

A GUIDE TO

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# GHETTO LIFE 101

Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, Inc.  
Brookline, Massachusetts

**GHETTO LIFE 101** was produced by Sound Portraits Productions in New York City in 1993.



Producers: David Isay, LeAlan Jones, and Lloyd Newman.

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Page 5: From *Our America* by LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman with David Isay. (Scribner, 1997), p. 65.

Page 7: *Ibid.*, p. 36.

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Page 17: From *Our America*, p. 87, 200

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## CONTENTS

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Preface	iv
Introduction to <b>GHETTO LIFE 101</b>	1
<p>The Introduction to <b>GHETTO LIFE 101</b> provides a context for ideas and themes developed in the radio documentary.</p>	
Responding to <b>GHETTO LIFE 10 1</b>	3
<p>Responding to <b>GHETTO LIFE 101</b> is designed for use immediately before and after hearing the documentary. It seeks to widen perspectives and foster critical listening by encouraging reflection and discussion.</p>	
Reflections	5
<p>Reflections adds new voices and historical perspectives to discussions sparked by <b>GHETTO LIFE 101</b>. It also considers some of the questions the documentary raises but does not fully answer.</p>	
Reading 1: Snapshots of a Neighborhood	5
Reading 2: A Tour of the Neighborhood	7
Reading 3: Neighborhoods Have a History	<b>10</b>
Reading 4: Growing Up in the Ghetto	<b>12</b>
Reading 5: Responding to Violence	<b>15</b>
Reading 6: Becoming Messengers	18

## PREFACE

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In reflecting on life in the United States in general and his experiences with the nation's educational institutions in particular, sociologist David Schoem has noted:

The effort it takes for us to know so little about one another across racial and ethnic groups is truly remarkable. That we can live so closely together, that our lives can be so intertwined socially, economically, and politically and that we can spend so many years of study in grade school and even in higher education and yet still manage to be ignorant of one another is clear testimony to the deep-seated roots of this human and national tragedy. What we do learn along the way is to place heavy reliance on stereotypes, gossip, rumor, and fear to shape our lack of knowledge.

The success of that “reliance on stereotypes, gossip, rumor, and fear” is evident in the labels that we attach to young men and women in the nation's inner cities. **GHETTO LIFE 101** offers a rare opportunity to break down stereotypes, address gossip and rumors, and reduce fears that tend to divide the nation into “us” and “them.” It is a rare opportunity to listen and learn from two young men from the inner city.

In developing the study guide, we did what Facing History and Ourselves does best. We listened and learned from one another and from a variety of experts. Phredd Matthews Wall and Ann Marie Ryan in Chicago and Peter Nelson, Adam Strom, and Blaise Kearsley in New York used the materials in workshops and gathered suggestions from educators. A number of teachers in New York City and in Brookline, Massachusetts, agreed to pilot the materials with their students. They then shared with us the way those students responded to the material. These efforts guided the writing and shaped the activities included in this study guide. We are especially grateful for the suggestions we received from writer and journalist Alex Kotlowitz and psychologist James Gilligan.

Margot Stern Strom  
Executive Director  
Facing History and Ourselves

## Introduction to Ghetto Life 101

**T**WO 13-year-old boys from Chicago—LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman—created the documentary you are about to hear. The program will tell you a little about their lives and introduce you to their neighborhood.

The idea for **GHETTO LIFE** 101 came from David Isay, a New York writer and producer. He was asked to make a documentary for a public radio station in Chicago as part of a series on issues of race and ethnicity in the city. Instead of interviewing scholars and other experts on urban life, Isay decided to ask young people who lived in urban neighborhoods to tell their own stories. He sent letters to social service agencies and high schools all over the city asking for help in finding two students interested in taking on the assignment. He received dozens of responses. From that list of applicants, he hired Jones and Newman as reporters, because “they were smart. They were funny. They were the ones.”

LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman decided to speak frankly about themselves, their families, and their community. They chose to share not only the good things about their lives but also their sorrows, fears, and disappointments. To broaden their audience’s perspective, they interviewed relatives, teachers, classmates, and others in their neighborhood—the area around the Ida B. Wells, a housing project on the South Side of Chicago. Lloyd Newman and his family have an apartment there. LeAlan Jones lives in a house nearby.

After a week of recording impressions, conversations, and interviews, LeAlan Jones signed off with these words:

Me and my friend Lloyd Newman just did a description of our life for a week, and we want to give you kids in America a message: Don’t look at ghetto kids as different. You might not want to invite us to your parties, you might think we’ll rob you blind when you got your back turned. But don’t look at us like that. Don’t look at us like we’re an alien or an android or an animal or something. We have a hard life, but we’re sensitive. Ghetto kids are not a different breed—we’re human.

