like that? They probably think he loves them. Don't they know when they're being pimped, used, conned?"

Eddie had placed "the usual" – Chivas and water – on the bar. Brock raised his glass and took a sip. As the rich liquid ran down his throat, he wondered why a trick didn't catch on. "How can a man let himself be used like that? Doesn't he ever wake up and see how the boss in his office is pimping him? How the boss loves him, adores him when he makes sales or brings in accounts, and how that same boss is angry, cold, distant when he goofs up, wants a day off, isn't making his usual quota? Won't he ever get hip to the way the boss's boss pimps the boss so the company will produce, how Uncle Sam steps in and takes his cut of anybody's action, how this poor sucker's wife and kids get all his money off of him? And he's got no satisfaction with his work; just does the same dumb job every day, never accomplishes a goddamn thing."

"And this man, this man," Phoenix fumed inwardly, "he doesn't contribute anything to society, he's dumb and brutal and too lazy to work. This dumb nigger, he's sitting there looking at me with a condescending, contemptuous little smile on his face!"

"Poor, poor bastard," Brock chuckled as he turned away from Phoenix and began to direct his earnest efforts towards the whiskey, "poor bastard's probably sitting there thinking how superior he is to ME – the flawless Black diamond!" He finished the drink and placed the glass on the bar. "But, of course," he mused, "I wouldn't have it any other way, trick. Because without

you and your fucked-up illusions, without your fucked-up sex life – I'd be out of business tomorrow." He laughed again and ordered another Chivas.

# APPENDIXES

## I. Pimp Poems and Stories

### Pimp in a Clothing Store By Soulful Spider

This dude, he had tried everything but skip skap and damn games, Jim. He had played every game that there was to play and things looked like worst was going to turn around and kick him dead in the head, Jack, you understand me. Boy, things was so bad that the devil wasn't even giving him no evil breaks either, you understand me, couldn't find nothing wrong to do, for a young man.

And then one day this young lady filled his head full of pride and joy, and stuck money to him in his pocket, and struck love to the young man's heart. And the next thing he know, man, this cat was going through a game that was called Nick-Nack and Pimpin' Snap. Pimpin', you understand me.

Nick, you get anything you can from them tricks and Nack, right off from them, and penny slap, for every time that they look around, and Nick-Nack, 'cause that man you gone bring money right straight home to him any old way and so he had his old game together. And then the man got insane -pimpin' back to back, Mack man, you understand me. Next thing you know a young man's got three or four. Look around, Jack, and from corner to corner, from street to street, from Friday to Saturday, Jack, he's got hos holding them down.

Now looka here, next thing you know he comes on down the street in a Mark II white on white in white, you understand me. Yessiree, Jack, he's coming on down high-sidin', signifyin' and talkin' that jive, come ridin' on by hollering, "Hey, you jive malformies, you better get on your job out there, quit your

chipping!”

Next thing you know he’s off in a clothing store. You ever seen a pimp off in a clothing store, man?

Looka here, like a little boy. Get off in a clothing store, Jack, and his eyes get big – his pocket’s big anyway, you understand me – eyes get big, Jack, and he gets to buying things like plum pants, shirts and socks, and carrying on. And yellow on yellow or blue on yellow or something like that. Oh yeah, they colorful, colorful, colorful. Soulfully colorful, that too, you understand me.

Young man walked in, Jack, in black on black with a gray tie. Mack hat hanging down, pimp shades sockin’ it to you from the cue view. Diamonds sparkling, oh, lookie here, look like stars on his fingers, you understand me. He fell on in high-sidin’ with his hands off in his pockets, his hand mini-high off in his pants, you understand me, and he fell on in.

And he say, loud, commanding voice “Looka here, young blood, why don’t you fix me on away with one of these old shirts here?” I say, [placating, submissive voice] “Yeah brother, all right, what exactly did you have in mind?” [First voice] “Well, looka here, man, I want one of them old highs, you understand, with the French cuffs and you know, something like uh, something very nice like blue on blue or one of them old dress downs, you know. Nothin’ that’s off the wall, don’t give me none of this Nick-Nack stuff. I just want something nice, you understand, blood?”

“Yeah, old blood, you holdin’ it down, yeah, all right. Well, looka here, man, here’s something, you understand, this is seven-inch collar with them French cuffs, back to back, and on your shirt, looka here, it got cuff links with it. With it, Jack, with it. Wraps around one time, you understand me, with sparkling jewels that will knock a young lady’s eyes right out of her head, you understand me?” “Uh huh.” “And looka here, blood, you ought to look at these

up here. Oh that go right nice with them pants, man. Yeah, you sure is looking boss, young man.

“Well looka here, we got this old thing up here, this mellow fellow shirt, mel-low fel-low shirt. This shirt here is called ‘French Tony.’ It’s got back-to-back cuffs with buttons, a high collar that will just make your neck shrink and your head fall in place, understand me, and it will look plenty, plenty, plenty, plenty fine on a young man and it’s only seven dollars, you understand me, just seven dollars. Oh, blood, let me show you. . .” [Pimp voice] “I’m holding, heavy, freeze, just bring them on down.” “All right, uh huh” (I’ll show him up the steeps, you hip to me).

I come on down with my stuff. Oh man, this cat didn’t know what to pick up next, you understand me. Boy, he had some colors there, Jack, that would, looka here, blood had some colors, Jack, that would put a rainbow out of style. He had some colors that would definitely make a rainbow look bad. Man! He was c-I-e-e-a-n!

One day I seen him when he was coming back to the store to pick up some of his stuff. He had on a blue high collared shirt that was that boss, you understand me, some plum pants and plum socks and plum suede shoes, understand me, with some shades on, his pimp shades, and a ruby off on his finger. And a Black man with a gold watch and diamonds and rubies in it, understand me, that’s plenty colorful right there.

And he falls on down, Jack, took his hands off in his pocket, pulled his pants halfway all up his chest and falls on in the store. [Shouts] “Young blood, where you at, man? [Meekly] “Oh here I am, brother, I’m right here, right here, right under you, brother, right under you, I’m on my job.” “Hey looka here, man, is my stuff ready? I mean you ain’t jivin’ around, is you? I’m out here doin’ it. I can’t be running around with these lames now. I mean, you know,

git it on.” “Stuff’s right here, brother. Now I hate to short-stop your whole conversation like this, you know, ain’t bogarting, but your stuff is right here. On our job, we don’t be shuckin’ and jivin’ with no malformies out in the street. We here.”

Man, he was dressed. Boy, looka here, he had a pot of gold sitting out there ‘cause he was a rainbow, yeah. That Mark II white on white in white with plum and blue and more plum and red and white, aw man, he was on his job. Yes sir, he drove off in his II high-sidin’, see, he got to leanin’ over on the side, you know, like he was goin’ to lay down, one hand up on the steering wheel, music playing side to side on his car, you understand me. Sound like a music box goin’ down the street, understand me, just ummmmmmm. Oh, he’s back to back, and that’s THE Pimp!

## **A Pimp Toast (Collected by Dr. Neil Eddington)**

One day I was walkin’ downtown in L.A. I thought sure was a nice sunny day. Walkin’ around, just cool as could be, didn’t think nobody else was better than me. While I was passin’ around Fourth and Grand I thought I’d go over and bullshit with some of my partners at the shoeshine stand. While I was sittin’ there, runnin’ it down ‘bout how I was goin’ to make money, I hear this plain, sweet voice in the background say, “Hello honey.”

I turned around and surprised to see some glamour girl in a Cadillac a-lookin’ at me. So, I say, “Hey baby, what’s goin’ on?” She say, “Nothin’, Daddy, I’d like to take you home. . .” “Well, I know you can take some jive [listen to a proposition] and quit your pimpin’ your last dime.” “Yeh baby, well, that’s all right.” So I jumped in the Cadillac and she say, “Come on, baby, let’s go for a

stroll [referring to a scenic drive in a car] You ain't got no weed, I got some to roll." [marijuana] So I jumped in the car and she pulls off the curb on two back wheels, burnin' rubber, rubber all the way to her pad in Beverly Hills. Now look here Jack, I'm goin' tell you where's it at!

This pad was unusual to see, This motherfucker had a lotta class. Look like all four walls was built with glass. We pulls up and she say, "Daddy, here's you home, inside is your throne, call it your home."

So we got inside and she say, "Go over there, go on and play your favorite song, I'm goin' change clothes, this won't take long." So she came back out a couple of minutes dressed in a sea-blue gown and lookin' good from her head on down. I grab my arm and pull a pack out and say, "I know goddamn well I'm goin' spend the night."

