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ABSTRACT

A current vocabulary of argot terms and meanings was collected from a Black male control group in the South Central Los Angeles ghetto. This lexicon was used to elicit and compare responses from 5 male groups of youths between 15 and 20 years old. Two of the groups consisted of lower class blacks separated geographically. The other groups were composed of middle class Blacks, middle class whites, and lower class whites. The data confirmed the existence of a well-formed argot known to all members of the South Central group. Although lower class whites live in close proximity, their knowledge of the argot was limited. Lower class Blacks in Venice, over 10 miles away, demonstrated a mastery of the argot. Middle class Blacks were not as fluent in the argot as lower class Blacks, but their facility was greater than either of the white groups. Those in the white and middle class Black group familiar with the argot were linked through illegal or anti-social life experiences. (Author/RS)

Final Report

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF URBAN BLACK ARGOT

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

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A Comparative Study of Urban Black Argot

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Los Angeles, California

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

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ABSTRACT

A Comparative Study of Urban Black Argot

by

Edith Arlene Folb

Doctor of Philosophy in Speech

University of California, Los Angeles, 1972

The general subject matter of this study is argot; specifically, the argot elicited from Black male youths living in the South Central Los Angeles ghetto.

A current vocabulary of argot terms and meanings was collected from a male 'control' group in South Central. This lexicon was used to elicit and compare responses from among five male 'response groups.' All youths were between 15 and 20 years of age. Two of these groups consisted of lower class Blacks separated geographically. One group consisted of middle class Blacks; one group consisted of middle class whites; the fifth group consisted of lower class whites. Using the control group responses as the standard of measurement, results were collated for individual members of the respective groups and for each group as a whole.

With some qualifications, the hypotheses were substantiated. The data confirmed the existence of a well-formed argot generated and validated in South Central Los Angeles and well-known to all members of the South Central response group. Lower class whites demonstrated limited knowledge of the argot, though they live in close proximity to a sizeable portion of the South Central youths and share certain life concerns characteristic of the lower class milieu.

Lower class Blacks in Venice, California, demonstrated a mastery of the argot roughly comparable to that of the most knowledgeable South Central informants, though over ten miles separates the two lower class Black ghettos.

Race predominated over economics or geography in the sharing of argot. The largest body of common argot was known by the three Black groups. Middle class Blacks did not demonstrate the same facility with the argot that the two lower class Black groups did, but their knowledge was generally superior to that displayed by either white group.

The argot known beyond the particularly knowledgeable lower class Blacks was generally concentrated among sub-sets of informants within the two white groups and the middle class Black group. These informants were linked together and to informants beyond their respective groups through common life experiences that could be classified as illegal or 'anti-social.'

Preface

A great number of people made this study possible. I am particularly indebted to all the adults and youths with whom I conducted interviews. Without their trust, good will and honest criticism, there would have been no dissertation. I am particularly grateful to William Elkins, Lonnie Wilson, Albert Jones, Joe Price, Walt Wright, Travis Watson, Carl Hampton, Robert Rupert, Richard Warren, Homer Gansz, Jack Moskowitz, Gerald Ikeda, Joan DePiore, Bessie Sales, Jerry Ritzlin, Roger Lipkis, Courtland Barber, Jack Schultz, Jean Wojack, Boyd Bosler, Betty Dukeman, Henry Knudsen, the Teen Post directors and their assistants. They not only facilitated my field work by minimizing the 'red tape,' but they offered a number of perceptive and invaluable suggestions.

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Chapter One

A CASE FOR THE STUDY OF BLACK ARGOT

The general subject matter of this study is argot. Specifically it is concerned with the argot derived from Black male youths living in the South Central Los Angeles ghetto. Answers to four questions were sought: (1) the degree to which argot terms elicited from the South Central ghetto are known by young males from different racial, economic and/or geographic backgrounds; (2) the factors which affect extra-ghetto recognition and usage of the argot; (3) the possible correlation of specific life experiences and specific argot usage; and (4) the degree to which intracultural and intercultural values are revealed by argot terms.

A. Background.

Within recent years, a considerable body of literature has grown up around the so-called 'culture of poverty.' The subject has also generated a number of offsprings, one of these being the study of the affects of poverty on language (Williams & Naremore, n.d.; Williams, 1970). Since there is a close relationship between poverty and minority group status, the vast majority of published articles and monographs concern the factors affecting language acquisition and usage in minority groups.

A number of research institutes have been concerned with the study of language acquisition among minorities (see bibliography for a representative listing of publications). The research being carried on at these schools and centers spans the vast field of language behavior from the medical to the linguistic. A portion of this research is directly related to the grammatical aspects of non-standard Black English. One such study is Garvey and McFarlane's (1968) investigation of the standard English speech patterns of both Black and white children enrolled in the predominantly segregated Baltimore city school system (Center for the Study of Social Organization of Schools). A primary objective of the study was to isolate and identify the childrens' 'differential ability to produce Standard English utterances' (p. 4). A subsequent publication (1969), developed some standard English instructional materials to be used in the city school system. These are but two of a number of studies coming from this center that are related to non-standard Black English (see Anderson, 1970; Guthrie, 1969a, 1969b; et al.).

The cited studies are primarily related to the phonological and syntactic aspects of non-standard Black English. However, the research being conducted by Entwisle (1967a, 1967b, 1968, 1969a, 1969b), alone and in conjunction with others, concerns the observable differences in the developing semantic system of the minority group child as compared with his white counterpart. She has also pursued the impact of this difference on the minority child's language development and on the cognitive role of words in his speaking and reading skills. In all cases, however, the form and meaning of the lexical items considered by Entwisle and the others cited have been drawn from standard English.

One of the most extensive and important investigations into the structure of non-standard English has been conducted by Labov (1968). He has explored the language of Black and Puerto Rican speakers in New York City. A major portion of the two-part investigation focuses on the phonological and syntactic components of the language of two South Harlem adolescent 'gangs' and, in addition, the role that non-standard Black English plays in the community itself. This study, together with other writings by Labov (1965, 1967a, 1967b, 1967c, 1967d, 1967e, 1969), forms the most detailed research into non-standard Black English to date.

Another research project that has focused on non-standard Black English is the one by Shuy and his associates in Detroit (1967). The Detroit study presents a much less detailed linguistic analysis of Black English than does Labov's since the Detroit team was also concerned with isolating and describing the 'specialized linguistic features of the various English speaking sub-cultures[1] of Detroit' (p. 1). Like Labov, Shuy hoped the study would 'provide accurate and useful language data upon which educational applications [could] be based' (p. 2).

Somewhat earlier than either the Labov or Shuy studies was one conducted by McDavid and Austin (1966). Primary emphasis is on the phonological features of non-standard English as spoken by Blacks in Chicago, singling out the vowels and consonants that differentiate Black English from standard English forms.

Stewart, of the Center for Applied Linguistics, has been particularly interested in the etymology of the so-called 'Negro dialect' and its impact on the present day speech patterns of American Blacks (1964a, 1964b, 1966, 1967, 1968). One of the most interesting developments growing out of the study of non-standard Black English is the controversy between Labov and Stewart. Stewart maintains that if one looks at the surface structure, i.e. the phonetic forms of sentences of Black English and standard English, one will observe superficial structural similarities. However, Stewart claims that a more detailed investigation of the grammar will reveal that the two grammars differ radically. Stewart states:

> ...if American Negro dialects have evolved in such a way that structural similarities with other dialects of American English (including standard English) are greatest at the superficial word-form level, then it is possible for these similarities to mask any number of grammatical differences between them (1968, p. 19).

He explains this purported significant difference between present day non-standard Black English and standard English in terms of a 'decreolized creole language.'[2]

Labov maintains a position almost directly opposite to that of Stewart. He concludes that the surface structures of non-standard Black English and standard English reflect much greater differences than do the deep structures (1967a, 1967b, 1967c, 1967d). Furthermore, Labov

clearly differentiates his view from that of the 'Creolist' when he states:

> Some scholars believe that the underlying phrase structures and semantics of non-standard Negro English are quite different, and reflect the influence of an hypothesized earlier Creole grammar. Others believe that this English dialect, like all other dialects of English, is fundamentally identical with standard English, and differs only in relatively superficial respects (1967b, p. 3).

Labov aligns himself with the latter position.

This controversy is directly relevant to the degree to which Black English differs from Standard American English. The similarities and differences discussed, however, are those which relate to phonological and syntactic rules, and not to lexical features. Little attention has been given to the special lexicon of non-standard American dialects, and to the lexicon shared by different dialect groups. This is the question of concern in this study. In particular the thesis addresses itself to sub-sections of the lexicon which may be dialect dependent, i.e., part of the 'competence' of one dialect group but not the others. This dialect dependent sub-set is called 'argot' in this thesis.

The British sociologist, Bernstein, has been concerned with the properties of specific linguistic codes and their relationship to identifiable social groups (1958, 1960, 1961, 1962a, 1962b, 1964, 1966). Gumperz (1964), on the other hand, focuses on the 'verbal repertoire' in relation to the code-switching behavior within a speech community. Thus Bernstein is concerned with two alleged linguistic codes and the identifiable social classes using them, while Gumperz provides a conceptual point of departure for investigating the code switching proclivities of a speech community as persons operate within a variety of social contexts. As Gumperz points out:

> The structure of verbal repertoires, ...differs from ordinary descriptive grammars. It includes a much greater number of alternants, reflecting contextual and social differences in speech. Linguistic interaction, as Bernstein (1964) has pointed out, can be most fruitfully viewed as a process of decision making, in which speakers select from a range of possible expressions (1964, p. 137).[3]

Lerman (1967, 1968) has studied the dynamics of subcultural delinquency and points out the close relationship between symbolic deviancy, i.e. the use of argot, and social deviancy (1967). He maintains that knowledge and use of argot, itself a mode of deviance, is 'an indicator of participation in a deviant subculture' (p. 210), and reinforces the value system associated with the deviant behavior of the group.

In a more specific context Barker (1947), discusses the anti-social and cohesion-producing function of the Pachuco argot used by Mexican-

Americans in the Southwest United States. Barker says of the Pachuco group that it 'rejects the cultural norms of both the Anglo and Mexican groups...and substitutes those of its own, drawn from anti-social aspects of both cultures' (p. 198).

Though Bernstein, Lerman and others discuss the possible ways in which a lexicon functions within a class or subculture, they do not address themselves to the Black subculture per se. Bernstein's concern, in the main, is with the working class culture in England. No mention, to my knowledge, is made of the racial composition of that class. In Lerman's work, the discussion of subcultural values and behaviors along racial lines is minimal, since the concern here is with the typology of subcultural deviance itself, rather than with one particular sector of the population. Barker's investigation is concerned with the Mexican-American minority. Even Labov pays little attention to that part of the Black lexicon termed 'argot.' The most extensive use made of argot terms within Labov's 1968 project is in the development of a 'hip vocabulary' that was used as a partial measure of a youth's participation in the various New York City subcultures.

On the other hand, a number of writers, both Black and white, have detailed other aspects of Black culture and, in some cases, its relation to language. Among the white accounts of Black life are Keil's (1966) narrative of the Black blues singer, Liebow's (1967) portrait of the day-to-day experiences of a group of Black street corner men, Horton's (1967) account of street life in Venice, California, and Hannerz' (1969) investigation of Black ghetto culture in response to the pressures of the dominant white culture.

But it is from within the Black culture itself that some of the most graphic and oftentimes painful accounts of the 'Black experience' emerge. These are important since a question of concern in this study is how the Black experience is reflected in Black argot. The writings of W. E. B. DuBois (particularly The Souls of Black Folk, 1903) detail the nature of that experience. More recently, one can point to the writings of the Black sociologist, E. Franklin Frazier. Perhaps his most famous and provocative work is his analysis of the middle class 'Black bourgeoisie' (1957). In 1968, Grier and Cobbs published a particularly distressing narrative of what it means to be Black in white America. Drawing from their case histories, these two Black psychiatrists describe the crippling psychological effects suffered by the Black man in a white man's culture. One need only turn to the autobiographies and letters of such Blacks as Malcolm X (1964), Claude Brown (1965), Eldridge Cleaver (1968), H. Rap Brown (1969), or George Jackson (1970) to see the scope and variety of pernicious experiences encountered by the Black in this country.