Some people might say, “That boy don’t know what he’s talkin’ about!” But I know what I’m talking about. I’m dealing from the heart because I’ve been dealing with this for thirteen years. These are my final words, but you’ll be hearing from me again, ‘cause I’m an up-and-coming activist. Peace out.



**LeAlan** Jones (left) and Lloyd Newman, both 13 years old, recording Ghetto Life 101.

## CONNECTIONS

**L**eAlan Jones suggests that outsiders know very little about his community. Is he right? How much do you and your friends know about neighborhoods other than your own? How do you get information about the people who live in other neighborhoods? What part does TV play in shaping your impressions of people you've never met? How else did you acquire those impressions? How do people in other neighborhoods learn about you and your friends?

In *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros describes the consequences of not learning about one another's neighborhood:

Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives. They are stupid people who are lost and got here by mistake.

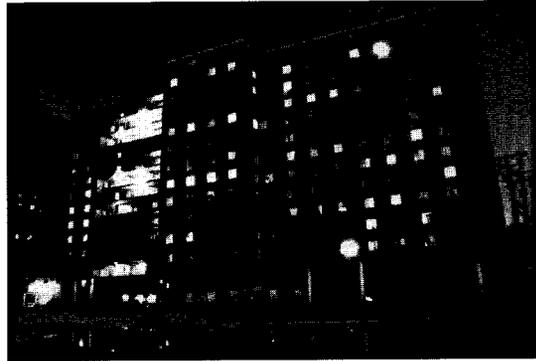
But we aren't afraid. We know the guy with the crooked eye is Davey the Baby's brother, and the tall one next to him in the straw brim, that's Rosa's Eddie V, and the big one that looks like a dumb grown man, he's Fat Boy, though he's not fat anymore nor a boy.

All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight. Yeah. That is how it goes and goes.

Sandra Cisneros refers to outsiders as "those who don't know any better." What is she suggesting about the way their lack of knowledge shapes their perceptions of us? How then does knowledge affect the way we see ourselves? What does her story suggest about the way our ignorance affects our views of *them*? Our behavior toward them?

What experiences have helped you or others understand other points of view? What experiences have had the opposite effect? Look for examples in the news. Interview friends and adults about experiences that have brought together people from different neighborhoods and backgrounds.

## Responding to Ghetto Life 101



One of the buildings in the **Ida** B. Wells housing complex.

As you listen to **GHETTO LIFE 101**, think about what life is for LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman and others in their neighborhood, but try not to reach conclusions about them or their neighborhood until the program is over. Use your journal to record your responses to the following questions before discussing them with your classmates:

- What do you remember? What interviews or incidents stand out?
- What questions do you have?
- What message do the boys want their documentary to communicate? Have they accomplished their goal?

What did you learn about LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman from the documentary? How do they describe themselves? How do they draw you into their world and help you see it through their eyes? How are they like other 13-year-olds you know? What differences seem most striking?

During the Middle Ages, the church enacted a series of laws that isolated Jews from their Christian neighbors. In many places in Europe, Jews were forced to live in a ghetto—a separate section of a town or city. Sometimes officials built high walls around that section of the city and placed Christian guards at every gate. In the 1700s and 1800s, those walls began to crumble. Most countries now allowed Jews to mix freely with others in the community. The ghettos were abandoned until Adolf Hitler re-established them during World War II. LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman call their documentary **GHETTO LIFE 101**. What does the word ghetto mean to them? How is the community they describe like the ghettos of the Middle Ages? How do you account for differences?

How do you account for the fact that the word *neighborhood* has a positive meaning but words like ghetto and *barrio* carry other connotations? To what extent is a ghetto like any other neighborhood or community? What sets it apart from other neighborhoods or communities? Introductory courses often carry the number *101*. Why do you think the boys included that number in the title of their documentary? What does the title mean?

LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman describe themselves as “top-notch reporters” and “ready to work.” They model themselves after Tom Brokaw and the other reporters they have seen on TV. What are the qualities of a “top-notch reporter”? What kinds of questions does such a reporter ask? How are Jones and Newman like the reporters they

admire? What differences seem most striking? How do those differences make this documentary unique?

In movies visual images, color, movement, and light help an audience see the world through the filmmaker's eyes. In making their radio documentary, LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman use words and sounds to paint a picture of their neighborhood and of their lives. Replay portions of **GHETTO LIFE 10 1**. How do the sounds you hear in the background make the documentary seem more real? For example, what sounds do you hear as the boys describe their neighborhood? Their school? What do those sounds add to your understanding of what the neighborhood or the school is like?

How do the boys use music in their documentary? How does it set a mood? How does it enhance particular parts of their story? To what extent does it enhance the overall message of the program?