"You can spend the night and many more too if you know what I want you to do." I say, "Yeh baby, I been around, but I'm still green, Hip daddyo to what you mean." So, to tell you it's true I go and here's what the whore said:

"I want you to get on your knees, eat my pussy like a rat eat cheese. [Narrator screams, thereby emphasizing how incredible such an idea is.] Suck on my titties hard and strong, just like Louie blows his horn. Peck at my pussy like a chicken peck corn." [Narrator now shows how incredible this proposition really is.]

Oh, I was so motherfuckin' mad, me, a pimp, goin' for shit like that. I got mad, I jumped out. I didn't know what the whore was talkin' about.



So, I got so mad I started walkin' for the door, She say, "Hold it, Daddy, one motherfuckin' minute more. You'd eat this pussy if you know'd what it had in it. Stop and think what it does have for a minute." She say, "Diamond rings, pretty things, Cadillac car, my own bar, everything else a man wants."

[Narrator explains] Looka here, I have seen people die before, I have gave people pity, I've tried to help other people when their personality was shakey, I have been here, there, and everywhere. [implying his sophistication]

I hung my head in pity, hung my head in shame, it's possible [that he could be bought off]

But today I hung my head in sorrow, I was a pimp that motherfuckin' day, [mock seriousness – a pimp has to do what is necessary to get the money] I was the cock-suckin' of \*em all. [Loud laughter. He broke the taboo and pretended to place himself in a submissive position to the woman because he was being well paid.]

Dr. Eddington comments that the hero was "able to break the taboo without any sanctions being imposed. . . . We also see in this toast a capsule history of the male vis-à-vis his position to the female, that is, the attempt of the female to dominate the male and the fact that, if he yields, he is rewarded with economic security. But befitting his role as a hero (pimp), he demonstrates his independence of the traditional dependent relationship insofar as he uses women while at the same time he objects to being used by them.

## Adam and Eve, A Traditional Pimp Origin Myth

BROCK: Pimping goes back to the man controlling the situation, directing things, before Eve bit the apple, see, and brought him down to her level and stuck the apple in his mouth. In the beginning God created earth and he created Adam. Took one of Adam's ribs and he created Eve. Eve infected Adam when she stuck that apple in her mouth. She was actually rebelling against Adam's authority, you know. She didn't know what she was doing, but by instinct she was rebelling against authority and she actually originated from Adam. And woman throughout time is gaining more points. When Adam let Eve tempt him into taking the apple he gave up his manhood and right now, today, man is fighting to regain it. HARRIS: Snake was a pimp. He was a stone pimp, Jack. He called that chick over and says, "Look here, that man you got really's not doing nothing for you. He come telling you that somebody said don't eat that apple. Say, man, that's the most foul story I ever heard in my life, huh, huh, can you dig that? Say look here, baby, you go ahead on and get yourself a bite of that apple and give my man one. Yeah, give him one, turn him on, you know. He's got to take the bitter with the sweet, you dig, blow his mind too, you know. 'Cause I know I got what you want and he don't know what I got, that's a secret, you see." So he runs the game on down to her and she fell for it, 'cause she didn't say, "No, I can't do that, I'm not that kind of woman." She reached out, man, and therefore she plucked a fruit from that forbidden tree, you dig?

RICHARD: Then Adam must have been the first trick.

HARRIS: Man, like you with it, you right down with it. He was a stone trick, you know.

## Whore by Ali Akbar

The pimp their thing be quick and fast, Walked before will not last,  
Money, it comes, will not [always] ring [cash register], All they say  
be simple sing. Cars and clothes, it be a bill, Bottom old timers sat  
at the hill, Calm and skin the lonely dick, Looking for all a money  
trick. Yet, they say the game be new, Whoring other nothing [else  
to] do, As the babe [of the New Year] will ring the chime, Stain, it  
ends whoring time. Put the mask far away, Curtain call ends one  
day, Act the role only now, For the curtain gives its bow. Together.

## Graffiti Collected During Study Period

May 1969 – written in a doorway near Broadway and Montgomery  
Streets. taking Happiness is a woman giving

February 1970 – written with spray paint in large letters on wall  
in Tenderloin area.

Pimp Alley.

March 1969 – handwritten sign in a store window on Fillmore  
Street.

Pimping Socks -99¢

October 1971 – written with spray paint on fences and walls in the  
Fillmore area.

WAR ON TRICKS

Black + White Tricks Stay Out of Fillmore

We taking pictures and license numbers

Respect Our Women

WHITE CHUMPS GO BACK TO SUBURBIA ALL WHITE TRICKS STAY

## OUT OF DODGE

### II. Pimp Talk: A Dictionary of Black Hustling Slang

This dictionary of terms used by pimps and hos includes both terms which are peculiar to the pimp subculture as well as those which are more general in the Black ghetto. Several terms inevitably overlap. Where a word or phrase clearly arises from the pimp subculture rather than from Black society at large we have notated it as a pimp term, abbreviated as PT. Most of these words and phrases are not listed in the Dictionary of the Underworld by Eric Partridge (New York: Macmillan Co.: 1950) or the Dictionary of American Slang by Harold Wentworth and Stuart Berg Flexner (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co.: 1960, 1967), but those that are have been noted using the abbreviations DU and DAS respectively. The Dictionary of Afro-American Slang by Clarence Major (New York: International, 1970) is another helpful source which, however, does not contain many of the terms listed below. DAS suppl. refers to the 1967 supplement appended to the more recent edition. In many cases [e.g. "blow," "cool," "bad"] the words and allied meanings may be mentioned in slang dictionaries, but their meanings have shifted considerably in current usage. A fuller explication of the semantic content of these terms and their contexts is given in Chapter 3 of this book.

#### **application**

PT.

Taking an application is the initial interview a pimp gives a ho to see if she is "qualified." Using his psychological skill, the pimp attempts to find out about the woman's background, her emotional needs, and her mental ability. Her responses enable him to decide whether he wants her and, if so, to devise a strategy for "catching" her.

#### **arm**

penis.

#### **to be bad**

DU. DAS.

1. Defiant, independent. Really to be good, admirable. A "bad nigga" is one who is defined as bad by the

values of White society and is therefore good because he is assuring his manhood. Also includes the idea of courting White wrath and consequently has a connotation of "crazy," unpredictable, and uninterested in self-preservation, reckless. (See Brearley, "Ba-ad Nigger.") A Black man who refuses to accept a subservient position, and will go to great lengths (including death) to avoid knuckling under. Pronunciation is intensified by drawing out the vowel. Someone who is b-a-a-d is badder than bad. 2. Applied to material objects: stylish, chic, as in "badboots."

## **bag**

1. DAS suppl.

One's disposition, mood, behavior pattern; that psychic niche to which one has assigned oneself. 2. Container for powdered drugs, e.g., "a twenty-cent bag of jam," twenty dollars' worth of cocaine.

## **behind**

1. The cause of something, e.g., "I got busted behind some reefer." 2. To get behind refers to involvement or commitment, e.g., "I could get behind pimping a broad."

## **a bill**

DU. DAS.

One hundred dollars. Also called a hun or C note.

**bitch**

DAS. PT.

Applied to a woman. It is allied to standard usage, but is not synonymous with it. Often is used casually and without malice, e.g., "He's a boss player, got six bitches in his stable." Signifies that women are members of a servile class, and that this is the natural order of things. Bad bitch—a good or exciting woman. Nothin'-ass bitch—a woman who either doesn't make money or won't give it to a man.

**blood**

used as a form of address between strangers, e.g., "Hey, young blood, what's happening?" From the meaning "blood brother" or "of the blood."

**a blow**

DU. DAS supp/.

A "snort" or "sniff" of cocaine or heroin. Also to give a blow is to blow it into someone's mouth (also marijuana smoke), usually between the sexes.

**to blow**

to lose something, e.g., "I'm gonna blow her [lose a ho] unless I can keep it together."

2. DU. To inhale cocaine into the nostrils.

**boojie**

a bourgeois Negro. The term is usually used derogatorily, implying that boojies have disassociated

themselves from the rest of their brothers and pursue phony social standards in an effort to act like Whites. Also implies that those who identify with their ghetto origins are more honest and "for real"

**book**

PT.

A supply of tricks' names, addresses, and telephone numbers written in a book. These books are often sold for considerable prices. Working from a book is conducting prostitution through the use of such a book, so that street-walking and other risky forms of contact are not necessary. A girl who works from a book is a call girl.

**The Book**

PT.

Oral tradition containing the rules and principles of the pimping game.

**boss player**

a top-notch player; a highly skilled, thoroughly professional pimp. One who is capable of leaving The Life and going on to higher game. The boss player is a loner who never uses his Black skin as an excuse for failure; the term does not necessarily refer to a pimp, and may be applied to a con man, politician, etc.

**to break luck**

PT.

A ho breaks luck when she turns the

**chump**

first trick of her work day.