Though a number of the sociologically oriented writers cited above deal with the Black vernacular, they do so tangentially. Of these writers, Hannerz (1969) is the most concerned with verbal ability and its significant role in ghetto-specific behavior.

There are, in addition, a number of glossaries and dictionaries devoted to particularized vocabularies. One of the most detailed compilations of English slang is found in the works of the British lexicographer, Eric Partridge (1950, 1970). Paralleling the work done by Partridge in England is the American Thesaurus of Slang (1952) and the Dictionary of American Slang (DAS) (1967). Both the British and American publications provide detailed compendiums of English and American slang, and, in addition, Partridge and the DAS in particular furnish discussions of the nature and function of slang and other forms of so-called deviant speech, such as cant, jargon, argot, etc.

A stimulating commentary on the English language and deviant lexical forms is Mencken's early Inquiry into the Development of English in the United States (1919). Though Mencken scoffed at attempts to identify him as an important linguistic scholar, his work gave impetus to the serious and systematic investigation of American English.

Mencken not withstanding, none of the references mentioned above deal extensively with the specific properties of the Black idiom.

In addition to these general reference works, there are a number of glossaries devoted to the non-standard lexicons of special subcultural groups, particularly that vast subculture referred to as 'the underworld.' The Dictionary of American Underworld Lingo (1950) is a compilation of argot terms that characterizes segments of the criminal world and its various activities. In a more specialized vein, Braddy (1960) collected argot used by Pachucos in the Southwest United States. Also, Coltharp (1965) compiled a 700 item lexicon of the 'calo' argot used among the Tirilones of El Paso.

The foremost authority on American argot, particularly that of the criminal, is David Maurer. His extensive writings on the nature and language of specialized criminal and quasi-criminal professions provide both a rich variety of specialized lexicons, and an on-going and significant statement about the nature, function and scope of argot usage in general (see bibliography for a representative listing of his writings). One of Maurer's most concise, yet informative, statements of the polarized linguistic and social condition that exists between a given subculture and the dominant culture is contained in a paper presented to the International Congress of Linguistics in Bucharest (1967). Yet, to my knowledge, Maurer has given only nominal attention to Black argot within or beyond the criminal world.[4]

The reciprocity between Black culture and other identifiable subcultures is shown in a number of specialized lexicons. As Gold (1957) points out in his etymological and lexical account of jazz parlance:

> Paralleling the 'polyglot origins and development' of jazz is the strange amalgam that constitutes the language of the jazz world--the curious mixture of Negro folk expressions with the imagery of the new city life, and the blending of the two with the terms revolving about the music in which these newly freed people found even greater release (p. xiii).

In a more popular vein, though no less informative in content, is Iceberg Slim's (Robert Beck) autobiographical version of the life and language of the Black pimp (1969a), and his subsequent treatment of the confidence man (1969b). Both books provide separate and authentic glossaries of the respective subcultures about which he writes--subcultures in which the Black man figures prominently. As in the writings of Iceberg Slim, a whole body of argot terms associated with aspects of the Black life style--hustling, drugs, street life, jail--can be found in the autobiographies of Malcolm X, Claude Brown and Eldridge Cleaver mentioned above.

One of the most original and unconventional treatments of culture-specific terminology is found in deCoy's Nigger Bible (1967).[5] As Dick Gregory points out in the preface to the book:

> He [deCoy] has dared further to reject the academic forms of Anglo-Saxon writings in order to establish newer forms and presentations eliminating the pure white 'bullshit' which has for so long shackled the spirits and minds of nearly all black people here in America and even throughout the modern world (p. 13).

Mention must also be made of the extensive lexicon compiled by Kantrowitz during his study of "The Vocabulary of Race Relations in a Prison" (1969). The exhaustive lexicon[6] compiled stands as a landmark effort in understanding the kinds of perceptions racially polarized prisoners have of one another as expressed through the names they assign to each other.

Very recently, two popular dictionaries have appeared in print, each including some portion of the Black argot. Landy's The Underground Dictionary (1971)purportedly began 'as a theraputic exercise for a patient' (p. 11). What it finally became was a linguistic 'Cook's Tour' of what has been variously called 'the underground youth culture,' 'the counterculture,' or 'the drug culture.' Landy indicates that terms peculiar to a particular subculture are designated as such. Among these subcultures is that of the Black.

From a more personal base comes the Dictionary of Afro-American Slang, compiled by Clarence Major (1970), 'not only from a scattering of printed sources but from the reliability of my own ethnic experience. And the experience of others' (p. 15). Major makes no pretensions of having exhausted the lexicon of the Black culture nor of having included only entries that 'first came from the mouths of black people' (p. 11). What he does claim for Afro-American slang is what he considers its lexical birthright, namely, that most white American slang derives from Black argot, itself a product of Black involvement in a variety of anti-social and criminal activities, such as we have already noted. But, like Gold before him, Major attributes the greatest source of Black argot to be the world of the Black musician. Thus Major's dictionary, like some of those already mentioned, acknowledges the continual interaction between Black culture in particular and the various subcultures that it feeds into and by which it is nourished--socially and linguistically.

There is another dimension of the Black experience, reflected through language, that Kochman (1968a, 1968b, 1969, 1970) and others have termed 'expressive role behavior' in the Black community. This refers to the complex role played by verbal dexterity in the Black ghetto, particularly the manipulative function it serves. As Labov (1968), Kochman (1968a, 1969, 1970), Abrahams (1962a, 1962b) and Dollard (1939) have indicated, there are ritualized speech events in the Black community that allow the youth to hone his verbal skills. These also provide a cultural-bound vehicle for the dissemination of attitudes, values and ghetto traditions. To a large extent, these speech events represent a hierarchical progression of verbal ability. The lowest level, which Labov (1968) groups under the rubric of 'ritual insults,' are games which are called 'the dozens,' 'playing the dozens,' 'putting someone in the dozens.' Other terms--'sounding,' 'woofing,' 'joning,' 'signifying,' 'screaming,' 'cutting' or 'chopping' are used in different parts of the country. (Labov, 1968, II, p. 76).[7]

Though the terms describing the activity are varied, the verbal activity itself remains constant. Once having mastered the various forms of ritual insults, the verbal combatant moves on to the 'toasts' which Labov defines as 'long oral epic poems' often containing 'complex metrical arrangements' (II, p. 55).[8]

As already suggested, importance is assigned not only to mastery of the ritualized speech event, but to the everyday event of speaking. Kochman (1968a, 1969), in particular, pays specific attention to the different kinds of verbal behavior connoted by the variety of Black argot terms.

The foregoing discussion of the literature dealing with the language of the Black in America does not presume to be exhaustive. It does show, however, the extent of the interest in this area, and the particular aspects of the Black idiom which have been investigated. Despite the amount of research which has been conducted in this sociolinguistic area, no work has attempted to single out the particular questions being investigated in this study. Before turning to a consideration of those questions, the nature and function of argot in general and what has been termed 'Black argot' in particular will be explored.

B. A Definition of 'Argot'.

Mencken (1919) in his discussion of the vagaries of American language made the following observation: 'The boundaries separating true slang from cant and argot are wavering and not easily defined, and there is a constant movement of words and phrases from one category to another' (p. 703). Some fifty years later, the same statement can be made about these descriptive categories and the words and phrases assigned to them, and these are but a sample of the terms used to classify subsets of lexical items. Other terms, such as 'jargon,' 'lingo' and 'jive' further confuse the issue. Finally, as Mencken implied, not only do the

words and phrases assigned to different categories defy clear cut classification, but the very definitions ascribed to differentiate terminology vary.

The unabridged Random House Dictionary of the English Language (1967) defines 'argot' as 'an idiomatic vocabulary peculiar to a particular class or group of people, esp. [sic] that of an underworld group, as thieves, devised for private communication and identification.' The American College Dictionary (1960) defines the same term in a somewhat different manner: 'the peculiar language or jargon of any class or group; originally that of thieves and vagabonds, devised for purposes of disguise and concealment.' Though the second definition indicates a wider range of application and uses 'argot' and 'jargon' synonymously, other references distinguish between the terms. For example, Eric Partridge (1950) indicates that the term 'jargon' should be limited to discussion of technical languages used within various trades and professions, 'shop talk,' as it were. The term 'argot' is dismissed by him as pretentious, merely the French equivalent for 'slang.'

However, in the Dictionary of American Slang (DAS) the authors do not equate 'slang' and 'argot,' but expand the meaning of 'slang' to encompass 'the body of words and expressions frequently used by or intelligible to a rather large portion of the general American public, but not accepted as good, formal usage by the majority' (p. vi).[9]

The terms 'cant,' 'jargon,' and 'argot,' as defined by the DAS, are more limited in scope than slang. They refer to 'the words and expressions peculiar to special segments of the population' (p. vi). 'Cant' is defined much as Partridge has defined 'jargon,' though with a somewhat more generalized application, namely, 'the conversational, familiar idiom used and generally understood only by members of a specific occupation, trade, profession, sect, class, age group, interest group, or other sub-group of our culture' (p. vi). No mention is made of secrecy as one of the conditions characterizing 'cant.' The definition of 'jargon' in the DAS, however, links the two terms 'jargon' and 'cant' together, since 'jargon' means 'the technical, or even secret vocabulary of such a sub-group' [i.e., specific occupation, trade, class, age group, etc.] (p. vi). Finally, 'argot' is defined in the DAS as 'both the cant and the jargon of any professional criminal group' (p. vi).

Goldin (1950) in his Dictionary of American Underworld Lingo concurs with this reference to criminal language. On the other hand, 'cant' is the term Partridge designates to mean 'thieves language.' And, like Mencken, Partridge also concludes that there is much disagreement over terminology and the definitions assigned to that terminology.

In contemporary sociolinguistic writings other meanings are assigned to the term 'argot.' For example, Gumperz (1964) in his discussion of local and superposed linguistic systems in India makes a distinction between at least two kinds of dialects. One type he designates the 'vernacular,' 'the form of speech used in the home and in the local peer group'

(p. 420). 'Argot,' on the other hand, becomes a kind of linguistic hat-rack upon which to hang 'all other styles of speech found in the village' (p. 420). Depending on the speaker, 'argot' may range from 'standard Hindi, Sanskrit, and English [to] one or another of the sub-regional dialects' (p. 421).

Lerman (1967) seems to consider 'argot' and 'cant' as historically synonymous terms. He states that they are 'words and expressions [that] are part of the language of deviant groupings that are often legally proscribed--e.g., thieves, beggars, addicts, racketeers, and prostitutes' (pp. 210-211). Lerman therefore underscores the association of argot with criminal or deviant groups within the larger culture. He goes on to relate that 'earlier writers stressed the secret nature of cant [argot] as a distinguishing characteristic, but present-day authorities--Partridge and Maurer, for example--minimize this attribute (p. 211).

If Maurer does minimize the secrecy dimension of argot usage, it is not apparent from his more recent writings or in his personal correspondence with me. Though he would certainly acknowledge the constant flow of argot terms from the subculture to the dominant culture, he also sees secrecy as one of the prime requisites for continued subcultural identity and cohesiveness (1967). Furthermore, Lerman's study (1967) presupposes the dimension of secrecy operative in delinquent culture when he states that 'a test of language knowledge also provides a useful way of distinguishing individuals who are likely or unlikely to be participants in a subculture' (p. 211). He creates an 'argot' list to be administered to selected youths in order to determine membership in the delinquent subculture.