What words and phrases do the boys use to describe people, places, and events? How do their words help you form a picture in your mind? For example, LeAlan Jones says of his house, "What nature does, our house does." How is that different from saying "Our house is cold in the winter, hot in the summer, and the roof leaks"?

The program you just heard focuses on a single week in the lives of LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman. Some listeners are reluctant to reach conclusions about the boys, their families, and their neighborhood from such a small slice of time. Do you agree? What do you think another week in their lives might be like? How might it differ from what you just heard? What might a program that focuses on a week in the life of a neighbor, classmate, or relative of the two boys add to your understanding of their neighborhood?

## Reflections

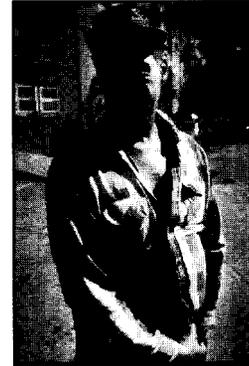
### SNAPSHOTS OF A NEIGHBORHOOD

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#### Reading 1

**G**HETTO LIFE 101 focuses on one week in the lives of two boys. To create a program that is less than an hour in length, the boys tape-recorded over 50 hours of impressions, interviews, and conversations. They and producer David Isay then edited those tapes into the program you just heard. In doing so, they made choices about what to include and what to leave out.

In many ways, GHETTO LIFE 10 1 is a series of snapshots of individuals, events, and places. For example, we learn that Lloyd Newman's mother died a few years earlier, when he was just eleven years old. We form a picture of her as we listen to interviews with Lloyd's father and sister. In 1996, the two boys and David Isay created a book called *Our America*. It contains transcripts of interviews, commentaries, and conversations that were not included in the final version of GHETTO LIFE 10 1. In one of those segments Lloyd Newman says of his mother:



Chill, Lloyd's father.

Sometimes at night I cry thinking about my mother-I stay under the covers so my brother won't know. When she was here I used to wake up in the middle of the night and go downstairs and just lay beside her, and we'd watch TV and laugh. Sometimes when I wake up, I think I see my momma standing right there before me. But now I have to get over it, because she's gone and I can't do anything about it

## CONNECTIONS

**W**hat stories about Lloyd Newman's mother are included in GHETTO LIFE 101? How do the memories Lloyd Newman shares in this reading complicate the picture of her that emerges from the documentary? Why do you think he chose not to include it in the final version? Why do you think he was willing to include it in a book published several years later?

Which interviews or reminiscences in GHETTO LIFE 101 stand out in your mind? Why do you think the boys chose to include each in their documentary? What do they reveal about the subject of the interview? About the boy who conducted the interview! How does each relate to the overall message of the documentary?

If you wanted people to understand who you really are, whom would you want them to

meet? What stories would you share? What stories might you be less willing to include?

**GHETTO LIFE 101** was made in 1993. Five years later, LeAlan Jones told a Facing History class that he still finds it difficult to listen to the interview with his mother. A number of students have also found it hard to listen to that interview as well as the one with Lloyd Newman's father. Some wonder why Jones and Newman chose to reveal family secrets to strangers. Why do you think they decided to include both interviews despite the pain they evoke? How do those interviews deepen our understanding of the boys and their world? How do you think those interviews helped the boys understand themselves?

Although **GHETTO LIFE 101** is a radio documentary, LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman often use the word see. What do they want listeners to "see"? What do they want listeners to know?

Jimmy Santiago Baca is a Chicano writer who has lived in neighborhoods much like the one described in **GHETTO LIFE 101**. The word see has special meaning for him. "The way the Indians say 'seeing' is how close you can come to the way things really are," he writes. "We call that 'seeing.' Every human being has that seeing in them." How is Baca's use of the word see similar to the way LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman use it in **GHETTO LIFE 101**? How is seeing, in Baca's sense of the word, like empathy—the ability to walk in someone else's shoes? How well are you able to "see" in Baca's sense of the word? Describe what it is like to see in this way. How does it make you feel? Does it take courage to see "things the way they really are"?

## A TOUR OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

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Reading 2

In *Ghetto Life 101*, LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman take their audience on a tour of their neighborhood. In a long commentary that is used in part in the documentary but is included in a more complete form in their book *Our America*, Jones describes what it is like to live in a place he likens to war-torn Vietnam.

It's about sixty degrees today-feels good out. Walking down the streets. See an abandoned building, graffiti on the wall. See some little kids playing on a little shopping cart that they got from Jewel Supermarket.

Walking by some abandoned houses-looks like some Scud missiles just bombed them out. A lot of trash here-glass and things. Used to be little snakes in this field in the summertime and we'd catch them. People out here pitching pennies. Houses boarded up.