DU. DAS.

A fall guy. One who is easily fooled. Used as a mild insult, nowhere near as forceful as punk, more like trick.

**chump change**

small money; amount of monetary value received not commensurate with effort.

**chump job**

respectable but low-paying work for an exploitative employer. Gas station attendants and petty clerks are most often mentioned as examples of chump jobs.

**clean**

immaculately groomed and dressed in the latest styles fashionable in the hustler's world. Careful attention is paid to such details as handkerchief or "fluff," shine on shoes, and manicure. Until the recent advent of "the natural" hairstyle, being clean for men also usually meant having the hair freshly straightened, called a "conk" or a "process."

**clean up**

make excuses, alibi. "I knew you was a lyn'sack of shit. Now that I peeped your game, how you gon' try and clean up for yourself?"

**cock**

female genitals.

**cock-hound**

a male come-freak: "Pussy means more to him than money."



**coke**

DU. DAS. Cocaine. Coke fiend, coke head, coke joint, coke party.

**cold-blooded**

cold-hearted, applied to a man or woman who can control their normal human emotions or who have none in the first place. Applied to cruel happenings. Frequently used among pimps who place a high value on being able to control their sexual responsiveness to women. Sometimes abbreviated to cold.

**cookies**

PT.

The prize, either sex or money.

**cool**

DU. DAS. A positive adjective, "groovy." Also connotes of a person that he can be trusted in illegal activities, i.e., he is not "the heat" (police). 2. vb. Action producing the opposite of a "hot" situation. "He was gon' fight, but I told the dude to cool it."

**to cop**

DU. DAS. To get, to take possession of. Can refer to any means of obtaining something, including buying and stealing. PT. To obtain a woman as a prostitute for the pimp's stable, "to catch."

**cop and blow**

PT. When it is known in advance that a ho is not a good long-term prospect for the stable, the pimp attempts to get as much money out of her as possible before she leaves

(blows). This is known as a short-money game. Even pimps with dependable stables may occasionally take on peripheral girls on the cop-and-blow principle.

**cop some z's**

to get some sleep.

**crib**

DU. apartment, pad. In older sense, a prostitute's working room.

**cut a loose**

to let go of, to end, to dissociate oneself from. "The bar is closing now, so I'ma have to cut all you dudes a loose" (a polite way of asking the guests to leave).

**dig**

DAS. To like or to understand. Often to enjoy or appreciate with deep emotion, e.g., "I dig the shit out that girl!"

**a dime**

DAS suppl. Ten dollars. Dime bag—ten dollars' worth of a drug.

**dog**

(extreme insult) A man who is sadistic, brutal, treacherous, and totally untrustworthy. Such a man deserves whatever evil may befall him.

**to be down**

DU. DAS suppl. 1. Ready, prepared, hip, cool, e.g., "I be down with it, Jack." Also to behave. 2. Getting down (to the nitty-gritty), appealing or satisfying to one's deeper emotions, as in fighting, fucking, or

	taking drugs.
<b>downers</b>	barbiturates.
<b>down-home</b>	DAS suppl. Usually refers to rural South, e.g., "down-home cooking."
<b>dudes</b>	DU, DAS. Men. According to DU, the original meaning relates to fancy clothes or "duds."
<b>to dump</b>	DU, DAS. To knock a man down, e.g., "He dumped the dude with one punch."
<b>fast track</b>	See track.
<b>flat-backer</b>	PT. A woman who makes her money by having intercourse with as many men as possible instead of attempting "higher" game. She thus "gives" more for lower return than do those women who attempt to talk their tricks out of their money or to steal money wherever they can.
<b>funk</b>	an intensified pronunciation of funk which has taken on the more negative aspects of funky, leaving the positive ones to funk, e.g. "She was gettin' down real fonky, so I dumped her." Often pronounced with an elongated vowel or with the emphasis on kyto designate the negative aspect.
<b>for real</b>	honest and sincere, lacking in guile or pretense, e.g., "I'm on the for real

side.” Also in *The Life*, a truce in gaming, e.g., “Now let’s rap about for realness.” When any hustler says this, one should double one’s alert.

**fox**

DAS suppl. Pretty, young woman. Mink is a new local variation on this.

**freak**

one whose sexual appetites are great or whose preferences are strange or homosexual. DAS: a male homosexual. Among pimps this maybe applied to one who likes sex for its own sake and doesn’t demand money for it, since this is perverted behavior according to the pimp subculture.

**freaked-off**

Enjoying sexual intercourse without money changing hands, e.g., “I know where Billy was last night -freakin’-off with some fox.”

Interior decoration, e.g., “I like the way you got your crib freaked-off.”

**front**

DU. DAS. From con-man slang. The behaviors and props needed to present the self in a particular way in order to play a particular game. In the pimping game flashy clothes, an expensive car, and jewelry are considered an important part of the front. Erecting this front is called “getting it together,” “getting your game together,” or “getting your front uptight.”

## fruit

DU, DAS. A male homosexual (derogatory).

## funk, funky

1. DU. Sweat, particularly connoting sweat generated during sex. 2. The odor of the female sexual organs, e.g., "You funky bitch."

3. Lowdown, low-class, elemental, earthy. DAS suppl. e.g., "funky music." Sometimes opposed to "finesse," or being "clean" or having high or big thoughts. See Fonk. DU refers the term "funk" and its original sense, "a stink," back to the standard English of 1623, when a written reference appeared.

## game

DU. Used as a noun, the quality of having mastered or having the aptitude to master techniques for getting money or one's own way through the manipulation of human emotions, e.g., "She's got some game in her."

DU. The Game—prostitution, also called the "pussy game." 3. Any game in which money and personal gain are the objects, including all hustles and "legitimate" big money enterprises. 4. DU. High game, e.g., "When you give ten cents' worth for twenty cents and the trick thinks he

**to game**

got thirty cents' worth."

to attempt to manipulate human emotions such as fear, greed, lust, love, for monetary or personal gain. "Playing a game," "running a game." Similar to meaning when used as a verb, e.g., "He was gaming off the bitch." Directly related to con-game usage. DU.

**to game**

to present the self in a particular way requiring certain behaviors and props (see front) , knowledge, and self-discipline. "To get your game up tight." to explain the principles of a particular game or hustle. Many pimps learned their game by having it "run down to them" by an older player. This oral tradition is called The Book. Also the pimp "runs down game" to his whores in teaching them how to get the most money in the easiest manner without getting arrested.

**to talk game**

to discuss various aspects of pimping and whoring.

**git-down time**

PT. The time of day at which a woman is supposed to begin her work as a streetwalker.

**git-go**

the beginning (noun, as in "from the git-go.")

**Goldberg**

a Jew, usually refers to a Jewish

- employer or ghetto shopkeeper. Sometimes used with anti-Semitic overtones, sometimes a neutral identifying term.
- gorilla pimp** a pimp who uses violence and fear—a “hard Mack” (see Mack man)—as his basic technique. DU. DAS. Gorilla—a strong-arm man.
- gray** white person, e.g., “gray broad,” “gray dude.”
- hard Mack** see Mack man.
- high game** see game.
- high-sidin’** showing off, especially “lording it over” others, particularly by the ostentatious display of jewelry, clothing, or other material possessions. Also, bragging. The meaning may derive from a characteristic and stereotyped gesture of a man hitching up the sides of his pants and strutting. See sidity.
- to be hip to** to understand or to make someone understand something, e.g., “Hip me to it.” According to DU, two older meanings of hip include  
hipped. 1. At a disadvantage, stranded; indigent . . . broke. 2. With one hip slightly atrophied from lying on one side while smoking opium.  
hippy, insane.

**to hit on**

DU. Generally, to attempt to make a score. PT. To hit on a woman is to accost her or try repeatedly to win her. Among pimps the term has the particular meaning of trying to add the woman to the stable. DAS: To hit someone for a loan or favor, to present a business proposition, to overwhelm or bewilder.

**ho**

a prostitute. The Black pronunciation of "whore."

**hog**

automobile, especially Cadillacs. It is a hog for gasoline.

**hole**

variant of ho.

**humbug**

a phony or trumped-up charge, often applied to a "cheap" arrest, e.g., "My old lady didn't say nothin' to the dude, man. He gave her a case on a humbug," or, "He gave her a humbug."

**hurting**

having financial difficulties, e.g., "Since there's so much heat on the street my woman's been busted twice, and I'm hurting." DAS: To hurt—to be in trouble, dire financial straits.

**jam**

cocaine.

**to jam**

to sniff cocaine, e.g., "We been jamming all night." Perhaps related to the musical (jazz) meaning.