Though there are differences of opinion in the field of lexicography and sociolinguistics over the definition and use of non-standard speech terminology, these terms do, nevertheless, provide the student of language with useful if somewhat limited tools for looking at different lexical sub-sets within a given language. It is with these limitations in mind that I propose a composite working definition of the term 'argot' that takes into account both the groups I am dealing with in this study and the various definitions that have been assigned to the term in the foregoing discussion.

I have dismissed from consideration the term 'slang' since its traditional meaning identifies it with a 'public' colloquial vocabulary, not particularly limited to any group or class. Conversely, the terms 'cant' and 'jargon,' as historically defined, are too limited in scope for the purposes of this thesis. I have, therefore, settled upon the term 'argot,' which allows us to extract certain common characteristics that seem to link together the semantic features assigned to it.

One property of 'argot' is that it identifies a lexicon unique to a particular group or class. Some of the definitions reviewed have limited the scope of that group to the criminal world. Others acknowledge the

earlier, limited definition that focuses on the language of the criminal, but also see it as a general cover term that is applicable to the special lexicon of any identifiable group or class.

A second common characteristic noted by lexicographers and sociolinguists in defining 'argot' concerns the secret or private nature of the words and phrases used.

Finally, the most consistently shared meaning for the term 'argot' is as a lexicon of criminals and other persons of a dubious social status, given the prevailing views of the dominant culture. Mencken (1919) tells us that historically those that have been identified as social 'questionables' were beggars, tramps, gypsies and vagabounds, the latter group being comprised largely of 'begging friars and the displaced Jews' (p. 709).

These three particular characteristics--usage limited to a particular group or class, secrecy, and usage associated with members outside the dominant culture--form the basis for the functional definition of 'argot' used in this study. This definition aptly characterizes certain of the properties present in the lexicon gathered for this study. It also provides a point of departure from which to examine the dynamics of Black argot.

C. The Dynamics of Black Argot Usage.

The historical necessity for a secret form of communication among Blacks who found themselves living in a hostile, frequently brutal environment is a matter of fact. Ironically, it was the very dialect of those who enslaved him that the Black pragmatically incorporated into his verbal repertoire to serve his own particular needs:

> [T]he southern dialect as used by whites in the South also came to reflect certain aspects of the slave culture.... The tentative, tendentious quality of the language is often used to obscure the inconsistencies in the life of the Southerner. Things which cannot be faced squarely are covered over with an obscuring scrim of softening words.
>
> In the later years of slavery, when some slaves were able to master the language, and after the emancipation of slaves from bondage, a proliferation of schools enabled large numbers of ex-slaves to learn the language, but still the indirectness of southern language patterns fitted the needs of the oppressed black minority perfectly. In the circumlocution so necessary to the beleaguered blacks it became a more refined art (Grier and Cobbs, 1968, p. 104).

In addition to the syntactic and stylistic circumlocutions the Black found useful in his verbal dealings with whites, there were various subterfuges language offered, namely, a secret lexicon that would pass unnoticed and remain unknown within the white-dominated environment. The

development of 'jive talk,' that particular segment of the Black idiom identified with the Black jazz musician, is hypothesized to have had such a beginning:

> Jive...may go way back, deep into the bowels of the Negro-American experience, back into the revolutionary times when it was necessary for the Negro to speak, sing, and even think in a kind of code....Jive talk may have been originally a kind of 'pig Latin' that the slaves talked with each other...when...in the presence of whites. Take the word, 'ofay.' Ninety-nine million white Americans right now probably don't know that that means 'a white,' but Negroes know it. Negroes needed to have a word like that in their language, needed to create it in self-defense (Ulanov, 1952, p. 13; in Gold, 1957, pp. xiii-xiv).

What has been said about the self-defensive origins of 'jive talk' can be generally said of the whole body of Black argot. Whether the terms incorporated into the argot derived from the jazz experience or the prison experience or the streets--all contributors to Black argot--the need was to create and cultivate a linguistic vehicle that, in part, withheld the Black experience from the white's grasp.

Not only does the Black argot serve a need for linguistic privacy in a hostile environment, it also 'becomes a cultural storehouse for hostility' (Hannerz, 1969, p. 166), directed back upon the white culture. As Grier and Cobbs (1968) have observed, the Black 'patois' reflected in what they refer to as 'jive' and 'hip' language (which I am calling 'argot') 'while presented in a way that whites look upon simply as a quaint ethnic peculiarity, is used as a secret language to communicate the hostility of blacks for whites, and great delight is taken by blacks when whites are confounded by the language' (pp. 105-106).

Though Maurer (1967) acknowledges the presence of reciprocated hostility in <u>any</u> subculture's private argot, he singles out the Black ghetto as an extreme example. The emergence and continued use of a secret argot represents not only the Black's means of countering hostility with hostility but, more profoundly, provides a historical record of 'a whole sense of violent unhappiness in operation' (Major, p. 9).

Intimately related to the secrecy function of any subculture's argot is the argot's contribution to group solidarity and identity. 'A sub-group vocabulary shows that we have a group to which we "belong" and in which we are "somebody"' (Wentworth and Flexner, 1967, pp. x-xi).

The argot of an ethnic group serves to solidify the group internally, and, at the same time, provides a signal to outsiders of its existence. '[T]he ethnic language comes to symbolize the group and its cultural background, or, in terms of its social function, to identify the group as a group' (Barker, 1947, p. 186).

Within the Black culture, the argot functions then, not only as a linguistic refuge but as a visible ghetto institution that a collective minority can identify with even if all do not share extensively in the actual use or perpetuation of that argot. As Major (1970) puts it: 'Afro-American slang is created out of the will to survive on black terms' (p. 10).

Furthermore, in order to protect one's traditions, it is important to protect the 'language' that conveys them. 'The continuity of any sub-culture is heavily dependent on keeping its language usage exclusive, since the sub-culture loses its identity once its language is known and used by the dominant culture' (Maurer, 1967, p. 5). As a riposte to the threat from without, the subculture reaffirms its identity, in part, through its language. Thus, 'the argot forming there [in the sub-culture] emphasizes the values, attitudes, and techniques of the sub-culture, at the same time downgrading or disparaging those of the dominant culture' (Maurer, p. 4).

Maurer points out that the greater the number of words escaping from the subculture, the greater the 'indication of weakening hostility and the widespread diffusion of the subculture through friendly contacts with the dominant culture' (p. 6). Rozak's (1969) description of the youthful 'counter-culture' suggests that we may be witnessing that point of 'friendly contact' between two races. If Rozak's assumptions about a segment of the middle class white youth culture are correct, then the cultural interface Maurer speaks of is apt to occur between this group of alienated white adolescents, disaffected with the dominant 'technocratic' society, and segments of the Black minority. The Black activists' cry for 'total rejection' of the dominant society and the creation of a new way of life is especially relevant to alienated white youths even though, ironically, the rally cry is not meant for them. 'Black Power may build any number of barriers between white and Negro youth, but across the barriers a common language can still be heard' (Rozak, p. 44).

While Rozak is speaking of a language of ideas that serves to bind the youths of two races together in common cause, Major (1970) addresses himself to the language, itself, as the cohesive force.

> Today the influence of his [the Black's] secret and rebellious way of communicating continues not only to wedge itself deeply into the sensibility of black folks but also it has become more than ever an 'extension' of the young white person's conscious communication apparatus....But--the important difference is: these young whites speak the code language of oppressed black people without the old smirk intrinsic in the attitude of their white forefathers and mothers (p. 13).

The degree of Black argot that escapes from the realm of private usage and is transmitted cross-culturally is, no doubt, an important indicator of lessening hostility--at least between segments within each

racial group. Yet, this mechanism by which argot is shared also presupposes a constellation of shared attitudes, values and life experiences rather than a one-sided, static relinquishing of minority group language. Kantrowitz (1969) and others have noted that 'if a phenomenon is important, it is perceived, and, being perceived, it is named' (p. 24). To carry that supposition one step farther, it may be said that those who have identified the phenomenon as important and, consequently, have named it, will come to share that name with others whom they encounter and with whom they interact in the pursuit of shared activities of which the phenomenon is a part. The degree, manner and place of that sharing is an important consideration in this study.

If, as Maurer has stated, a subculture relinquishes hold of its group identity to the degree that the argot becomes known beyond the group, then the converse would also appear to hold. That is, subcultural acceptance of the language of the dominant culture, and the values and traditions embodied therein, not only indicates a potential lessening of hostility toward that culture but also a concomitant weakening of subcultural identity and group cohesion.

Another side of this question is contained in Labov's concept of 'functional conflict,' which describes one aspect of interference in the acquisition of standard English experienced by the Black and Puerto Rican youths studied in New York:

> [I]n many cases there may be no direct structural conflict between standard English and the vernacular of Negro and Puerto Rican children. The children may be aware of the standard English forms, be able to perceive the difference between them and non-standard forms, and even be able to produce them at times. However, they may be unable to acquire the use of standard English because of a functional conflict: the fact that the values symbolized by standard English are in direct conflict with the values symbolized by their own vernacular (1965, pp. 5-6).

The data collected and presented in Labov's study of the non-standard speech of Black and Puerto Rican youths in New York give strong support to his conclusions. For one, the Black vernacular is 'positively valued by speakers of it....all adults endorse the values of "correct speech" in middle class terms,...But adults who retain their association with lower class culture continue to identify with the NNE [Non-standard Negro English] forms, and there is good reason to think that the peer group members in school do the same' (1968, II p. 344).

In fact, there was a strong commitment on the part of the Black youths interviewed by Labov's team to the lower class values transmitted through the vernacular, i.e. the 'bad body' image, and to the use of the vernacular itself as an indicator of group identity and one's sense of belonging. Finally, the pressure exerted by the peer group upon individual members to conform to non-standard Black usage was considerable.

In his concluding remarks, Labov suggests not only the extent to which the values reflected in the language of the dominant culture and those of the Black subculture are still polarized, but also points to a continued source of that polarization--the public school.[10]

H. Rap Brown comes to essentially the same conclusions as Labov about the public school and the middle class values it imposes on Black children, though from a radically different perspective and expressed in somewhat more graphic terms.[11]

The resistance on the part of both Black adults and youths to the values reflected in standard English and the usage itself is still considerable, even monumental. Therefore, if any weakening of Black group cohesion and identity is to come via language, it is more likely to occur, at this point in time, through transmission of the argot by way of interracial contacts of a friendly sort, than through Black rejection of the grammar, phonology and lexicon of their own dialect. In this study, we will look at the inroads made by the former mechanism.

A final aspect of the relationship between argot usage and group identity is the position occupied by the middle class Black. As noted, the lower class Blacks (both youths and adults) not only retain non-standard Black English,but assign a positive value to its usage and tacitly or openly accept the cultural values transmitted in its form and content. This is not to suppose that the ghetto Black has not suffered the daily humiliation of 'being Black' in America and the conflict created between emulating a hated oppressor and positively asserting one's group identity. But the ghetto Black has managed, nonetheless, to maintain an extraordinary degree of ethnic identity and personal adaptability in the face of cultural values impinging from outside that run contrary to ghetto-specific modes of behavior.[12]

But what of the middle class Black? In his study, Frazier (1957) exposes the world of make believe created by the 'Black bourgeoisie' in their attempt to escape from the dilemma of being marginal men, rejected by the dominant white culture on the one hand, and rejecting of their cultural past on the other. One of the middle class Black's efforts to break with his 'folk background,' as Frazier calls it, was to abandon the Black dialect: '[S]tudents were taught to speak English correctly and thus avoid the ungrammatical speech and dialect of the Negro masses' (p. 71).