Walking through puddles of water. Bums on the street. An abandoned church. A helicopter. There goes somebody we thought was dead-guess he ain't dead.

By the old library, which is no longer in business-there was a murder in there last year and they closed it down. See a "Rest in Peace" sign. Birds flying. There's the store they burned down when the Bulls won the championship. Going by the gas station where they sell liquor and food. Now we see some spray paint that says: 'justice for Rodney King/Revolution Is the Only Solution.'

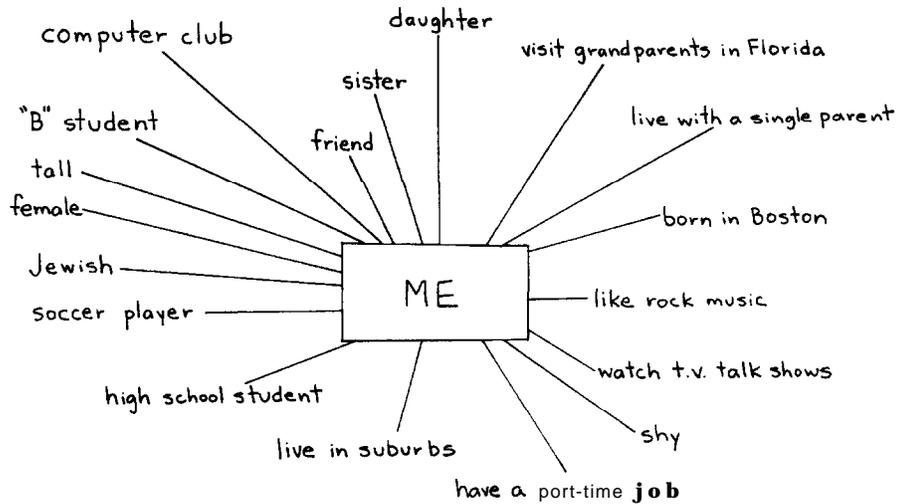
Now we're walking in the Ida Bees, which is 50 percent boarded up. Now we're by Lloyd's house. Abandoned apartments. Broke-down basketball hoops. We see little kids just sitting around looking at us

Now we're walking in the parking lot where they play loud music in the summertime. Little trees growing up in the concrete cracks. See the trash dumpster and graffiti. See an airplane overhead. We're walking through the ghetto. Our neighborhood.

## CONNECTIONS

If you were asked to introduce outsiders to your neighborhood, what words would you use to describe it? What sounds would you want outsiders to hear? What sights would you include on your tour? What parts of your neighborhood are you proudest of? What do you wish you could change? How do you think outsiders see your neighborhood? What are they most likely to notice? What might they fail to see? What might they fail to understand? How might you help them see your world from your perspective?

Each of us has an identity—a sense of who we are and what we might become. Communities also have an identity. What distinguishes the neighborhood Lloyd Newman and LeAlan Jones describe from your neighborhood or any other? Create an identity chart for their neighborhood. The diagram below is an example of an identity for an individual. It contains the words or phrases we might attach to ourselves as well as the ones that outsiders may give us.



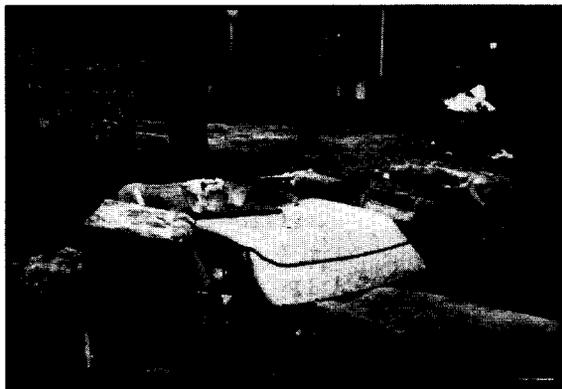
Begin an identity chart for the boys' neighborhood with the words or phrases that describe the way they see it. Then add the labels others might attach to it.

Create an identity chart for your neighborhood. Compare it to those of your classmates. Which categories were on every chart? Which appeared on only a few? As you look at other charts, you may wish to add new categories to the one you created. What does your neighborhood have in common with the one Jones and Newman describe? What differences seem most striking?