- jam house** an apartment where pimps and hustlers gather to buy cocaine from the "host" and then to "snort" it in company.
- jive** lies, tall-tale telling, "bullshit," deception. DAS: also phoniness, pretentiousness.
- jive-ass** a liar or phony.
- a joint** 1. A marijuana cigarette, "reefer." DAS: e.g., "Let's see the joint" (pass it to me). 2. A nightclub or store.
- the joint** Prison, the penitentiary.
- ladies** PT. Prostitutes (polite form). A gallant euphemism allied to the Standard English "ladies of the evening," e.g., "This is Sheila, one of my ladies."
- lug, drop a** to call someone on his actions or behavior, to confront him with a truth about himself.
- Mack man** DU. DAS suppl. PT. Short for Mackerel man, a pimp. Possibly from the French maquereau. Connotes the working side of pimping, especially the line, the "rap," the psychological game. 1. Mack or Mack talk, e.g., "He sure can Mack 'em down in a minute." 2. Hard Mack—a pimp who uses violence and fear, a gorilla pimp. 3. Sweet Mack—a pimp who uses a great deal of charm and

little violence, a "sugar pimp." 4. Mack hat, Mack shoes, etc.—clothing items associated with pimps. Comments: Sometimes (perhaps folk etymology) the term is linked with the "fishy" smell of women's sexual organs. Poisson is one who lives on the earnings of a prostitute (Argot and Slang, by Albert Barrere [London: Whittaker & Co., 1889], p. 348). Synonyms listed therein include macque, macquetmaq, mquerceau, poisson, Jrayeur, marquant, mee.

### **moneymaker**

female ass or genitals. "Shake yo' money-maker," is often called out to sexy girl dancers.

### **motherfucker**

once a serious curse, now a ubiquitous all-purpose word whose meaning is dependent on tone and context. DAS suppl. Meanings can be entirely opposite, e.g., "I love that motherfucker," and "I hate that motherfucker." Similar to standard usage of "bastard."

### **to motivate**

to force oneself to do something. A ho whorecally doesn't want to work that night says, "I gots to motivate."

### **nigger**

used in many contexts from affection to insult. A word with truly ambivalent connotations. It is used as an insult often associated with poverty, e.g., "Don't talk to me, I got

	diamonds on my finger, nigger.”
<b>nigger-rich</b>	deeply in debt, in order to maintain symbols of affluence, such as an expensive car.
<b>to have one's nose open</b>	a metaphor of sexual attraction referring to the dilated nostrils which indicate passion. Connotes the image of a sexually aroused bull, and this image is sometimes more explicit, e.g., “She had his nose so wide open he was pawin’ at the ground.” Also used to humorous effect in hyperbole, e.g., “She had his nose so wide you could run a freight train through it.”
<b>off the wall</b>	cheap, mass-produced, second-rate. Image refers to ready-to-wear clothing on racks.
<b>old lady</b>	wife. DAS: prostitute, girlfriend. Could be any of these without additional information.
<b>on the — side</b>	referring to what “bag” one is describing, e.g., “On the ho side, she’s out of sight,” or, “On the for real side, I don’t dig it.”
<b>original</b>	a Black man, soul brother, e.g., an all-originals scene (an all-Black gathering).
<b>out of pocket</b>	refers to speech or behavior which is unacceptable, out of line, not right. Derives from poolroom slang. On

the pool table shooting a ball "out of pocket" causes the player to lose his turn.

**outlaw**

PT. A whore without a proper pimp, a girl who does not play The Game by The Book. Call girls who work for themselves are put in this category by the pimps.

**piece**

1. gun. 2. quantity of cocaine, usually an ounce.

**pimp**

PT. A man who lives off the proceeds of female prostitution. In Ghetto English, it also connotes the ability to control women and a predilection for flashy clothes, expensive cars, etc. He does not solicit for his women, and is a ghetto culture hero. A man may be called a pimp if he has merely succeeded at some endeavor or encounter with Whitey which required the guile of a gamester.

**to pimp**

PT. To use a human relationship to get money. Sometimes used in other contexts than the pimp subculture, e.g., "That child been pimpin' off his mother since he was three years old."

**pimp's arrest**

When a pimp turns his former woman, who is out on bail, over to the police so that he can retrieve his money. Usually this is done when the woman chooses a new pimp, who must then post a new bond for her.

**pimp-crazy**

PT. Refers to a girl who has been abused by several pimps in succession.

**pimp shades,  
pimp socks, etc.**

PT. Items of dress such as sunglasses, long pastel-colored hose, favored by pimps.

**pimp sticks**

Two wire coat hangers twisted together, used by sadistic pimps to beat women. (See use of this term in D. Boines, *Whoreson: The Story of a Ghetto Pimp*, p. 199.)

**pimp talk**

PT. The special terminology of the pimps as opposed to the rest of the Black and White worlds.

**pimped down**

PT. Dressed in the pimp's finery, carefully groomed, "clean" and ready to "catch."

**to play past**

to go around or over obstacles, psychological as to play past well as others. e.g., "She prejudice', but I can play past that shit."

**player**

1. A man who is able by charm, wit, and game to move in rich strata, cross the color line, and extract money from wealthy women. 2. PT. A euphemism for a pimp. 3. Any man who wins wealth by wit and manipulative techniques, including business speculators, politicians, or religious hustlers.

**poop-butt**

a lazy person, a "drag-ass."

**popcorn**

lightweight, not heavy; usually refers to mental ability. Humorous insult.

**professional woman**

DU. DAS. Prostitute.

**to pull**

PT. to win a girl, "catch" a ho, usually with the connotation that she was attached to someone else at the time.

**to pull one's coat to**

to make someone aware of something, to teach him something, to show him something. A man who is not playing the pimp game properly may be instructed by an older, more experienced player. He might express his gratitude by saying, "Thanks for pulling my coat to it, brother." This expression is not confined to pimps, but is part of general ghetto usage.

**punk**

DU. DAS. Prison term. A man who will submit to anal intercourse, either willingly or under pressure of threats and beatings.

**qualified**

PT. An experienced prostitute, e.g., "She a bona fide, qualified ho." Comment: This is a deliberately ironic usage of Standard business English, as in "to fire," "to take an application," and "taking care of business."

**rap**

DU. DAS. To speak. If the

conversation is a dialogue, you “rap with” someone. If the speaker is attempting to “game off” another or is simply dominating the conversation he “lays a rap on” someone. A rap (noun) is a spiel or a set presentation, e.g., “I ain’t buying, but I’ll listen to your rap.”

DAS. Terrific, perfectly satisfying, more than fair deal.

perhaps short for “right on the nose.” Exclamation expressing agreement in mood or substance with something that has just been said or an event which has just occurred.

1. To steal. 2. To kill.

to beat you up.

DAS suppl. The places of action in a city’s night life, including bars, cafes, parties in private homes, places where underworld types congregate, e.g., “Every night while my woman’s working, I’m out on the set.

“Comment: Note affinity with “stage set” implying a quality of unreality to the urban night life. Also, the “set” in which the players play their roles.

to ignore. DU. DAS. Car, automobile.

**shot-stop**

1. For a short period of time, short-term. 2. Abrupt end.

**shucking sidity or  
sidity**

lying, conning, cheating, fooling, showing off, cutting up, arrogant, stuck up, e.g., "I don't care what your sidity friends think of me." See high-sidin'.

**signifying, to signify**

to cause trouble, to instigate, to stir up, although often all in fun. DAS: Signify—to pretend to have knowledge, or to be hip, especially when such pretensions cause one to trifle with an important matter.

**simple pimp**

One who does not succeed at pimping and /or is incapable of going on to higher game. Typically, he is locked into the subculture and is constantly surrounded by ego-bolstering companions.

**slapping, slip-slapping  
smack**

DAS. "Slip me five" -meaning shake hands. The custom of communicating emotion through the slapping of hands, particularly among men. You slap a man's hand when you greet him and when you part, to express agreement, or pleasure at something said, or to emphasize unity or affection. To refuse to slap when one extends his hand is an insult. DAS suppl. Heroin.



**soul sister**

DAS suppl. A black woman. The term expresses Black solidarity. A militant bumper

**splib**

sticker reads: Black Brother, stick with your soul sisters.

1. A black person. 2. Splib-de-wib; ghetto talk, jive.

**square**

DU. One who is not in The Life, i.e., a non-hustler. PT. Implies restricted sexual experience of sex, naive honesty in money matters, and misguided belief in the efficacy of the standard American social and economic system.

**a square broad**

PT. A woman who is not a prostitute. In this usage it does not matter whether the girl is "hip" or sexually experienced.