But what of the middle class Black today, some thirteen years after Frazier wrote about them? Though this study does not address itself to the etiology of Black consciousness nor the growing pride in one's race, it does concern itself with linguistic manifestations of group identity, that is, the degree of Black argot known and used by blacks from different economic and geographical backgrounds. I am particularly interested in the extent to which the middle class Black youth identifies himself with his heritage via his use of the argot. Labov (1968) believes that the middle class Black, in his use of language, identifies with mainstream white America when he states:

> It is not uncommon to refer to the value of language as a vehicle of self-identification; certainly at the very least, the vernacular language of the Negro community is associated with that community, and carries the value of identifying a speaker as a Negro. In some contexts, this has not been an asset, and many middle-class Negroes have attempted to erase every trace of the NNE vernacular from their speech, even in their family (p. 218).[13]

This linguistic 'double bind' some Blacks find themselves in, particularly the middle class Black who battles his own conflict as a would be participant in two cultures, is contemptuously dismissed by Malcolm X as indicative of an inability on the part of the middle class Black, and other so-called 'Black leaders,' to switch codes when the need presents itself. However, underlying the ability to do so, is not only a speaker's knowledge of the two different cultures in which he finds himself, but also his ease of movement in both.[14]

It must be remembered that Malcolm X was bi-lingual, or at least, bi-dialectal. He 'knew' both dialects or languages, and was therefore able to switch from one 'grammar' to another depending upon the language of the people to whom he addressed himself. This was as true of the syntactic and phonological rules of the two dialects as of the particular lexical items. The questions raised by Malcolm X and Labov attest to the fact that the attempts by Blacks who identify with or are economically part of the middle class are often superficial and ineffective. This is because these Blacks do not know the language which they are attempting to speak. They are as unaware of the grammatical constraints in the grammars of Black English as are their white counterparts. They are also unaware of the special vocabulary of words and idioms.

There are those, of course, knowledgeable in both dialects. Code switching is possible for them, and is often an unconscious or quasi-conscious response to different contexts. Stewart (1966) is explicit on this question:

> Some educated Negroes may never use any of these social dialect features [markers of non-standard Black English], many others seem to use some of them in special styles. Such persons have a 'public image' style which is more-or-less free of specifically Negro dialect features, and in addition, an 'ethnic style' in which the same speaker will use Negro dialect features...as well as current in-group vocabulary (pp. 4-5).

Stewart goes on to point out that the educated Negro, while publicly decrying the existence of a 'Negro dialect' (and doing so in very standard English) may 'at an in-group party...switch automatically into a style which does indeed have many of the features which are associated with Negro dialect. If caught doing this...the individual may claim that the ethnic-less style represents his or her normal dialect, while the ethnic dialect is only a special "put on" style' (p. 5).

Though the problem of defining the parameters of 'Negro dialect' is not the purpose of this thesis, the questions raised in the discussion of this problem are of interest. As the observations of such different writers as Labov, Malcolm X and Stewart indicate, the question of the manner and degree to which the educated or middle class Black can or does identify with his ethnic group origins via language is unanswered. But while the phonological and syntactic shifts in one's speech patterns are largely unconscious, shifts in one's vocabulary are often not (Stewart (1966), Bright (1967), Dillard (1967), Wentworth and Flexner (1967), Gumperz (1964)). This seems particularly true of that area of specialized vocabulary I am calling argot. As Flexner (1967) points out:

> Slang can be one of the most revealing things about a person, because our own personal slang vocabulary contains many words used by choice, words which we use to create our own image,... as opposed to our frequent use of standard words merely from early teaching and habit' (pp. xii-xiii).

Gumperz (1964) lays particular stress on the acquired nature of argot when he says: 'An argot is ordinarily learned after childhood often as a result of conscious effort; and its patterns are, so to speak, superimposed over those of the vernacular' (p. 422).

Furthermore, as our discussion has already suggested, the reciprocity between secrecy and sub-group identity in argot usage presupposes a largely conscious acquisition of vocabulary. Dillard (1967) recognizes this dimension of word usage as a method of establishing one's loyalty to the group when he points out how the structural conflict faced by the speaker of Black English is further complicated by the apparent 'imposition of ethnic slang upon the often quite standard grammar of certain Negro groups' (p. 7).

The prime importance of the foregoing discussion for this study is to point up the fact that one's knowledge of argot presupposes a conscious attempt to actively identify oneself with a given group. A particular concern of this investigation is to discover the degree to which the middle class Black youth can be said to identify with his lower class counterpart through his knowledge of a ghetto-generated argot list. An equally important concern was the degree of argot knowledge shared among the ghetto youths interviewed. As Hannerz (1969), Labov (1968) and others have discovered, living in the Black ghetto does not necessarily mean being part of it psychologically or behaviorally. Hannerz has termed 'main-streamers' those ghetto dwellers who see themselves and are seen by others in the community as 'respectable people,' or 'model citizens,' terms that refer more 'to a life style ideal than to socio-economic status' (p. 34). Thus, a ghetto youth may not know the argot known to others in his economic, racial and geographic peer group, whereas a Black middle class youth, who closely associates himself with his ethnic origins or, even a white youth who ideationally identifies with the 'Black experience,' does. These are some of the aspects of argot usage explored in this study.

One final dimension of Black argot that needs to be mentioned is the sources and contexts that have historically fed into the lexicon. I have already touched upon some of them, namely, prison, the drug world, the street culture of the pimp and hustler, and concomitant criminal activities. All these contexts and conditions have unhappily been the historical lot of the Black man in America and, therefore, have provided a number of argot terms that refer to sexual exploitation, drugs, toughness, manipulation and other so-called 'anti-social acts.' But, perhaps, the largest segment of the Black argot has been drawn from the world of the Black musician, particularly the jazz performer, as we have already seen. Gold (1957) looks upon the development of a group-bound argot and a unique form of music as interwoven cultural threads:

> So we get a people in rebellion against a dominant majority, but forced to rebel secretly, to sublimate, as the psychologist would put it--to express themselves culturally through the medium of jazz, and linguistically through a code, a jargon (p. xiv).

In more recent times, the Black Power movement, with its numerous organizational offsprings, has provided another potential context from which Black argot could arise. The question of whether or not this is the case is difficult to answer. At the time of this study (1966-68) of a circumscribed Black ghetto neighborhood in Washington, D.C., Hannerz found that his adult acquaintances and friends gave little attention or time to Black organizations or politics. Yet, Hannerz does take note of a growing receptivity to the message of Black Power--particularly among the youth.

Labov, who was working with South Harlem youths during approximately this same period, was discovering not only strong identification with Muslim doctrine on the part of one of the gangs, but also the beginning of a different attitude toward reading and learning stimulated by intense interest in 'the development of Black Muslim ideology' (1968, II, p. 344).

Here again, the question of the force of Black Power on the behavior patterns of ghetto dwellers, linguistic or otherwise, is not a primary concern of this study, however intriguing its implications. However, attention will be given to argot that can be identified with this cultural-political phenomenon and to a discussion of the backgrounds of informants who knew such terms.

Earlier in this discussion, I quoted Maurer as saying that one of the ways in which argot escapes from a given subculture is through friendly contacts with the dominant culture. Contacts between Blacks and whites whether friendly, forced, or expedient--as they may well be in prison, in the drug world or in some other shared form of anti-social activity--may also see argot transmitted from one group to another. This concept of forced or expedient contact and communication will also be considered in the discussion that follows.

D. Special Problems Associated with the Study of Black Argot.

1. The 'Perimeters' of the Black Community.

Throughout this study, reference is made to a geographical, economic and racial entity called the 'Black ghetto.' In recent years, the term has taken on such explosive political and social overtones that it is either used in the rhetoric of one cause or another, or it is totally avoided. Many have euphemistically called it the 'inner city' or the 'central city;' others have labeled it a 'slum' or the 'bad part of town.' Yet, none of the terms adequately describes it. '[W]hile the former [are] only...term[s] of location, sometimes wrong and sometimes right, and the latter [tell] us that the area is rundown and poor, "ghetto" tells us more about the nature of the community and its relationship to the outside world' (Hannerz, 1969, p. 11).

The term 'ghetto,' then, is used in this study to describe not merely a 'part of town,' but some very real conditions of life that residents of South Central Los Angeles share in common, such as the color of their skin, their low income and, often, their involuntary residence within a limited geographical area. Most importantly, they share a complex set of experiences that grow out of the restraints ghetto life imposes on them.

In Chapter Three, more will be said about the physical boundaries of the South Central Los Angeles community and the young ghetto residents that participated in the 1968 investigation and this study.

Beyond the very tangible perimeters of the South Central Black ghetto, lies another kind of 'community.' Like the term 'ghetto,' the expression 'Black community ' has come to mean a variety of things, depending upon who uses the term and for what end. For many people, 'Black community' is synonymous with 'Black ghetto.' For others, it is a meaningless filler in a number of media-worn clichés--'concerned members of the Black community,' 'responsible leaders of the Black community,' and so on. For some, it means simply a 'community' of Black people, both within and beyond the ghetto, of low or high income, either physically or psychologically constrained by the dominant white culture. This is the sense in which 'Black community' is used in this study. One of the purposes of this investigation is to determine the degree to which young members of that 'Black community' are bound together through the argot they share.

2. Acquisition and Identification of Black Argot.

As discussed above, the attempt to formulate a definition of Black argot, and to identify terminology, can be a frustrating and perplexing problem. The subterranean and transitory nature of much argot, whatever its group derivation, presumes a phenomenon in a state of perpetual flux.

As pointed out, the function of a subculture's argot is as much to confound the dominant culture as to solidify the group and its values and attitudes. Furthermore, the argot of any subculture changes as the group's perceptions of their environment changes. It is possible that when a phenomenon is no longer important or attitudes toward it change, the names used to describe it are altered or fall into disuse.

Labov (1968) acknowledged this continual shift in the status of argot words in his New York study and attempted to accommodate this flux by assigning so-called 'hip vocabulary' to categories descriptive of their status at the time of the field work, i.e. 'new and entering,' 'steady,' 'passing out,' or 'obsolete.' Labov's practical method of dealing with the hip vocabulary did not, however, attempt to catalog any sizeable body of argot along racial or ethnic lines--nor was it constructed for this purpose.

Another factor that complicates the identification of Black argot is the great amalgam of subcultures that feed into this hypothetical pool of Black terminology. If we look at any given subculture, we can observe a number of discrete mini-cultures that comprise it. We need only observe the criminal hierarchies within the Black ghetto. For example, we can talk of the 'hustler' subculture and divide it into the specialized and identifiable worlds and argots associated with the pimp, the pusher, the confidence man, the gambler, and so on. We could then dissect each of these sub-sets and extract still more discrete argot. If this is the case with a given subculture and its argot, what must we say of the multiple cultural and linguistic sources that make up Black argot?

Though it is misleading to talk of a fixed subcultural argot, we can observe a more or less stable core of terms that has retained the same form and meaning over a period of time. Prior to this study, a pilot study was conducted in January, 1968. An argot lexicon was constructed at that time. The approximate three year interval between that study and the completion of the field work for the present study (September, 1970) provided valuable longitudinal information on the status, form and meaning of the argot terms reviewed in both studies.

The overwhelming majority of the pilot project words used in this study have retained their original meaning. Approximately one-fourth of the words appearing in the 1968 study have assumed other meanings in addition to their original definitions. Some items appearing on the original list have fallen into relative disuse. In their stead a number of new terms have arisen to define the same or similar phenomena or identify new experiences and events. These have been acknowledged in the present study.

With this information available, we can talk about the 'known' or 'unknown' status of argot in relation to a prospective argot user, and also the 'dormant' or 'active' character of the argot within the designated

subculture. Such a descriptional paradigm accounts for the retention of words and their meanings in the argot pool, while observing the dynamic acquisition of new words descriptive of new perceptions and redefining and reinterpreting old experiences. The latter indicates the potential for continual development of a subculture's argot; the former acknowledges the operation of a conservative mechanism that lends stability to the lexicon through time.