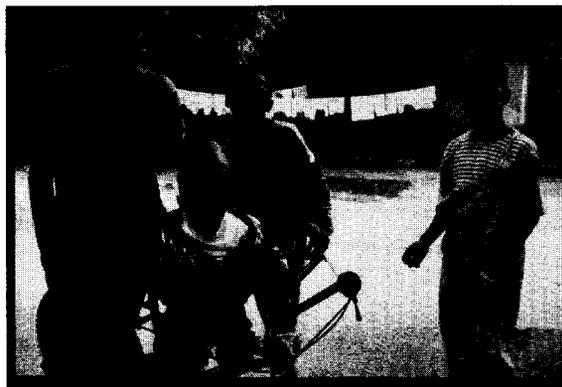
John Brooks grew up in Cabrini Green, a public housing project on the North Side of Chicago. At the age of twelve, he enrolled in an after-school photography class. He has been taking pictures ever since. Brooks took the photographs for *Our America*. How do Brooks's photographs help us "see" the world Jones and Newman describe in a different way? How do they deepen our understanding of the documentary? If you were asked to show your neighborhood to outsiders, what photographs would include?



Making the most of a puddle.



The yard at the Ida B. Wells.



Hanging out at Ida B. Wells.

## NEIGHBORHOODS HAVE A HISTORY

### Reading 3

Neighborhoods have an identity. They also have a history. The neighborhood that LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman describe has not always looked the way it does today. June Marie Jones, LeAlan's grandmother, has lived in the neighborhood since 1937. She can still recall a time when "we had nice hotels where different movie stars would come and stay, and up on Pershing Road they had a lot of entertainment spots-it was almost like going downtown with all the bright lights. We had the Savoy, where the children would go roller skating; the Regal, where you would see live entertainment."



June Jones, LeAlan's grandmother.

In the 1930s and 1940s, African Americans were separated from other Americans in Chicago and other cities by laws that permitted discrimination. Employers were free to choose job applicants on the basis of their "race," religion, or ethnicity. As a result, most African Americans in Chicago were crowded in a few neighborhoods with little or no opportunity to buy or rent housing elsewhere.

When the Ida B. Wells housing project was completed in 1941, many African American families were eager to live there. The townhouses and low-rise buildings that made up the complex at the time were a vast improvement over the crowded and often dangerous buildings they replaced. The Ida B. Wells was the first public housing project in the city open to African Americans-and one of the first in the nation. It provided not only safe, affordable housing for over 1600 poor African American families but also jobs for African American contractors, masons, plumbers, carpenters, engineers, artisans, and other workers. Both were critical at a time when local, state, and federal governments permitted and even encouraged landlords, realtors, and employers to discriminate against African Americans.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Chicago's African American population grew rapidly even as many of the city's white residents moved to the suburbs. For example, in the 1940s, the number of white residents in the city fell slightly, while the number of African Americans increased by 50.5 percent. As one historian has noted, "While blacks crowded into ghettos, whites found ample space in the mushrooming suburbs. In Chicago 77 percent of home building between 1945 and 1960 took place in suburban areas. Yet by 1960, only 2.9 percent of the people in these suburbs were black, roughly the same percentage as had lived in Chicago suburbs in 1940."

By the mid-1960s, a growing number of African Americans in Chicago and other cities felt that government officials were ignoring their concerns about jobs, education, and housing. By then, many public housing projects like the Ida B. Wells were as poorly managed and maintained as the slums they replaced. After riots broke out in a number of inner-city neighborhoods across the nation in 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson formed a special commission to address two questions: What happened and why did it happen?

Under the leadership of Governor Otto Kerner of Illinois, the commissioners spent seven months conducting research in Chicago and other cities, hearing witnesses, and gathering expert opinions. In a report issued in 1968, the group concluded that “in the teeming racial ghettos, segregation and poverty have intersected to destroy opportunity and hope and to enforce failure. The ghettos too often mean men and women without jobs, families without men, and schools where children are processed instead of educated, until they return to the street-to crime, to narcotics, to dependency on welfare, and to bitterness and resentment against society in general and white society in particular.”

Congress, state legislatures, and city councils responded to the report with new laws and new programs. Most were well intentioned but few altered life for the better on the South Side of Chicago or other inner-city neighborhoods. In fact, in the years that followed, as LeAlan Jones’s grandmother notes, poverty, hopelessness, and deterioration increased, not “all of a sudden” but “gradually. Day by day, year by year.”

## CONNECTIONS

**F**ind out about the history of your neighborhood. How has it changed over the years? What prompted those changes?

The Ida B. Wells housing project was an attempt to improve life for needy African American families. What ideas about “race” and “poor people” shaped the way the project was designed and managed? Each of us has a “universe of obligation”—a circle of individuals and groups toward whom we feel responsible, to whom the rules apply, and whose injuries call for amends. What does this reading suggest about the way the city of Chicago and the nation seemed to define their “universe of obligation” in the 1940s? In the years that followed? What are the consequences of those definitions? How do they still shape life in the neighborhood LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman describe?