**stable**

DU. DAS. A collective term for a pimp's women. They work for him; they are "his" women. Comment: The image that the women are like a herd of domesticated animals is clear and unmistakable. DU quotes Joseph Crad's *Traders in Women* (London: Long, 1940): "He'—'one giant bucknigger'—now runs a "stable" of white women for coloured seamen in Cardiff, his haunt being in the infamous Tiger Baydistrict." DAS. Several individual entertainers, prizefighters, prostitutes, or the like,

	serving under one manager or agent.
<b>stable sister</b>	PT. Member of a pimp's stable of hos.
<b>stallion</b>	tall, fine-looking woman.
<b>stick</b>	PT. Prostitute, ho. "Man I only got one stick left to fight the world with."
<b>sting</b>	DU. DAS. A good amount of money hustled, at least five hundred dollars. The person from whom it was separated got "stung."
<b>styling, to style</b>	strutting, showing off. Often involves elements of self-parody, greatly exaggerated pantomimes of preening and sexual attitudes, modeling new clothes, etc.
<b>sucker</b>	1. Sometimes used synonymously with men, dudes, cats, etc., often as a term of respect but usually of someone the speaker does not know well, e.g., "Why, he so bad, that sucker'll waste you in a minute." 2. DU.DAS. Trick, mark, chump. Cf. DAS: sucker list.
<b>suede</b>	Colored, Negro, Black.
<b>sugar pimp</b>	a pimp who uses a great deal of charm and little violence; a "sweet Mack." See Mack man.

**taking care of  
business**

to attend to the task at hand, to be serious, to be competent, e.g., "Hey, Jim's got it together, he's really taking care of business." aim maybe on his way to pick up some dope, making love to a woman, speaking at a militant gathering, or executing the latest dance step.)

**talking shit**

refers to verbal play, sometimes with a serious underlying purpose. Used of man-woman flirtatious encounters as well as of "cutting up" between male friends.

**talking trash**

polite form of "talking shit."

**taste, or to have  
a taste**

to sample some alcohol or drugs; a shot, a hit. DAS suppl.: "A small portion or sample of anything."

**threads**

clothing

**to be tight with**

close, closeness; as in "Me and him, we tight"(we're close friends).

**the track**

the hustling arena. Eastern cities are on the fast (or hard) track. California is the slow (or soft) track.

**tracks**

DAS suppl. Marks on arm left by use of hypodermic needle in injecting drugs, particularly heroin.

**trick**

DU, DAS, PT. 1. A prostitute's customer; a "John." 2. (An insult.) A man who is controlled by women.

Allied usage: to turn a trick—performing a sex act for money, tricking. One who thinks or acts like a trick is said to be in a trick bag. Trick baby—a light skinned Negro of mixed parentage. Louis Armstrong, in *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1954), quotes from “Bawdyhouse Blues,” a very old jazz song: “Keep aknockin’ but you can’t come in. I hear you knockin’ but you can’t come in. I got an all night trick again. I’m busy grindin’ so you can’t come in. If you love me you’ll come back again. Come back tomorrow at half-past ten.”

### **tricking**

DU. Tricking broad, prostitute, since ca. 1910. Performing a sex act for money. Comment: By implication, a prostitute is literally tricking a man by taking money for what women should do for free (or what a real man gets paid for, according to the pimps).

### **twenty cents**

twenty dollars.

### **uptights**

could be positive or negative depending upon the context. In its positive sense, refers to being “together,” on top of things, in control. For example: “I’ve got my front uptight, I’moutta sight.” In its negative sense it means

disorganized, nervous, not in control; sometimes refers to lack of money, as in, "I gotta get some bread, man, I'm uptight."

DAS. A suit. An Eastern big-city term, somewhat dated in San Francisco but still used sometimes.

1. DAS. To kill or severely injure someone, e.g., "That dude wasted his woman, so they sent him to the joint." 2. To get very high on drugs; to pass out.

prostitute.

**vine**

**to waste**

**working broad**  
**working chick**





# **NOTES AND REFERENCES**



Since we wanted to leave the text free of encumbering or distracting references and footnotes, we provide here some annotation of the chapters. Of course, there is not room for an exhaustive bibliography on urban anthropology, Black culture, prostitution, or any of the other major themes, but the interested reader can find more extensive bibliographies and introductions to the literature in the books and articles cited below.

Sources of quotations and other material drawn from the literature are included here, as well as references for those who wish to extend their reading on particular topics. In truth, we purposely did not read widely in the professional literature before or during the study. It was only after we had obtained our findings and formed our major conclusions that we turned to the journals and learned books to compare notes with our colleagues. We recommend this method to all who aspire to do fieldwork, despite the contrary view held in most graduate schools.

## **CHAPTER ONE: THE PLAYER'S WORLD**

Urban Ecology. The dramatic device of Brock and the tree is fictionalized. However, several of the players—including Brock—frequently went horseback riding or walking in the woods alone. Brock's reflections on the similarities between nature's ways and urban life were, in various forms, verbalized to us by several players. Social scientists are not the only ones who see the city as a type of ecosystem; pimp philosophers conceptualized the web of interrelationships, territory, and mutual exploitation. For a representative selection of social science thinking on the subject, see *Studies in Human Ecology*, edited by George A. Theodorson. This volume includes essays by Robert Ezra Park and Louis Wirth, two of the men who pioneered

ecological thinking in the social sciences during the thirties. Of special interest is the article by Walter C. Reckless, "The Distribution of Commercialized Vice in the City: A Sociological Analysis" (pp. 50-56) .

The Subculture of The Life. An increasing number of anthropologists have begun to bring the techniques originated in work among small, homogeneous tribal groups to bear on the complex modern societies. There have been studies of urban life made all over the world; however, many of these are of "ethnic enclaves" rather than of true subcultures. (See *The Urban Villagers* by Herbert J. Gans for a classic study of this type.) Among the recent anthropological studies of American Black ghetto life are Elliot Liebow's *Tally's Corner: A Study of Negro Streetcorner Men*, Charles Keil's *Urban Blues*, which explores Black culture through its music, Ulf Hannerz's *Soulside: Inquiries into Ghetto Culture and Community*, and Roger Abrahams's *Deep Down in the Jungle*, a real breakthrough in the recording and analysis of nitty-gritty urban folklore. For those who are approaching urban ghetto life for the first time through the writings of anthropologists, these books provide a much-needed background and rounding of the picture, since the present book sheds its light on certain aspects of Black culture through the very special lens of *The Life*, a subculture which breaks important rules of both White and Black culture. Among books on the subject of prostitution, those of the "breast-beating" variety include *Streetwalker* by an anonymous author, Polly Adler's *A House Is Not a Home*, Kipp Washington's *Some Like It Dark: The Intimate Biography of a Negro Call Girl*, and many, many others. The majority of these confessional recitations are titillating, but not productive of much insight or understanding. The case history or "causes and cures" approach is exemplified by Maryse Choisy's *Psychoanalysis of the Prostitute*, John W. Wells's *Tricks of the Trade*, Harold Greenwald's *The Call Girl*, and others. Most of these books are founded on the dubious premise that prostitution is a social "pathology" and that anyone

who plies the most ancient profession is "sick." We prefer, with Travis Hirschi, to regard pimps and prostitutes as members of a "personal-service occupation," and to let the moral judgments be suspended until we have comparable "pathological" analyses of why the barber cuts hair, the dentist drills teeth, or the social scientist is always poking his nose into other people's business.

Some of the theories offered by these "pathology" writers turn out, not surprisingly, to provide ample "scientific" bases for middle-class morality, and have easily become "accepted" and widespread. For example, Choisy's view that pimps and prostitutes come together "not to love but to hate" and that pimps are basically homosexual, has been thrown up to us again and again. Perhaps here we should reiterate our refutation of this point of view, a refutation the perceptive reader will find throughout this book: most pimps we encountered were manly men, and many pimp-ho unions could easily be described as bound by love.

For an unusually unbiased discussion of the pimp-ho couple, we quote from a lucid paper by Travis Hirschi: "The pimp occupies perhaps the most despised role known to conventional society. He not only takes almost all of the earnings of the prostitute, he also seduces young girls into the business and gives them dope to keep them there, or, at least, so the story goes, as told by many prostitutes, police officials, and madams. The problems involved in a description of the pimp-prostitute relationship are, as a result, fantastic. The question usually asked, 'why a pimp?', is usually answered in terms of the loneliness of the prostitute. Reitman contends, on the other hand, that the pimp is a functional necessity: the prostitute simply couldn't get along without him. 'He is the woman's protector against the police, her employment agent, her guard and bouncer, her impresario, and her man' (Reitman, *The Second Oldest Profession*, p. 14) . I have argued earlier that prostitution is a difficult occupation and that certain skills must be acquired if it is to be followed successfully. Certainly the pimp can be, and often is, helpful in this respect. But this explanation of the

prostitute's pimp should not be overworked. The similarity of the pimp-prostitute relationship to the husband-wife relationship, with the economic roles reversed, is too obvious to overlook. I have no explanation for marriage, but it is, to evade the question, traditional, just as is the prostitute-pimp relationship. . . . Much of the physical abuse of the prostitute by the pimp can be accounted for as the lower class equivalent of the middle class family argument. Still more of it could be the prostitute's 'excuse' for turning the pimp into the police when she wishes to rid herself of him." (From p. 39 of "The Professional Prostitute" by Travis Hirschi in *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*.)