It is the conservative element in argot retention that can be said to perpetuate ghetto traditions through time and in the face of adversity. More will be said about the conservative element in argot usage below. It is enough to note here that the oral transmission of culture is much in evidence in the Black ghetto. Thus, the retention of argot through time allows the observer an opportunity to identify what is important to the subculture, whether it be positively or negatively valued, by its very perpetuation in the argot pool.

In most studies,of course, the researcher of necessity authenticates his argot sample in the present. Consensus becomes another method for validating argot as the particular property of a given subculture. 'Consensus' is secured when a number of informants from the subculture have similarly defined an item and have, thus, implicitly acknowledged it as part of their personal vocabulary, and by extension, as part of the group's lexicon.

In the last analysis, one can only make an intelligent determination of what is or is not 'pimp' argot, 'con-man' argot or 'Black' argot, after the fact. That is, one takes a body of argot terms known to be used by members of a given subculture and exposes it to another sample of the subculture, and also to a variety of non-members. Those terms that are predominantly or totally unknown to the non-members can be reasonably considered as part of the subcultural argot. This, in essence, is the rationale used in this study. An attempt will be made to determine not only what terms constitute 'Black argot,' but also what items can be related to sub-groupings within the Black culture, such as, 'lower class Black argot,' or 'ghetto-specific Black argot.' Conversely, the study is also concerned with those terms that no longer fall under the rubric of 'Black argot,' though they were part of the group's special lexicon in the past.

This determination of a phenomenon's status 'after the fact' is not a new approach to data analysis in sociological circles. Merton (1957) identifies it as 'post factum' sociological interpretation, that is, 'observations are at hand and the interpretations are subsequently applied to the data' (p. 93).

The sorting out of what can be identified as 'Black argot' must of necessity be left until the data are analyzed, rather than declared in advance of informant review and response.

3. Assessing Informant Knowledge of Black Argot.

It is one thing to identify a set of argot terms as part of the special lexicon of a particular subculture, and another matter to specify those who 'know' the items involved within or beyond the subculture. Knowledge of grammatical rules (syntactic and phonological) is more often than not unconscious, tacit knowledge. The acquisition of these rules is certainly accomplished unconsciously. Thus for example, a speaker of Standard American English (SAE) can not usually formulate the Sentence Negation rule which transforms He knows something into He doesn't know anything. The do-insertion in the negative sentence and the accompanying change of something into anything is a regular rule of SAE. Similarly, when a speaker of Black English (BE) negates the sentence He know something (note that the third person singular marker on the verb---s--is regularly deleted in this context) forming He don't know nothing, the BE rule inserts do as in SAE before the not or 'nt but regularly changes something into nothing. In both dialects these are regular transformations and not haphazard (see Labov 1969). Yet speakers can not tell you what rules they are using. They learn the rules by virtue of their learning the language, i.e. generalize a grammar from the input data.

Similarly, a large part of the basic vocabulary of speakers of both dialects are acquired in this way. That is, no one tells the child that the sounds [haws] means 'house'. But, there is often a distinction between the acquiring of new words or idioms and the acquisition of syntactic and phonological rules. All of us often consciously add to our vocabularies. When we hear a word we do not know, we can look it up in the dictionary, or ask someone its meaning. With slang terms, and particularly with argot terms, the conscious acquisition of new words is even greater. As already noted, proficiency with a given body of argot is a way of identifying oneself with a given group, and, in turn, being perceived as a member of this group. Thus, one desiring such identity will actively seek knowledge of this argot.

A great percentage of our lexical acquisitions, particularly so-called deviant lexicons, are first learned contextually. In my early years in college, I was often overwhelmed with the flood of 'academic jargon.' Not being willing at the time to admit my ignorance to others, I would either search out the meaning of this or that word in a dictionary or I would formulate a meaning from the context in which I heard the word.

With argot terminology, dictionary definitions are, at best, impractical and often impossible to determine. A pimp doesn't learn his trade's vocabulary from the writings of Iceberg Slim or Dr. David Maurer; he picks it up 'on the streets ' as he learns and hones his 'hustle' piecing together the meaning of words from the context in which they are expressed. The overwhelming majority of Black and white informants interviewed in this study and the pilot project indicated they had most often learned the argot they knew 'from context.'

This is particularly evident in that form of communication most often associated with argot usage, namely, 'face-to-face communication.' As Smith (1970) has pointed out:

> [T]his situation [contextual understanding of word meaning] is constantly being created in interpersonal communication. Our 'un-huh's' and shaking heads do not necessarily indicate total understanding of every word uttered; they might merely mean that we understand the drift of what is being said by the speaker. Words can only become 'known' to us after we have heard them used and have used them ourselves in various contexts; indeed, the correct use of a word, vocally or written, is a cognitive process' (p. 24).

As Smith indicates, we can talk about levels of 'knowing' words. Contextual knowledge of word meaning is often a superifical level of 'knowing' and the method most subject to error. It is quite a different matter to be able to explain or extensionally define a word to oneself or others without the benefit of a context than to formulate an approximate meaning within context. The sharp disparity that is possible between contextual understanding of words and isolated understanding of words, as when a specific definition is asked for and provided, indicates, I believe, a differing level of potential facility with the word in question. This is not to say that all or most words, whether they be associated with a particular group's argot or not, lend themselves to precise or even approximate definitions.[15] However, those concepts or words that do not can often be related to a particular situation or context which itself indicates the user's familiarity with the meaning of the word.

The pilot project (Folb,1968) clearly indicated these two levels of informant 'knowledge.' It separated the would-be users from the true users. For the purposes of this study, therefore, informants will be said to 'know' an item if they are able to provide a 'correct' definition for it, that is, one provided by the control group or the earlier pilot group, or a 'situational' definition for the term or phrase that relates it to an appropriate context or activity.

No contexts were provided for any of the stimulus words presented to any of the groups in this study. Though this minimized the opportunity for correct guessing, guessing did take place and, undoubtedly, was sometimes recorded as a 'correct' response. In addition, the environment in which the interview was conducted, the interviewer herself, the informant's feelings and frame of mind possibly all played a role. Despite these conditions, the approach used in determining a subject's knowledge of an item seemed to work well.

The demands for a definition in response to a given word or phrase brought to light another property of the argot, namely, its potential use as a projective tool. Those who did not know an item, but guessed anyway, provided some interesting psychological data. Though this aspect

of argot usage is beyond the limits of this thesis, it would be of interest for future study.

Though the questions of identifying Black argot, and determining who knows it, have been given special attention, they are by no means the only problems that emerged during the course of this study. For example, the potential impact of a white, female interviewer on both argot acquisition and informant response demanded consideration. Such additional questions are discussed below.

E. Scope and Purpose of the Study.

The pilot project (Folb, 1968) was an attempt to systematically explore the nature of Black argot and the uses to which it is put. The prime purpose of this earlier work was twofold: (1) to determine whether or not a well-formed body of argot terms could be elicited from among youthful residents of South Central Los Angeles, and if so, (2) to determine the extent to which the forms and meanings assigned to those argot terms were shared among a sample from this target area. Working closely with a number of Neighborhood Youth Corps youngsters from the South Central area, I was able to answer both questions in the affirmative. In addition, some beginning efforts were made towards correlating culturally significant attitudes and values with the connotative meanings provided for the words elicited and reviewed (1968, pp. 21-58).

This thesis is another step in the effort to investigate Black argot usage. As such, this work is to be seen as exploratory rather than definitive. As already indicated, the approach taken in the data analysis is, to some extent, that approach suggested by Leibow (1967), 'to make sense of...[the data] after the fact' (p. 12).

It is of course true that the particular methodology adopted, and the design of the study assume certain underlying 'presuppositions' (see Hanson, 1958). Without them, collection of data is random and uninterpretable. It is, of course, often the case that in the investigation of a problem new hypotheses suggest themselves and earlier suppositions must be discarded. We are still in the stage where questions need to be formulated. This study will hopefully provide some answers, however tentative.

In keeping with the exploratory nature of this thesis, the scope of the investigation is limited and circumscribed. No attempt is made to generalize the data gathered beyond the informant 'populations' to be described and discussed. Whether or not the same or similar statements can be made about others selected from the same target populations as were the informant groups is for future study to determine. However, evidence from a number of the sources already cited suggests that the conclusions reached are neither unique nor isolated. Nonetheless, the observations made throughout this work are, at best, suggestive. To construe them otherwise is to claim for the study more than it claims for itself.

The following hypotheses were used as the basis for this study:

1. Lower class Blacks use and share a special argot unknown to lower class whites, even when the two groups live in close proximity;

2. The argot cuts across geographical boundaries; lower class Blacks living in geographically separated ghettos share a common argot;

3. This argot is shared by middle class Blacks;

4. A primary factor affecting shared argot is shared life experiences.

Chapters Two, Three, and Four deal with the methodology employed in the study. Chapter Two examines the instruments used in the field work, namely, the lexicon and the questionnaire, and details the methods that were followed in developing each instrument. Chapter Three details the composition of the various informant populations that were interviewed, and describes the procedures used for selecting participants. Chapter Four explores the settings in which the individual interviews took place and the means used to elicit data.

Chapters Five and Six are devoted to the analysis of the data collected. Chapter Five is a quantitative examination of the data. Chapter Six discusses the argot as divided into special category sets. In addition, three subjects from different response groups are discussed.

Finally, Chapter Seven summarizes the findings and provides evidence in support of all the hypotheses presented, with some qualifications.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter One

[1]The term 'subculture' appears frequently throughout this thesis. Though I cannot account for the definitions assigned to it by others, I use it to mean: any discernible group or class of people that identify themselves or have been identified by the dominant culture as deviating from that culture's standards of behavior. 'Behavior' here includes, of course, linguistic behavior.

[2]'Decreolized creole language' is an expression used by Dillard in his discussion of the etymology of non-standard Black English. (See bibliography for articles by Dillard that express a pro-Creolist point of view.)

[3]See Hymes (1964, 1967) for discussion of a working model to be used in identifying the points of interaction between language and various aspects of social setting.

[4]See Maurer (1955) for a discussion of the Black's place in a specific criminal subculture.

[5]A few examples taken from deCoy's Black 'lexicon' should give some indication of the inventiveness inherent in the creation of argot:

> NIG-GER-OON-IE, n.--A Nigger or Nigrite female who is 'passing for white.'
>
> NIG-GRI-TUDE, n.--The condition of being Black.
> v.--Niggrituding.
>
> UN-ASS, v.--To surrender or give up something; to remove one's presence from a scene or place. Conjug; Unass, unassing, unassed. (pp. 37-38).

It should be noted that these word-formations follow the derivational rules of Standard English. Thus, for example, the suffix '-tude' is generally used to denote 'the state of,' as in servitude, gratitude, solicitude, etc. And the prefix 'un' is one of the most common negating prefixes. Its particular usage here is less common, however, in that it verbalizes the noun and signifies 'change of state' rather than simple negation. The 'oonie' is an affix usually used only in slang formation.

[6]Unfortunately, only a minute portion of the 1,098 common vocabulary names and the 252 'racially unique names,' could be reprinted in the American Dialect Society article. Kantrowitz was kind enough to send me a copy of the unpublished manuscript entitled, 'Stateville Names: A Prison Vocabulary,' which was compiled between 1959 and 1963.

[7]There are a variety of definitively 'Black' terms used in the Los Angeles area for insulting another person, for example, 'to base' on someone, 'to rank' someone. In my experience, the terms 'cutting' and 'chopping' which are indicated by Labov to have currency in Los Angeles are more visible in the argot of white youths than in that of Black youths.