William Julius Wilson is a sociologist who has studied inner-city life, particularly inner-city life in Chicago. He has observed that “a neighborhood in which people are poor but employed is different from a neighborhood in which people are poor and jobless.” How is that difference reflected in the tour the two boys give of their neighborhood? In June Marie Jones’s recollections of the neighborhood at a time when people were poor but employed?

## GROWING UP IN THE GHETTO

### Reading 4

“Our neighborhood is a fun neighborhood,” LeAlan Jones says, “if you know what you’re doing. If you act like a little kid in this neighborhood, you’re not gonna last too long.” Jones and his friend Lloyd Newman are experts on their neighborhood. They know what to expect, how to behave, and what they can and cannot do. They were not born knowing such things. We all learn the skills and acquire the information we need to get along in a particular place. For most of us, that learning began at home. Our parents, brothers, sisters, and other relatives were our first teachers. From them, we learned to live with others. They taught us about love and trust, courage and resilience, caring and responsibility. They taught us about joy and sorrow, triumph and disappointment, and perhaps even shame and humiliation.



Friends at Ida B. Wells,

The process of acquiring such knowledge and skills is called *socialization*. It is the process of learning to live in a society. No one learns a way of life all at once. Little by little, year by year, we add new pieces of information and put them together with the things we already know. In *GHETTO LIFE 101*, LeAlan Jones observes, “When I was ten I knew where drugs came from. I knew about every different kind of gun. I knew about sex. I was a kid in age but my mind had the reality of a grown-up, ‘cause I seen these things every day.”

Jane11 Jones, LeAlan’s17-year-old sister, estimates that nearly 30 of her friends have been killed over the years. Many of them were murdered. Violence is very much a part of life in the neighborhood. LeAlan speaks of a time when he spent the night at an aunt’s house. He recalls playing Super Nintendo when he overheard a confrontation followed by gunshots. He says of the incident, “We were just still there playing like nothing happened. In Vietnam, them people came back crazy. I live in Vietnam, so what you think I’m gonna be if I live it and they just went and visited? Living around here is depressing!”

## CONNECTIONS

**L**eAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman compare children in the inner city to M&Ms—both are hard on the outside and sweet on the inside. How would you describe them? How has the violence that many of them have witnessed shaped their identity—their sense of who they are and what they might become?

The principal of their school tells the boys that her job is difficult “not because the children are really any different” but “because of the publicity that surrounds our housing

development and community.” How does the way others view your community affect the way you see yourself! How do her comments about outsiders help explain why she tells the boys that they and their classmates “don’t believe we believe that you’re smart”? What evidence can you find in the documentary that LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman are smart not only about their neighborhood but also about society as a whole? What does it mean to be smart at school? What skills and knowledge are required? What attitudes and values? What does it mean to be “street smart”? What skills and knowledge are required? What attitudes and values? What knowledge and skills are needed in both places? What is unique to each location?

When Jane11 Jones was 13, she was an honor student, the salutatorian of her class. Just a year later, she was in trouble both at school and at home. At nineteen, in reflecting on the choices she made at that time, she urged other girls to “take your time.” “Take everything slow. Don’t rush anything, especially if you aren’t sure about something.” Why do you think she was in such a rush to grow up? What part may peer pressure have played in the choices she made? What other factors may have influenced her decisions?

LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman comment on the fact that many of their friends have given up hope. What does it mean to give up hope? How important is hope to the choices we make in life? To the way we see ourselves? The boys believe that they have not given up hope because each has someone who believes in him. Who is that person in Jones’s life? In Newman’s? How does their friendship help them keep hope alive?

It is hard to imagine what it must be like for Jane11 Jones to lose so many of the people who were once a part of her life. In *Savage Inequalities*, a book about children in the nation’s inner cities, Jonathan Kozol quotes a woman as saying, “Our children start to mourn themselves before their time.” If you mourn yourself before your time, how do you regard your future? To what extent is Janell Jones mourning herself?

Some students wonder how LeAlan Jones was able to play Super Nintendo during a shooting. Didn’t he care? they ask. How would you answer their question? What options did he have? What might have happened if he had opened the door? Called the police? How do your answers complicate your understanding of terms like *bystander* and *victim*?

Alex Kotlowitz is the author of *There Are No Children Here*, a book about life in a neighborhood not far from the one LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman describe. In reflecting on the effects of violence on young people in the inner city, Kotlowitz observes:

Children don’t become used to the violence; they find ways, often self-destructive ways, to accommodate it in their lives. A 1995 article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* concluded that witnessing a stabbing or shooting causes depression, anger, anxiety, and dissociation. It’s not at all unusual to find young boys in a community like the Ida Bs with dark circles under their eyes, children who clearly have trouble sleeping. Or to find children unable to sit still in the classroom; such hyperactivity is common among trauma victims. Or children who unsurprisingly deal with conflict in violent ways.