On the matter of pimps encouraging dope addiction to keep their girls working: Virtually none of the pimps in our sample did this, and most claimed that it was a poor idea. "When a broad gets strung out on dope, she starts holding out [money] on you, she's unpredictable, might disappear for a few days at a time. You just can't rely on a dope fiend broad," was a commonly expressed sentiment. As one man put it, "If she gets strung out on 'H' then you out of a job. You're not pimpin' her any more—the needle's pimpin' her." In Iceberg Slim's book, the "cold" pimp who strung a girl out on narcotics did it to get rid of her when he no longer wanted her (*Pimp*, p. 159).

Much of the existing literature on prostitution relates either to social or psychological "pathology" or to legal problems. Among the law-oriented literature, see for example "Prostitution" by B. J. Georgy, Jr., in *Sexual Behavior and the Law*, edited by Ralph Slovenko, *Cast the First Stone* by John M. Murtagh and Sara Harris, and "The Prostitute" by Paul F. Cook in *The Female Offender*, etc. Histories of prostitution, like Curt Gentry's entertaining *The Madames of San Francisco*, and the more ambitious *Prostitution and Society* by Fernando Henriques, constitute another approach—the historical.

Most of these books do not offer much enlightenment on the phenomena with which the present book is concerned: pimps in

general, and Black pimping in particular. The only two recent books which are directly relevant to Black-style pimping are two novels by Black authors: *Pimp: The Story of My Life* by Iceberg Slim, and *Howard Street* by Nathan C. Heard. Both are well worth reading, for these authors provide many valuable insights into The Life and detailed if fictionalized descriptions of its ghetto roots.

As we go to press, another Black novelist, Donald Goines, has captured the language and flavor of the pimp's world with an emphasis on its brutality and cold-bloodedness. See his *Whoreson: The Story of a Ghetto Pimp* as a welcome addition to the works of Heard and Iceberg Slim.

The definition of subcultures is from Donald Cressey and David Ward, *Delinquency, Crime and Social Process* (pp. 634-635), which contains a great many valuable articles for understanding the topics listed in its title.

To the young Black woman who wanted to know why anthropologists don't study the subculture of "White suburban wife-swappers," we can now reply: they do. See Gilbert D. Bartell's *Group Sex*.

## **CHAPTER TWO : THE SETTING: BAR LIFE**

"Take a Free Peek": "The Player's Inn." Again, as a convenient dramatic device, the incident of the businessman from Phoenix is fictionalized. However, it is based on repeated observations night after night in the bars; there were many men like "Mr. Phoenix." It might be well to reiterate that this chapter, the first chapter, and the last section of the final chapter ("An Unspoken Conversation") are the only parts of the present work in which dramatic liberties have been taken in presenting the data.

Field Strategy and Methodology. We have often been asked what perversity in our own natures led us to seek out Black pimps for study. Why pimps? And if pimps, why Black pimps? The honest

answer is: serendipity. We did not start out with the desire to study either pimps in general or Black pimps in particular. But, as anthropologists searching for a worthwhile study, we stumbled on the situation because of Christina's part-time job in topless bars. There were White pimps in the area, but most of them—with a very few exceptions—did not publicly congregate.

We believe, however, that our success in making the study was made possible by Christina's very natural and continued presence as a legitimate fixture in the social setting. Because of our marginal participation in the subculture, we were not subjected to many of the difficulties and obstacles which confronted other anthropologists who have worked in the Black ghetto. For insights into some of these problems, see Hannerz's chapter "In The Field" in his *Soulside* (pp. 201-210), and Liebow's discussion of gaining acceptance in Tally's Corner (pp. 232-256). As a contrast to their approaches to fieldwork, there is the recent work of Marilyn Salutin, who worked as a stripper in a burlesque house while collecting material for a thesis on strippers.

Daring or unorthodox participant-observation is not the same as being a fink or undercover agent. The people were well aware that we were writing a book on *The Life*, but although they might try to make a special first impression, it was obviously impossible for them to change their behaviors, their personalities, or their way of life for our benefit. Once in a while someone might ask, "How's the bookcomin'?" But in daily interactions over a two-year period, there was nothing which could be greatly disguised as life went along its day-by-day course. Ironically, Christina was more "invisible" dancing nude on a stage than most White fieldworkers could hope to be in "anonymous-looking" casual clothing in the ghetto.

## CHAPTER THREE: TALKING GAME AND SLAPPING HANDS

The incident concerning Malcolm X and the "downtown leaders" who couldn't understand ghetto language is related in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Malcolm X with Alex Haley (p. 310). It includes a sampling of the hustler's speech and Malcolm's translation.

Iceberg Slim's *Pimp* contains an extensive glossary of ghetto terms used in his book (pp. 313-317). Although there is considerable overlap with modern usage, many of these terms were peculiar to the Chicago ghetto thirty years ago, and we did not encounter them among our informants (for example, "bell," notoriety connected to one's name; "crumb crusher," a baby; "yeasting," to build up or exaggerate, etc.). From Mr. Milton Van Sickle, formerly with Holloway House, we learned that Iceberg had not originally planned to include a glossary in his novel, but that it was deemed necessary because the editor "at first couldn't understand what the hell he was talking about."

Thomas Kochman, a linguist, makes a preliminary distinction between different kinds of ghetto talking (rapping, shucking, jiving, running it down, signifying, etc.) in his paper "Rapping in the Ghetto." "Rapping," he writes, "is used at the beginning of a relationship to create a favorable impression and be persuasive at the same time. The man who has the reputation for excelling at this is the pimp, or Mack man. Both terms describe a person of considerable status in the street hierarchy, who, by his lively and persuasive rapping ('macking' is also used in this context) has acquired a stable of girls to hustle for him and give him money. For most street men and many teenagers he is the model whom they try to emulate" (p. 53).

For more on *The Game* see Woodie King, Jr., "The Game."

## CHAPTER FOUR: PLAYING BY THE BOOK

The "commandments" were generalized from many observations and dialogues with informants. "Fair trade is no robbery" was one of the most commonly repeated aphorisms among the sample; it also appears in Iceberg Slim: "What a thrill for a dog like her to turn out a tender fool like me. . . . Fair exchange, as the old saw goes, is never robbery" (p. 61). "A man can't fool with the Golden Rule in a crowd that don't play fair" was described as the major guideline for conduct in the ghetto milieu described by Heard in Howard Street.

For more on The Book see Iceberg Slim's chapter, "The Unwritten Book" (pp. 191-198) and pp. 214-216 in which an older pimp "runs down some game" to Slim. The Pimp as Trickster Hero. Here we have stated the pimp's position as trickster quite baldly. Stated thus, we have doubtless omitted mention of the qualifiers and ambiguities which exist in the life situations of individuals. But there is point in throwing the trickster character into such bold relief; trickery is a strategy for survival, and consequently the trickster archetype repeatedly emerges in Black stories, poems, and folklore. One cannot understand Black personality and culture without taking the trickster into account. Later in the book, we will return to the trickster in greater detail (chapter 5, part VIII) and contrast him with the archetype of the "bad nigger" in Black mythology. See also the notes on that section for the bulk of comments and references about this topic.

According to Richard M. Dorson, in his collection *American Negro Folktales*, "Curiously the most popular animal narrative I heard, some eighteen times, has been only thrice reported among American Negroes. Brother Rabbit has entered most American versions of this tale ... [as] the sly weakling who introduces the king beast of the forest to man, and then scoots off while the lion, bear or wolf gets badly shot up" (p. 67). In its outline, this tale is almost the same as that of a very popular toast about the Signifyin' Monkey, who introduces the lion to the elephant, who in turn



mauls the king of beasts while the monkey watches safely from his treetop. Taken together with the history of the Black experience in America, the popularity of this theme—in which the trickster conquers an infinitely more powerful adversary by guile and wit—suggests that it may be the basic archetypal form, of which all other Rabbit and Monkey tales are elaborations.

Incidentally, the “Br’er” in Br’er Rabbit is a result of the clumsy efforts of nineteenth-century White writers to reproduce Black speech. As Dorsey mentions in a footnote (p. 66) , “The contraction of ‘Brother’ in the storyteller’s vernacular cannot be exactly rendered, but. . . ‘Buh’ comes closer than ‘Brer: “ Fantasy as a Way of Life. The conceptualization of “backstage” and “front stage” is from Erving Goffman’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. His description of a “backstage” situation is quoted from that work (pp. 175-176).