[8]In addition to sharpening verbal skill and transmitting cultural content, Abrahams (1962a) claims that these speech events provide a much needed psychological channel for venting anxieties and frustrations experienced by the Black living in an essentially hostile environment. In a subsequent article, Abrahams (1962b) enlarges the psychological function served by the speech event, particularly the 'toast,' by claiming that 'Black humor' provides a method of tolerating the real tragedy of one's personal life. It is interesting to note that this claim has also been made for the particular characteristics of Jewish humor (Rosten, 1968).

[9]Ambrose Bierce has undoubtedly provided the most colorful and ascerbic definition of 'slang': 'the speech of him who robs the literary garbage can on [their] way to the dump' (see Partridge, 1950, p. 295).

[10]Furthermore, Labov seems dubious about the ability of many teachers now in the system to 'learn' about the language and culture of the Black children they teach:

> It seems to us more difficult to convey this information [the need to know about the Black language and cultural values reflected therein] to the present teachers from other communities than to train teachers from the NNE community. A lifetime of experience is not easily compressed into a teaching manual; and we are not dealing merely with referential knowledge, but a set of ingrained attitudes. Given the situation presented in these volumes, we do not think it is realistic to expect that new publications or training courses will convert middle-class white teachers into effective teachers of ghetto children' (II, pp. 347-348).

[11]'The street is where young bloods get their education. I learned how to talk in the street, not from reading about Dick and Jane going to the zoo and all that simple shit. The teacher would test our vocabulary each week, but we knew the vocabulary we needed. They'd give us arithmetic to exercise our minds. Hell, we exercised our minds by playing the Dozens.

> I fucked your mama
> Till she went blind.
> Her breath smells bad,
> But she sure can grind.

I fucked your mama
For a solid hour.
Baby came out
Screaming, Black Power.

Elephant and the Baboon
Learning to screw.
Baby came out looking
Like Spiro Agnew.

And the teacher expected me to sit up in class and study poetry after I could run down shit like that. If anybody needed to study poetry, she needed to study mine' (pp. 25-26).

[12]See Hannerz (1969) for a thorough investigation of the mechanisms adopted by ghetto dwellers to reconcile mainstream ideals with the realities of ghetto life.

[13]Labov goes on to say that standard English is, ironically, the 'language' of the Black Power movement:

> In the present period of rising self-consciousness among Negro people, and the assertion of pride in ethnic identity, it would seem that NNE would swiftly come to the fore as a political and social badge of honor. This has not been the case so far, however; northern Negro leaders of all social backgrounds are fundamentally SE speakers, and their concessions to the vernacular are superficial and trivial from a linguistic point of view. Whatever emotional and political value NNE may have, non-standard grammar is marked as the speech form of ignorant and uneducated speakers. Those who oppose white middle-class society with the most radical nationalistic positions are inevitably standard speakers. There is a fundamental contradiction here:
>
> > Those who would like to use the vernacular as a sign of solidarity with the community, find themselves derogating that community by so doing--demonstrating that its leaders are too ignorant to speak correctly. The social values attributed to NNE, therefore, are those appropriate to informal and colloquial communication (1968, II, pp. 218-219).

[14]Malcolm relates the following story by way of example:

> After a Harlem street rally, one of these downtown "leaders" and I were talking when we were approached by a Harlem hustler....he said to me, approximately: "Hey, baby! I dig you holding this all-originals scene at the track...I'm going to lay a vine under the Jew's balls for a dime--got to give you a play...Got the shorts out here

> trying to scuffle up on some bread...Well, my man, I'll get on, got to go peck a little, and cop me some z's--"....
>
> I would never have given it another thought, except that this downtown "leader" was standing, staring after that hustler, looking as if he'd just heard Sanskrit. He asked me what had been said and I told him (p. 310).

[15]I am aware that 'knowing' takes place in many different ways, not the least of which is contextually. One need only look at Eastern philosophy and religion to see the extent to which knowledge is seen to be undefinable or untranslatable. However, I am here using the concept of 'knowing' in a much more limited sense. As a product of Western culture, I need to objectify argot knowledge through some test of the subject's experience with the word and the phenomenon it details.

Chapter Two

DEVELOPMENT OF MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENTS

A. Compilation of the Lexicon.

In the pilot study (Folb, 1968) approximately 330 argot terms were elicited from South Central Los Angeles youths. This ghetto-generated argot formed the basis for the field glossary used in this investigation. It provided a standard against which to measure the responses of the designated informant groups. Since two years had elapsed between the compilation of the original lexicon and the field work for this study, it was necessary to update the lexicon, validate the meanings assigned to the various entries, infuse the lexicon with fresh entries and, finally, construct the glossary to be used.

The first step taken was to review reputedly 'Black' or 'hip' glossaries, other than the one constructed in the pilot project. A wide collection of sources was examined.[1]

In addition, new words or phrases that I heard in the course of my work with Neighborhood Youth Corps (NYC) enrollees were als recorded. Nonetheless, the majority of entries in this expanded list remained those originally collected during the pilot study.

This enlarged lexicon did, however, represent argot gathered from various cities in the United States reflecting a number of subcultures. Since the words and their meanings were to be validated by a Los Angeles 'control group' comprised of youths from South Central, the diversity of input was of interest. It stimulated discussion among the control group informants concerning differences between regional and local word-forms and their meanings; it prompted additional argot words for a particular concept; and, it served to elicit still other terms and meanings through the associations triggered in the minds of the informants reviewing the list.

The number of entries on this composite argot list totaled 550. Each entry noted both primary and secondary meanings.[2] This expanded lexicon was too unwieldy for use in the field; past experience with young informants indicated their inability to concentrate on such a large body of data. A valid, yet simple method of condensing the lengthy list was needed. The experiences and knowledge of Black adult informants living in the South Central area were used for this purpose.[3] (See discussion of informant populations for a more detailed account of their composition.)

Though the primary reason for adult participants was to assist in shortening the lexicon, they were also encouraged to participate in the other aspects of revising the list, namely, redefining terms in accord

with their own usage, adding terms from their own vocabularies and noting dated or seldom-used entries. The basis for retaining an entry at this point was, simply, recognition of that entry and its primary meaning by any two members of the adult resource group. Entries that showed low frequency of usage and those which replicated more frequently used terms were eliminated. As a result, I was able to derive a 220 item 'condensed lexicon' that included updated definitions for older terms, new terms, and terminology that represented a number of ghetto-specific interests and behaviors.

The next step was to administer this condensed version of the lexicon to the youthful control group selected from the large South Central Los Angeles Black ghetto, analogous in age and income level to the youths originally interviewed in the pilot study (see discussion of informant populations for a detailed account of selection procedures and group composition). Their primary task was to update the list in terms of current youthful usage. They also assisted in deleting unknown or little-used terms.

Since the ultimate task of the adult group and the adolescent control group was to contribute to the creation of an updated, representative field glossary, few constraints were imposed on their responses. A majority of the 220 entries reviewed by the adult resource group and the control group were recognized by both groups. Interestingly, there was little disagreement between adults and adolescents over the form of the words or the meanings assigned to them.

The lexicon that finally emerged after the control group's review included 172 entries. Though this list was more manageable it still needed to be condensed for field administration. I had found that informant interest and responsiveness waned after more than ninety minutes. Since a questionnaire was to accompany the field glossary, it was necessary to further limit the glossary. However, to insure the inclusion of significant terms, a number of criteria were used to evaluate entries.

1. Criteria for Inclusion.

   a. Control Group Consensus.

Initially, the sole criterion that was to determine the fate of an entry was whether or not all control group informants knew it. Both my own field experience and my correspondence with others working in the field of non-standard English indicated that such a response level was unrealistic. As Labov pointed out: 'Very few lexical items are one hundred per cent....Remember that the answers to your questions include a lot of mistakes and misunderstandings' (personal communication). The 'mistakes and misunderstandings' were not only conceptual, but environmental in nature. For example, many of the field interviews with control group informants were conducted in community-based recreation centers where the noise factor, the often cramped quarters and the

numerous interruptions increased the possibility of misunderstanding or miscommunication between the informant and myself.

Another factor that worked against securing 100% knowledge of terms from the control group is inherent in the nature of subcultures and the argot they use. As Maurer counseled:

> Don't be disturbed that some informants do not know terms which you have obtained from solid informants in the same sub-culture. Language is an unstable thing on this level [sub-culture], with new terms appearing and even disappearing relatively rapidly....You will seldom get 100% either usage or recognition, by the very nature of sub-cultures' (personal communication).

A third factor that limited the possibility of soliciting 100% knowledge of argot terms was the geographical spread of the Central and South Central Los Angeles Black community and the wide dispersion of control group informants throughout that community. The area within which these informants lived extended over a fifty-six square mile radius.[4] In a study conducted by one of Maurer's students related to the occupational subculture of nurses in the Louisville metropolitan area, he noted:

> Terminology differs from hospital to hospital, with some nurses not recognizing terms used in another hospital several blocks away....If we have this situation within a highly disciplined and organized occupation like nursing, and within a very small geographical area, you can realize how much more disparity you may find in groups like yours (personal communication).

A final factor that made 100% informant knowledge an unrealistic criterion has already been mentioned. As Hannerz (1969) discovered, not all residents are <u>of</u> the ghetto, though they live there. Similarly, not all of the control group informants could be expected to know all of the items reviewed, since a number of them were not part of the so-called 'swinger' or 'hip' element within the youthful population (see section b below for a definition of the 'swinger' or 'hip dude'). The distinction between these two types of ghetto youths will be discussed below. For the moment, it is enough to note the impracticality of 100% response to the lexicon on these grounds alone.

The control group responses tended to numerically sort themselves out. Labov anticipated this natural distribution of responses: 'I think you will find that there is a sharp discontinuity between the items that are generally known and the other items that are not common knowledge' (personal communication). One hundred and twelve terms were known by 75% or more of the control group members. Most of the remaining terms were known by less than 50%. This discontinuity supports Labov's observation and the 112 terms were included.

However, other terms were added according to additional criteria.

b. The 'Hip-Lame' Dimension.

As already suggested, not all ghetto dwellers identify with ghetto-specific modes of behavior or the life style and language implied. Some of the lexical items known to less than a majority of the informants reflected interests and experiences associated with the life style of the 'hip dude,' the adult or youth who has 'been around,' the person Hannerz identifies as 'the swinger.' Whatever he is called, he is the youth in this study who is involved in drinking, gambling, drug use, acquisition of material possessions, fighting, sex, and uses the 'language' that best serves to describe or substantiate those experiences. He is also the youth who, because of his interests and the circumstances of life in the ghetto, often finds himself incarcerated, or at the very least, subject to police harassment, detention and questioning.

There is a widely-held belief--perpetuated by Blacks as well as whites--that all Blacks by definition are 'swingers' or 'hip' people. In fact, there are as many 'lames' (persons who do not engage in the activities described above) in the ghetto as there are 'swingers.' One of the intriguing aspects of certain categories of argot terms is that they tend to separate out 'hip dudes' from both the self-admitted 'lames' and the 'lames' masquerading as 'swingers.' This distinction between the 'hip' and 'lame' argot-user surfaced in the 1968 study. At that time, informants began to distinguish themselves in terms of the kind of argot they knew as well as the number of terms they could identify.

This distinction became apparent within the control group. Here too, there began to be discernible correlations between the presence or absence of certain factors in an individual's background and the degree to which he did or did not know less frequently identified argot.

Since the 'hip-lame' paradigm seemed to be an important factor affecting knowledge of the argot, it was decided to retain entries that showed a high frequency of recognition by 'hip' informants.

c. Spontaneously Repeated Terms.

As indicated, lexical entries were continuously being added, deleted and redefined by the adult resource group and the control group. As new terms, or old terms newly defined, arose in an informant's spontaneous speech, they were administered to subsequent informants. Of these additional items, any which were known by at least 75% of the remaining control group were included in the field glossary.