How do Kotlowitz's remarks help us understand the way the two boys discuss violence?

The violence LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman describe is not limited to ghetto neighborhoods. How is the violence in those neighborhoods like violence in other places? What differences seem most striking? Are the differences in the causes of violence, its effects, or in the ways the community as a whole responds to the violence?

## RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE

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Reading 5

Author Alex Kotlowitz believes that the kind of violence LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman describe has far-reaching consequences. He writes:

When a friend of mine takes the elevated train home to Oak Park, [a suburb of Chicago], she makes a point of sitting away from the window. She worries she might get hit by gunfire while passing the Henry Horner Homes project.

Pharoah Walton, age 9, lives in Henry Horner. For him the shooting is so frequent and intrusive that he's learned over the years to look both ways before running when he hears gunfire.

Our inner-city neighborhoods, particularly public housing projects, have become islands of violence, isolated both geographically and *in spirit* from the rest of us. Delivery trucks and taxis dare not venture into these embattled neighborhoods, which are cordoned off by boulevards and highways rather than by walls or rivers. Many residents don't have telephones; there aren't even any supermarkets within walking distance. There is, say residents, a terrible feeling of aloneness.

Most disturbing, however, is how little we know or care about what happens on these inner-city reefs. Most of us are like my friend, for whom the neighborhood is a blur and the violence a momentary but passing threat.

Suppose people in the larger community chose to expand their universe of obligation—the circle of individuals and groups toward whom we feel responsible, to whom the rules apply, and whose injuries call for amends. What if they chose to see violence in the inner city as a problem that matters deeply to everyone, not just to those who live in a particular neighborhood? Could they make a difference? In 1994, with support from the federal government, several public and private groups within the city of Boston tried to answer that question by making a positive difference in one housing project in the city—the Franklin Hill development. In 1998, Ralph C. Martin II, the district attorney of Suffolk County, reported on their efforts.

I remember well when more than 100 police officers holding arrest warrants fanned out through the development in search of drug dealers and violent offenders. The officers made many arrests that day, but the arrests were only part of the effort.

What happened later in the morning symbolized this project's unique approach. Boston Housing Authority workers moved in and painted hallways, changed locks, and removed piles of trash. Abandoned cars were hauled away. Workers cut down a dying tree whose branches bore nothing but discarded sneakers, the gang equivalent of business cards.

On the heels of visual improvements came civic improvements. A local food pantry began donating thousands of pounds of food each week at Franklin Hill. The Red Cross and other providers began conducting nutrition classes, health workshops, and CPR classes. City Year volunteers constructed a new playground and launched a graffiti removal program. More than 70 “building captains” — residents who act as liaisons between tenants and the housing management—were trained.

Within a year of the project start date, crime statistics from Franklin Hill provided clear proof of a community turning itself around. In 1995, drug charges decreased by 23 percent and dropped an additional 60 percent in 1996. Assaults, robberies, and other serious crimes dropped 55 percent in 1996. Emergency 911 calls from the housing development have dropped by more than 40 percent since the project began.

Those statistics have inspired similar initiatives in other parts of the city. As Martin is quick to point out, although these efforts have “scored numerous successes, there were some bumps along the road.” Still, he notes, that “despite the occasional problems, the project never became derailed. Everyone involved recognized the overall goals and resolved to work through the immediate difficulties. Prosecutors learned a great deal about being responsive to a community’s concerns. Residents learned the capabilities of a prosecutor’s office, and together we learned what works and what doesn’t work in community crime prevention projects.”

## CONNECTIONS

Many people see themselves as bystanders—individuals who lack the power and influence to make a difference. Others disagree. They are convinced that there are no limits to what people can accomplish if they join together with others who share their vision. What do you think? To what extent can people stop the violence and regain control of their community?

June Marie Jones, LeAlan’s grandmother, says their neighborhood deteriorated not “all of a sudden” but “gradually. Day by day, year by year.” How do neighborhoods improve? Do they get better “all of a sudden” or is it also a gradual process of “day by day, year by year”?

Sociologist David Schoem believes that as a result of isolation among ethnic and racial groups, we learn “to place heavy reliance on stereotypes, gossip, rumor, and fear to shape our lack of knowledge.” To what extent does the project Ralph Martin describes break the barriers that exist among individuals from different racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds? How might such projects serve as models for other communities, including your own?

Suzanne Goldsmith wrote a book about volunteer efforts to improve life in the nation’s inner cities. She concluded that “life changes often happen slowly, incrementally. Small

gains are sometimes more profound than they first appear. And seeds planted at one time may not bear fruit until a month, a year, or even ten years later.” Give an example of a small gain you have made or observed that is more profound than it first appeared to be. What does her statement suggest about the way changes are made in any neighborhood or community?