## CHAPTER FIVE: GHETTO ROOTS

Avoiding the Giant White Foot. Although Black psychiatrist Grier and Cobbs have drawn much of their case material from the Black middle class, many of their conclusions are equally applicable—if not more so—to the lower class. We are aware that some of their critics were disturbed at the near absence of nitty-gritty ghetto types in a book entitled *Black Rage*, yet their description of various psychological syndromes of the ghetto we find highly accurate. The quotation about cultural paranoia is drawn from pp. 177-179 of their book.

Lobsters in the Basket. The quotation is from Nathan C. Heard’s *Howard Street*.

You Can Miss All the Rungs Going Down. Grier and Cobbs retell this illuminating Black joke on p. 113 of *Black Rage*.

Hustler as Horatio Alger. John Horton’s analysis of the hustler as exemplifying great individual initiative is from his article “Time

and Cool People.' He writes, "The petty hustler more fully realizes the middle class ideal of individualistic rationality than does the middle class itself. When rationality operates in hustling, it is often on an individual basis. In a world of complex organization, the hustler defines himself as an entrepreneur; and indeed, he is the last of the competitive entrepreneurs. Alone, without a sure way of running the same game twice, he must continually recalculate conditions and people and find new ways of taking or be taken himself. The phrase 'free enterprise for the poor and socialism for the rich' applies only too well in the streets. The political conservative should applaud all that individual initiative" (p. 42).

Junior Pimps and Hos. Jim Brewer's article appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle, March 10, 1970. We did no firsthand work on youngsters, but our secondary evidence clearly points to the need for more understanding of the development of patterns of interpersonal relationships among ghetto children. An important recent contribution in this area is David

A. Schulz's *Coming Up Black: Patterns of Ghetto Socialization*. Although he did not explore the pimp's special world, Schulz is aware of the pimp's existence (pp. 82-83, 142-143) and notes, "In the cool world the ideal relationship (from the young male's point of view) between the sexes is achieved by the man who 'pimps' a woman. . . . This [classic pimp] type is still prevalent. . . . However, the term also covers the more general situation where a man lives off a woman who is not a prostitute and who earns her living legitimately as a professional, a well-paid clerk or domestic, or a welfare recipient. Hence, the excitement of 'Mother's Day,' the tenth of the month when the welfare checks come in the mail and 'the eagle flies.' Pimping seems to be the younger man's approach to the dilemma of poverty, low status in the larger culture, and unemployment" (pp. 82-84). Although Schulz gained the impression that pimping was largely a premarital experience (p. 143), in our sample it appeared that for many it was post marital—after the man had become disillusioned with the failure of a "square

marriage.”

Black Capitalism, Racism, and Pimping. Possible parallels with Algeria were suggested by the discussion (pp. 59-67) in Frantz Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism*. The brief quotation is from Fanon, p. 61. Another suggestive passage follows: "There is not occupation of territory, on the one hand, and independence of persons on the other. It is the country as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested. . . . From this point on, the real values of the occupied tend to acquire a clandestine form of existence. In the presence of the occupier, the occupied learns to dissemble, to resort to trickery. To the scandal of military occupation, he opposes a scandal of contact. Every contact between the occupied and the occupier is a falsehood" (p. 65).

Pimps and Hippies. Eldridge Cleaver's statement in which hippies and acid heads are disavowed appeared widely in the media. The quotation is taken from a complete text of his statement in the *Berkeley Barb*, February 5, 1971.

The Cat Versus the Bad Nigger. Hannerz, in his excellent chapter on "Streetcorner Mythmaking" in *Soulside*, clearly perceived the existence of the trickster and the badman, as did Abrahams before him in *Deep Down in the Jungle*. "Although Br'er Rabbit is no longer very important," Hannerz writes, "the traditions of today still deal in characters who in one way or other oppose, circumvent or ignore the order imposed on them. The 'gorilla' type of ghetto man is idealized in long elaborate rhymes (known as 'toasts') about legendary 'bad niggers.' One of the most notorious, variously known as Stagolee, Stackolee, and Stacker Lee, a constant troublemaker but also a great ladies' man, has also been a topic of black music. Wilson Pickett—the 'wicked Pickett' after the title of an LP album of his, and thus himself the bearer of a trickster image—had a rock-and-roll hit with 'Stacker Lee' in late 1967. Other toasts still revolve around an animal trickster, the monkey, but he and his opponents, the elephant, the lion, and the baboon, live in a very urban jungle with pool rooms and card

games, and the monkey is identified as a pimp, very concerned with male clothing and fashion. The monkey works more with his brain, men like Stagolee with their brawn" (p. 115).

Hannerz also discusses the distinction between the bad-man and the trickster drawn by Abrahams, and notes that "such a distinction may be misleading, for smartness and toughness are only facets of a single if somewhat amorphous conception of ghetto-specific masculinity which both Stagolee and the monkey serve. That is, most street-corner men would be able to recognize both of them as cultural models for their own role, although they may personally emphasize one or the other" (p. 115). Bill R. Hampton, in his paper "On Identification and Negro Tricksters," also objects to a rigid separation of the two types.

We believe that it is very useful to separate these two types, but not necessarily as personalities in the ghetto. Hannerz is correct in stating that they are both cultural models which at various times a ghetto man might emulate, depending on the situation. But the point is that they are separable as mythological archetypes, and, in a very practical sense, as strategies for survival. After all, when you are at the bottom of the social order, there are only two basic ways to beat the Man: you can fight him or you can trick him. We are by no means the first to recognize this connection between the trickster and his appearance in the mythology of an oppressed social class. See, for example, Abrahams (*Deep Down in the Jungle*, p. 68), Hannerz (*Soulside*, pp. 115, 217n.), and Hampton (p. 58). As Hannerz reminds us (p. 117), Clyde Kluckhohn, in his "Myths and Rituals: A General Theory," theorized that each culture has its type-problems and its type-solutions, and Kluckhohn saw in mythology "a storehouse of supra-individual type solutions."

The wonderful story of Efam (variously known as Effam, Ethan, John the field hand, etc.) is drawn largely on a version given in Black novelist Cecil Brown's comic novel *The Life and Loves of Mr. Jiveass Nigger* (pp. 71-75). A similar version of the tale collected by folklorist Richard M. Dorson is given in his *American*

Negro Folktales (pp. 134-135) . Variants of different parts of the story recorded from different informants are given by Dorson as part of an important cycle of tales of the trickster under the heading "Old Marster and John" (pp. 124-171), a general category of stories and jokes about the clever slave who outwitted his master.

For more on the "bad nigger," see H. C. Brearley's article "Bad Nigger" (pp. 75-81), which is our source for the lyric "Wild Nigger Bill." An excellent folkloristic treatment of this theme is William H. Wiggins's analysis of the story of Jack Johnson, the boxer, in "Jack Johnson as Bad Nigger: The Folklore of His Life." The story of Johnson's life and its accompanying mythic themes have formed the basis for a highly successful play and movie, *The Great White Hope* (ca. 1968). A more nitty-gritty approach to the "bad nigger" story in the movies has been Melvin Van Peebles's raw exposition in the recent *Sweet Sweetback's Baaadassss Song*. For more on the "bad" hero see Roger Abrahams's paper "Some Varieties of Heroes in America," in which the Black "hardhero" is defined as one who is "openly rebelling as a man against the emasculating factors in his life" (p. 34), and Samuel M. Strong's "Negro-White Relationships as Reflected in Social Types," in which the "bad nigger" is defined as a Black man who refuses "to accept the place given to Negroes" (p. 24, cited in Wiggins).

#### CHAPTER SIX: 'SEX, RACE, MANHOOD, AND WOMANHOOD

Nature of Woman According to Pimp Philosophy. The players' ideal culture is found in varying degrees among several non-Western societies throughout the world. Margaret Mead's description of Tchambuli, reported in her *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*, is an example of an actual culture which perfectly fits the players' ideal of what a good culture would be like.

Dime-Store Novels. Among the pulp novels which epitomize the mythic archetypes discussed here, there are Kyle Onstott's *Mandingo*, Norman Gant's *Slave Queen*, Eric Corder's *Slave Ship*, and Mark Oliver's *Flamingo*. For a Black writer's personal and

extended discussion of race-sex myths, see *Sex and Racism in America* by Calvin C. Hernton. *Soul Brothers, Stick with Your Sisters?* The long quotation from Eldridge Cleaver's allegory is to be found on pp. 158-160 of his *Soul On Ice*.