In addition, argot terms arose during an interview that were overlooked or lost in the course of conversation. However, when the tapes were later heard, some of these bypassed terms had been used by several different informants. I applied Maurer's standard for validating argot, namely, that 'it occur spontaneously three or four times on the tapes or in the interviews' (personal communication). A number of these items were included.

d. Ghetto-specific Meanings.

There were some terms that arose during the compilation and review of the lexicon that appeared in standard reference works, such as the DAS, but displayed a definition unique to the control group. For example, the term to burn someone is found in the DAS. Among its many definitions is the entry: 'to rob, swindle, cheat, or take advantage of another' (1967, p. 77). This approximates, but does not pinpoint, the idiosyncratic manner in which this term is used by 97% of the control group, namely, 'to "steal" a young lady away from another male.' As Maurer indicates: 'the fact that you find the term used or known there [within the subculture] in a sense peculiar to the subculture is justification for including it' (personal communication).

e. Redundant Terms.

A final consideration that was to determine if a term should be included in the field glossary was whether or not it replicated other words and meanings. A number of phenomena were represented by several argot terms. For example, there were approximately twenty-five terms on the 220 item list that described an act which verbally demeaned another person. Some of these synonyms were excluded, even if they were known to more than a majority of the control group. At the same time, it was important that ghetto-specific concerns and behaviors be adequately and variously represented. (See Folb, 1968, Miller, 1958, Hannerz 1969, for an account of lower class/ghetto specific concerns and activities.) Even so, certain topics, as we will see, have disproportionate representation on the list because they are particularly important to ghetto life. (See Chapter Five and Six for an extended discussion of terms and the cultural concerns they reflect.) Undoubtedly, a number of discriminating terms were omitted from the final field glossary. Conversely, some of the entries that were retained did little or no work in distinguishing among the informant groups. There is no foolproof approach to preparing a lexicon for field administration. One can only attempt to validate its terminology and establish some justification for including or excluding terms. It is only after the informant groups have responded that one can begin to evaluate the effectiveness of the preparation.

2. Format of the Field Glossary.

The final field glossary contained 138 entries; 60 of those entries were from the original pilot project. Ten topical categories, reflecting ghetto-specific concerns and activities, were represented in the field glossary.((See Chapter Six for a complete listing and discussion of these categories.) Each entry noted the primary and secondary definitions that had been validated (see Appendix A). Argot terms or phrases that were synonymous in meaning and parallel in structure were entered as one item. For example, the following cluster of terms--ace, ace coon poon, ace boon coon--were grouped together to form a single argot entry,

defining 'a good friend.' This was done only with terms similar in both form and meaning.

For the most part, the field glossary as used was arranged alphabetically. However, new or redefined terms were added at the end as they appeared and were validated. No conscious attempt was made to strategically 'order' the glossary. Because the glossary was a 'working' document, little effort was made to provide scholarly definitions for the terms included. Many argot entries were defined by using colloquial speech or other argot.

Generally speaking, two sets of argot entries appeared in the final field glossary: 1) those terms known and used by a majority of the control group and; 2) those terms linked to the 'hip' life style. The data compiled from the five response groups were evaluated in terms of both levels of recognition and usage.

B. The Questionnaire.

1. The Adult Questionnaire.

The purpose and scope of the adult questionnaire was intentionally limited since the adults were only tangentially involved in the study. The primary purpose of administering a questionnaire at all was to provide substantive data acknowledging the adults as representatives of the South Central community. The questions, therefore, were close-ended, formal and designed to elicit circumscribed information rather than the nuances of attitude, value, or opinion sought from the adolescent questionnaire. Furthermore, the adult informants were asked to fill out these questionnaires prior to the review of the lexicon, since primary attention during the interview was to be given to the review of the lengthy lexicon (see Appendix B).

2. The Adolescent Questionnaire.[5]

The adolescent questionnaire was intended to be a detailed instrument. Unlike the adult form, the questions were constructed with a number of purposes in mind (see Appendix C).

One of the goals of the questionnaire was to establish the informant's 'credentials' for inclusion in a given group. Questions substantiating his age, income level, place of residence, past residence, and schooling were included.

A second category of questions attempted to elicit responses that would disclose objective data, and at the same time, provide subjective commentary indicative of the informant's life style and experiences. These questions deal with the informant's contacts with the police, his police record if any, his association with ghetto-based gangs or Black organizations, his favorite 'hang-outs' and his weekend activities.

A third group of questions was designed to solicit data reflecting the informant's value system. Some of the questions within this category were: 'What school has the reputation for being the toughest? Why?;' 'What school did you like the least (best)? Why?;' 'What's the difference between the East and West side of town?;' 'What do you think the Panthers, US, and the Muslims are trying to do?' The extended commentary that usually constituted an informant's response to these questions not only provided important data concerning his values, attitudes and opinions, but also furnished valuable data for studying the phonological and syntactic properties of Black English. While the latter was beyond the scope of this study, the data should be extremely helpful in later research.

A fourth series of questions was devised to elicit two kinds of linguistic information: 1) the potential influence of peer group interaction on argot knowledge and usage and, 2) the informant's subjective response to argot and its use. The sections in the questionnaire devoted to 'Language Information,' 'Peer Group Associations,' 'Gang Associations,' and 'Arrest Record,' were particularly designed with these two ends in mind.

In addition to its informational function, the questionnaire also served a psychological purpose; since it would be used in the first part of the interview, it became an 'icebreaker' between the informant and myself. With this purpose in mind, the ten areas were arranged so as to move the informant from a rather close-ended, objective answer to a more expansive, open-ended response. Furthermore, in an attempt to keep the total interview context informal, the language in the questionnaire was colloquial and made use of appropriate argot.

The same adolescent form was used for both the control group and the five response groups, though some of the questions were rephrased or omitted, given the particular group being interviewed. The ordering of the questions was not fixed, in order to permit an easy flow of conversation. That is, it was found that certain questions and topics naturally arose at different times in the interview, depending upon the particular informant being questioned.

Above all the questionnaire was designed to be responsive to the uniqueness of the individual informant and, at the same time, an instrument that would elicit as much information about the informant as was possible within the context of a 90 minute interview. As it turned out, the questionnaire furnished invaluable personal and linguistic data that supplemented the information gathered during the field work.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter Two

[1]These sources included: Kochman's Chicago 'Glossary of Slang Terms,' (work in progress); a Louisville, Kentucky glossary of inner-city Black terminology (David Maurer, 1969); the books of Iceberg Slim (1969a/b); Kantrowitz's 'Statesville Names: A Prison Vocabulary', gathered at Statesville penitentiary, Illinois (1959-1962); The Nigger Bible (1967); A Jazz Lexicon (1957); and Lit's Philadelphia-based 'Dictionary of Hip Words' (1968). A number of older sources were also checked. Among the most prominent were: The New Cab Calloway's Hepsters Dictionary: Language of Jive, Cab Calloway (1944); Dan Burley's Original Handbook of Harlem Jive, Dan Burley (1944); Hepcats Jive Talk Dictionary, Lou Shelly, ed. (1945).

[2]A 'primary' definition was the one most often given for a term, either the initial definition in a written glossary, or the first response from an informant for a given stimulus word. A 'secondary' definition was any second or third level of response the term elicited.

[3]I cannot adequately thank the adults who participated in this phase of the study for the patience and humor with which they responded to this task. Their enthusiasm and warmth was sorely needed at this unwieldy juncture in the field work.

[4]Mapping Section, County Engineer Department, County of Los Angeles.

[5]I am indebted to William Labov for the general format of the questionnaire. It is based upon the teen-age questionnaire used by Labov's team in the New York City study (1968).

Chapter Three

THE INFORMANT GROUPS

A. Introduction.

Two classes of informants were used in this study: (1) the adult resource group and the adolescent control group, both of whom were responsible for review and revision of the argot terms used, and (2) five adolescent response groups, from whom responses to the 138 item field glossary were sought.

Since the field glossary was primarily reconstructed from the responses of the control group and would provide the standard of measurement for the five response groups, it was particularly important that the control group be homogeneous. The physical boundaries from which control group informants were selected encompassed a 56 mile radius and roughly approximated one of the geographically largest urban ghettos in the United States. It also included the greatest number of low income Blacks living in Los Angeles County.[1] (See Appendix D for the geographical boundaries.)

Each of the five response groups was to represent a different set of racial, economic and geographic characteristics. The five populations from which response group informants were to be selected were: (1) lower class Blacks from South Central Los Angeles, California (Group A); (2) lower class Blacks from Venice, California (Group B); (3) lower class whites from Lennox, California (Group C); (4) middle class Blacks from the Baldwin Hills-View Park-Winsor Hills area of Los Angeles, California (Group D); and (5) middle class whites from West Los Angeles, California (Group E).

These designated areas were roughly analogous to the district boundaries for five high schools within the County of Los Angeles. These boundaries satisfied the geographical conditions set forth in the hypotheses and allowed selection of response group informants to be made through community-based contacts, and also through high school personnel. (See Appendix D for the geographic boundaries for each of the five response groups.)

In the discussion that follows terms such as, 'sample' and 'informant populations' are used in a purely descriptive manner. As earlier discussion indicated, the tenor of this investigation is exploratory. As such, sophisticated selection techniques, such as random sampling of statistical populations, have been set aside in favor of procedures that are more congruent with the nature of the subject being explored and the philosophy that underlies this inquiry. This is not to say that the choice of informants was whimsical or without structure. Informant selection was subject to a set of criteria in keeping with the subject matter and the hypotheses being tested.

B. Criteria for the Selection of Informants.

1. The Adult Informants.

Since the adults played a valuable but secondary role in this study, the criteria for inclusion in this group were simple: (1) the wherewithal to tolerate a lengthy interview; (2) an income level comparable to that of the control group informant; and (3) residence within the South Central Los Angeles ghetto for at least two years prior to the interview.

No constraints were placed on the age or sex of the adults as was done with the adolescent informants. What was deemed most important was the widest possible input of experience, linguistic and otherwise.

2. The Adolescent Informants.

a. Sex.

There is ample support for the claim that the use of 'deviant' speech is a male-dominated behavior (Wentworth and Flexner, 1967; Lerman, 1967; Labov, 1968; Kochman, 1968; Hannerz, 1969). Even slang is less frequently used by females. As Flexner (1967) points out: 'Most American slang is created and used by males....Women have very little of their own slang...she will learn much of her general slang from him [the man in her life]' (p. xii).

In his study of argot use and subcultural delinquency, Lerman (1967) suggests that 'argot, even more than slang, ought to reveal sizeable sex differences' (p. 215). His findings demonstrated that 'sex differences held for all age groups (10-19), indicating that males are probably dominant in linguistic deviance' (p. 224).

Male-dominated argot usage was also apparent in the Folb study (1968). In that project, both males and females were interviewed. Although some of the females demonstrated considerable facility with the argot, the majority were only moderately aware of argot word-forms and their meanings. Though the female sample for the pilot study was small (twelve), the data pointed in the direction of male-dominated usage and understanding. It was therefore decided to limit the adolescent groups in this study to males.[2]

b. Age.

Argot is most consciously acquired and actively employed and refined during specific adolescent years (15-19). According to Lerman (1967), the earlier years (14-15), seem to be a time of fullest participation in general argot usage, whereas 'late adolescence (16-19),...is...a period of consolidating and expanding particular types of argot knowledge' (p. 224).

Thus, the age range for the present investigation was set at 15-20. This not only accounts for the time of most active argot use among males, but marks a period of conscious and consistent acquisition of terminology and the attendant desire to display one's facility with it.

c. 'Hip-Lame' Representation.

Because the distinction between 'hip' and 'lame' argot users appeared to affect the kind of argot an informant knew, it was considered important to interview youths who potentially represented both classes. The difficulty lay not in identifying 'lame' but 'hip' informants.