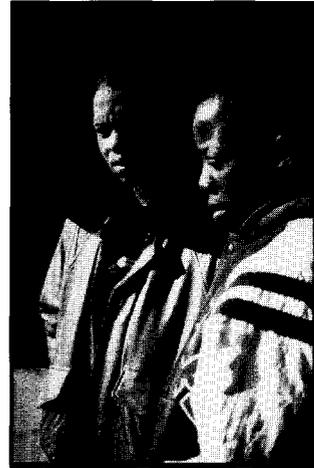
What projects and people make life better in your community? The nation? The planet? How do you learn about these people and projects? What part does the press play in telling these stories? How else do we learn them? How important is it that we know about the good things happening in our communities as well as the bad?

## BECOMING MESSENGERS

Reading 6

After making GHETTO LIFE 101, LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman retired. An incident that place on October 13, 1994, brought them out of retirement. There was a new story about their community that had to be told.

On that day in October, two boys, one eleven years old and the other ten, deliberately pushed five-year-old Eric Morse out of a window on the fourteenth floor of an apartment building. The murder took place in one of the four high-rise buildings known as the Darrow Homes, a part of the Ida B. Wells complex. LeAlan Jones recalls the way local and national leaders responded to the story:



**LeAlan** Jones (left) and Lloyd Newman at 15 reported the story of Eric Morse.

For a couple of weeks, there were reporters and politicians all over Ida B. Wells. Jesse Jackson had a press conference. President Clinton talked about the incident in a speech and so did Newt Gingrich. Everybody jumped on the bandwagon and said, "We're gonna change things in the Ida B. Wells!" "We're gonna do something about these buildings!" "We're gonna do this" and "We're gonna do that." But after a little while everyone left, and nothing changed. Not surprising-when it comes to the Ida B. Wells, politicians keep sweeping the dirt under the rug and it just keeps piling up. The problems get bigger and bigger every day, every minute, and every second.

So in January, 1995, when we were both fifteen years old, Lloyd and I decided to try to do something: to be messengers to the world about the Ida B. Wells, and let them know that something has to change. We picked up our microphones again to find out the story of Eric Morse.

LeAlan Jones viewed the documentary he and Lloyd Newman made as a way not only of expressing their outrage but also of bringing about change. He ends their book *Our America* with these words:

I know you don't want to hear about the pain and suffering that goes on in "that" part of the city. But little do you know that "that" part of the city is your part of the city too. This is our neighborhood, this is our city, and this is our America. And we must somehow find a way to help one another. We must come together-no matter what you believe in, no matter how you look—and find some concrete solutions to the problems of the ghetto. Right now we are at the point of no return. We've got to make a change, because if we don't we'll go into the millennium in total disarray. But I believe it's going to

be alright. Somehow, some way, I believe in my heart that we can make this happen. Not me by myself. Not you by yourself. I'm talking about all of us as one, living together in our America.

## CONNECTIONS

What is LeAlan Jones's message? To whom is it addressed? How important is it that he give that message in his own words? How does he define his universe of obligation? How does he want his audience define their universe of obligation?

Compare LeAlan Jones's message in 1996 with the one he recorded after completing *Ghetto Life 101* in 1993. What similarities do you notice? What differences seem most striking?

Geoffrey Canada, the author of *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun*, grew up in a neighborhood much like the one LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman describe. Today he is an educator who works with young people in New York's inner-city neighborhoods. He believes that he has an obligation to the children who live in those neighborhoods. He also believes that the nation has an obligation to those children. He writes:

If I could get the mayors, and the governors, and the president to look into the eyes of the five-year-olds of this nation, dressed in old raggedy clothes, whose zippers are broken but whose dreams are still alive, so they would know what I know—that children need people to fight for them. To stand with them on the most dangerous streets, in the dirtiest hallways, in their darkest hours. We as a country have been too willing to take from our weakest when times get hard. People who allow this to happen must be educated, must be challenged, must be turned around.

How do people get “educated”? “Challenged”? “Turned around”? What part do documentaries like the one LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman made play in that process? How else do people learn about one another's neighborhoods? To care about what happens in those neighborhoods?

**Facing History and Ourselves** is a national educational and professional development organization whose mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice and antisemitism in order to promote the **development** of a more humane and informed **citizenry**. By studying the historical development and **lessons of** the Holocaust and **other** examples of collective violence, students make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives. Facing History and Ourselves has **offices** in areas including Boston, Chicago, Europe, New York, Memphis, Los Angeles and San Francisco. For more information, contact the national office.,

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