Pimping, "Rep," and Black Manhood. The quoted statement that Black mythology and folklore are "filled with tales of sexually prodigious men" is from Grier and Cobbs (p. 4), as is the longer quotation about the ambivalent role of the Black mother in preparing her son "for his subordinate place in the world" (p. 63).

For more on the phenomenon of "streetcorner mythology" see the excellent discussions in Abrahams's *Deep Down in the Jungle*, Hannerz's *Soulside*, and Liebow's *Tally's Corner*.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: THE PIMP GAME AS A MODEL OF THE WORLD**

On Values and the Goals of Life. For a remarkable and stimulating book on the "game" aspects of life, see Robert S. De Ropp's *The Master Game*. For another, psychoanalytic view of "gaming" in human life, see Eric Berne's *Games People Play*.

A Hierarchy of Game. The chart, "Levels of Pimping and Prostitution," is a composite assembled from the statements of many informants. Although there are several possible arrangements of some of the elements, we believe the general form of the diagram accurately reflects the informants' world view and analysis of game in the larger society.

As for the players' view, given throughout this chapter, that respectable White businessmen are let off lightly for their misdeeds while Black hustlers are subject to extreme punishment -there is ample documentation in the literature for their cynicism. For example, see the articles on differential application of justice and the scope of "white-collar" crime in *Delinquency, Crime, and Social Process*, edited by Donald Cressey and David Ward. Edwin

H. Sutherland, in his paper "White-Collar Criminality," writes: "White-collar criminality in business is expressed most frequently in the form of misrepresentation in financial statements of corporations, manipulation in the stock exchange, commercial bribery, bribery of public officials . . . in order to secure favorable contracts and legislation, misrepresentation in advertising and salesmanship, embezzlement and misapplication of funds, short weights and measures and misgrading of commodities, tax frauds, misapplication of funds in receiverships and bankruptcies. These are what Al Capone called 'the legitimate rackets'" (p. 351).

Other articles of note in the same volume on related topics are Viihelm Aubert's "White Collar Crime and Social Structure," Robert F. Kennedy's "The Respectables," and Richard Austin Smith's "The Incredible Electrical Conspiracy." As to the magnitude of these illegal but rarely punished activities, Sutherland notes, "The financial cost of white-collar crime is probably several times as great as the financial cost of all the crimes which are customarily regarded as the 'crime problem.' An officer of a chain grocery store in one year embezzled \$600,000, which was six times as much as the annual losses from five hundred burglaries and robberies of the stores in that chain" (p. 353).

## **CHAPTER EIGHT: THE SECRET AMERICA**

Black Pimps and Other American Heroes. Myron Brenton, who discusses contemporary sex role problems in his book *The American Male*, recognizes the existence of what he calls "The Dagwood Bumstead Syndrome" in the mass media. He cites one writer (p. 127) who defines the type as "a well-meaning idiot who is constantly outwitted by his children, his wife, and even his dog" (p. 127).

Brenton further points to television situation comedies for a revealing look at cultural conceptions of the contemporary American family man. "In most of these shows, Father can be classified as the village imbecile. When he tries to fix a faucet, he

winds up with a Hooded basement. . . . When he attempts to fend for himself, he nearly sets the whole house afire, trying to cook a meal. Bring a beautiful sexpot into his orbit—usually a teacher he is all set to give hell to because she has been picking on Junior—and he degenerates into a drooling adolescent” (p. 128). An Unspoken Conversation. Like the first two sections of the book, this “unspoken conversation” is fictionalized.



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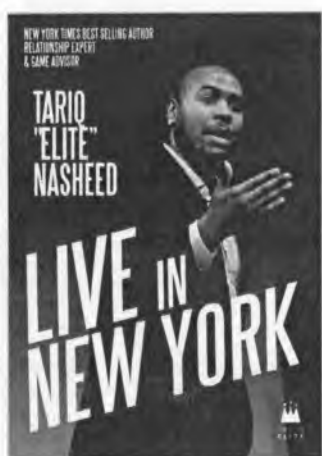
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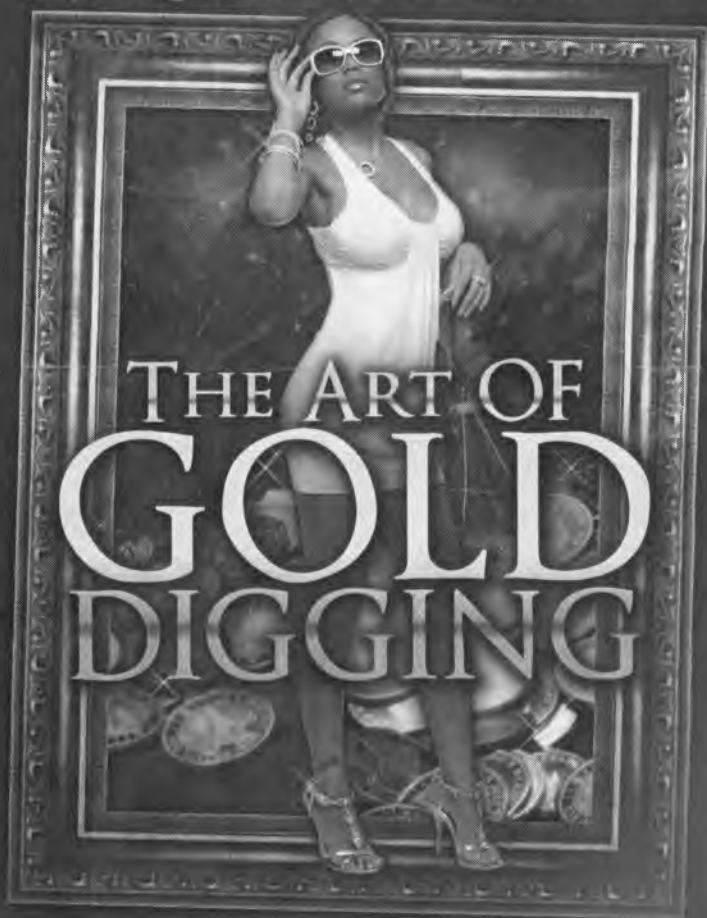
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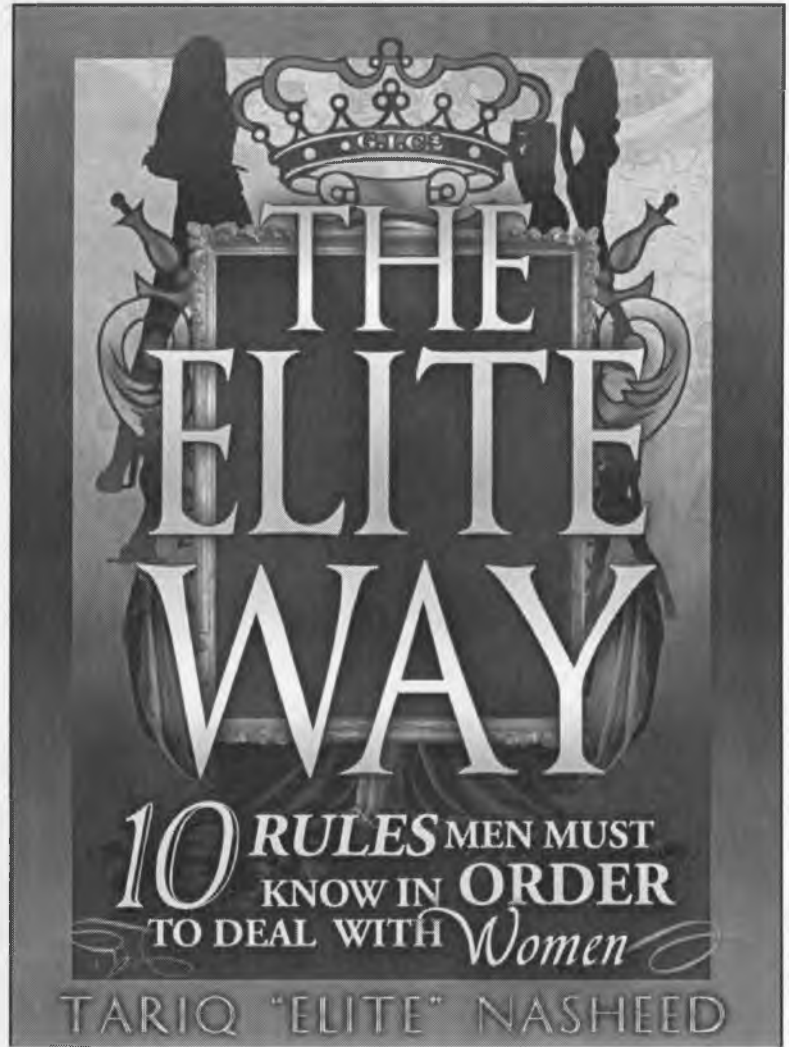
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