Since prison (and the activities that bring one there) has long been recognized as a primary source of argot acquisition (Lerman, 1967; Maurer's listed works; Kantrowitz, 1969; Labov, 1968; et alia), it seemed probable that interviews with young ex-offenders would reveal different categories of argot knowledge than with non-offenders. They certainly promised to be the richest source of 'hip' informants. According to Kochman: 'kids who have "done time" are looked upon within their peer group with respect, as a source of information. They are "cool;" they've "been around"' (personal communication).

Therefore, youths who had arrest records were actively recruited for interviews. Within the middle class groups, where arrest records were less in evidence, youths who demonstrated so-called 'anti-social' or 'delinquent' behavior were included.

d. Length of Residence Within the Community.

It is difficult to determine how much time one needs to establish peer contacts in a given city or community. Some individuals never do. My experience with the pilot project informants indicated that it took, on the average, a year for newly arrived youths from the South and East to plant roots and establish friendships.

To insure that the data in this study would not be adversely affected by limited residence demands, the length of residence within a given community was set at two years. 'Community' in this case referred to the designated geographical areas established for each response group (see Appendix D).

e. Socio-Economic Index.

In large part, the racial composition of the informant groups and the areas from which they were selected were specified by the hypotheses. Though the actual choice of a 'middle-class white community' or a 'lower class Black community, geographically removed from South Central Los

Angeles' was open-ended, it was subject to the constraints of the hypotheses. The question of determining 'social class' was another matter.

In his 1966 study, Labov reviewed the process by which he determined the 'indicators' of social class most relevant to his investigation (occupation, income, education).

> A single indicator, such as occupation or education, might have been used for the social class index. Most of the indicators are closely related; Michael refers to a study of Horwitz and Smith which showed that two separate indicators of class predicted attitudes with roughly equal force in the same direction (p. 212).

If the three indices mentioned above can, in fact, be used independently of one another and still provide a valid measure of social class, it follows that two can be utilized, with one of those two indices playing a primary role in determining class status, and the other a supportive or supplementary role. This was the approach used in this study; the level of income was to be the primary indicator of social class; occupation, a secondary index.

There are two reasons for isolating income as the prime measure of social class in this investigation. One is historical. That is, social class in this country has often been identified with one's financial position. Financial success for a large portion of American society continues to be the mark of social achievement.

This is not only white America's priority, but, more urgently, that of the Black American (Rozak, 1969). Furthermore, for South Central and Venice informants income data was most accessible. There was no lack of information to substantiate their low economic status.[3]

Aside from official records, the questionnaire sought out the income level of informants. Since a poverty level income warrants welfare relief for a 'female head of household,' one of the key questions asked of informants was whether or not their mothers were 'on the County.'

However, assigning other informants to a particular social class on the basis of income alone was untenable. This was particularly true of non-poverty level informants. To supplement the income index of social class, a portion of Kahl's table of 'Social Class Divisions,' was used. The descriptive categories detailed in Table 1 replicate part of the summary found in the Labov study (1966, p. 217). (see Table 1 on p. 41).

The categories, 'working class' and 'lower class' were consolidated to describe those informants I identified as 'lower class.' The two levels of middle class were combined under the rubric of 'middle class.' This simplification of categories allowed for a wider descriptional range of occupational and economic data to be used in evaluating an informant's potential class standing.

TABLE 1.

The Distribution of the Population
Their Occupational Characteristics
According to their Social Class

Class Title	Occupational Characteristics	Percentage of the National Population
V: Upper Class	First rate professional, manager, official or proprietor of a large business	1
IV: Upper Middle Class	Careermen in professions, managerial, official or large business positions	9
III: Lower Middle Class	Semi-professionals, petty businessmen, white collar, foremen and craftsmen	40
II: Working Class	Operatives: Blue collar workers at the mercy of the labor market	40
I: Lower Class	Laborers: Last to be hired and first to be fired. Frequent job shifts	10

Each informant was asked the occupation of his mother and father. Since few of the youths in this study had engaged in an occupation to any extent, the occupation of the principal breadwinner in the home was generally used. In those cases where a youth was clearly 'on his own,' both his occupation and that of the principal adult breadwinner in his family unit were considered.

A final determination of social class, then, was based on a combined assessment of an informant's income level or that of his family's, and his occupation, or the occupation of the main breadwinner in his immediate family.

C. The Informant Groups.

Since all field interviews for this study were being conducted by me, I decided to limit the number of each of the five response groups to twelve, and the control group to thirty-four informants. In order to

secure the necessary numbers of 'qualified' informants for each group, forty-eight youths were ultimately interviewed for control group membership and seventy-three for the response groups.

1. Adult Resource Group.

Twelve adults served as resource persons for initial review of the lexicon. They ranged in age from 22 to 46. Eleven males and one female took part in the review. Since all those who participated were employed at the time in the Los Angeles County Concentrated Employment Program (CEP), they met the Department of Labor poverty criteria.[4] All but one adult informant had lived in the South Central ghetto for more than five years.

2. Control Group.

Two sources were tapped for the thirty-four member control group: (1) the Los Angeles County Neighborhood Youth Corps program (NYC), and (2) Teen Post Incorporated.

a. NYC Program.

The NYC program was established by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. The County of Los Angeles became a sponsor agency in July of 1965. The stated purpose of the County program is 'to give eligible youth a start in breaking out of poverty by providing them with suitable work-training experiences and services' ('County Information and Procedure Manual,' 1965).

At the time of the field work for this study, youths between the ages of 16 to 21 were eligible and the program provided work training for both youths in school and those who had dropped out of school.

One of the target areas from which youths were recruited was South Central Los Angeles. After being screened at a community-based State Service Center, a youth was referred to one of the sponsor agencies participating in the County-wide program.[5] At the County, he was interviewed by a job counselor and 'processed.' That is, he filled out a personal data sheet, underwent a medical examination, had his fingerprints taken and his income eligibility reviewed. Finally, he was placed on a job. The intended length of the training program was six months. However, some of the Los Angeles County enrollees had been with the program two years or more.

The control group informants were selected, in part, from the membership of on-going NYC career planning groups. The enrollment figure for the five groups that were active at the time of the field interviews was approximately 100. Each group contained between twenty to twenty-five participants. Since all the Black NYC enrollees in these groups met the economic and geographic criteria for inclusion in the control group,

selection for interviews was relatively easy. For five consecutive weeks I interviewed all Black males who attended any of the five groups. Fourteen eligible NYC enrollees were selected in this manner.

b. Teen Post Incorporated.

To supplement the NYC population and expand the South Central Los Angeles representation within the control group, youths were recruited directly from the community.

The greater Los Angeles network of community based recreation centers that arose in the wake of the Watts riots are known as Teen Posts. Funded by the Office of Education and directed by local city agencies, these recreation facilities became gathering places for poverty level youngsters who could not afford or could not find outdoor sports facilities and equipment, indoor games, dances, movies, or a place to 'fall into.'

Teen Posts are primarily concentrated in the low income areas of South Central, Central and East Los Angeles, although at the time of the field work, some were located as far west as Venice, and north to the San Fernando Valley. In the Central and South Central area of Los Angeles, there were sixteen active Teen Posts. Of these, two were not suited to the needs of the study; one was a pre-teen center and the other was a youth band post that met infrequently. Of the remaining fourteen posts, twelve were sampled.

Initially, the membership rolls of the respective Teen Posts were to be used to select informants, since they contained some of the necessary eligibility information. However, this proved to have a built-in exclusion factor associated with it, namely, the unwillingness of some of the 'hip' youths to actually join the Teen Post. Ironically, it was the so-called 'street' youth who often made use of the game facilities, such as the pool tables, the ping-pong tables, decks of cards or domino sets. Therefore, both regular members and youths who periodically dropped in from 'off the streets ' were interviewed.

Approximately two and one half months was spent interviewing this group. An attempt was made to select at least three youths from each of the twelve Teen Posts canvassed. Twenty Teen Post habituees finally qualified for inclusion in the control group (see Table 2 below for Control Group eligibility data).

3. The Response Groups.

a. Group A--Lower Class Blacks (South Central Los Angeles).

Of the five response groups, Group A represented the greatest geographic spread. Strict or even approximate adherence to school district boundaries as a way of insuring geographic homogeniety was unrealistic

TABLE 2.

Control Group Eligibility Data

Informant No.	Age	Welfare Assistance	Occupation of Principal Breadwinner				Length of Residence (in years)	Police Record		
			Father	Mother	Self	Other		Stopped/ Questioned	Booked	Incarcerated
1	16	No	Truck Driver				13	No	No	No
2	16	Yes		--None--			5	Yes	No	No
3	16	No	Car Assembler	Domestic			16	Yes	Yes	Placed on Probation
4	17	Yes		--None--			10	Yes	No	No
5	17	Yes		Domestic (Part time)			16	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	17	No	Molder				17	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	17	No	Truck Driver				7	No	No	No
8	17	Yes		Babysitter			10	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	17	Yes		--None--			4	Yes	Yes	No
10	17	Yes		--None--			17	Yes	Yes	Yes
11	17	Yes		--None--			17	Yes	Yes	Yes
12	17	No			NYC Enr. Clerical Aide		17	Yes	Yes	Yes
13	17	No			NYC Enr. Mail Clerk		17	Yes	Yes	Yes
14	17	No	Truck Driver				8	Yes	Yes	Yes
15	17	No	Carpenter				11	Yes	Yes	On Probation

16	18	Yes		--None--	17	Yes	Yes	Overnight
17	18	No	Aircraft Assembler		15	Yes	No	No
18	18	No	Garbage Collector		9	Yes	No	No
19	18	No	Aircraft Assembler		17 1/2	Yes	Yes	Yes
20	18	Yes		--None--	18	Yes	No	No
21	18	No	Aircraft Assembler		6	Yes	No	No
22	18	No	Maintenance		4	Yes	No	No
23	18	No		Domestic	13	Yes	No	Yes
24	19	Yes		--None--	19	Yes	Yes	Yes
25	19	Yes		--None--	9	No	No	No
26	19	No	Maintenance		2	Yes	No	No
27	16			Clerical Aide (MDTA Trng. Prog.)	16	Yes	No	No
28	19			Grandfather Handyman	19	Yes	No	No
29	20	Yes		--None--	20	Yes	No	No
30	20			Machinist Aide	20	Yes	Yes	Yes
31	20	Yes		--None--	20	Yes	Yes	Yes
32	20	No		Train. (CEP) Clerk Prog.	16	Yes	Yes	Yes
33	20	No	Maintenance		6	Yes	Yes	Yes
34	18		Mechanic's Assistant		4	Yes	No	No

for this group. The traditional concept of the 'neighborhood high school,' is meaningless in certain parts of the Black community. This is because of the large number of male high school students who transfer, or are transferred, suspended or expelled from their 'neighborhood' school. It was, therefore, necessary to include a larger geographical area than with the other response groups.(See Appendix D for Group A geographic boundaries.) In this instance, the schools were not approached at all. Two public agencies were utilized: (1) the County NYC program and, (2) the California Youth Authority.

The County NYC program has been discussed above. Once more, the career planning groups were solicited and two youths were selected.

The California Youth Authority (CYA) is the State correctional agency concerned with both the incarceration and the rehabilitation of the juvenile offender in California. After a youth has 'served his time,' in a CYA facility, he is usually placed on parole. This means that he must periodically report to a parole officer who is responsible for his post-institutional rehabilitation. The parolee is assigned to the CYA office nearest his home.

Two South Central CYA parole offices were utilized in the study.[6] Ten subjects were selected from among the young parolees who visited the two CYA offices within the ten day interview period. Prior to their selection, information concerning their age, geographic and economic status was solicited from their parole officer.(See Table 3 for Group A eligibility data.)

b. Group B--Lower Class Blacks (Venice, California)

Since Hypothesis 2 called for a response group comprised of lower class Black youths that were geographically separated from the South Central ghetto, there was some choice of area involved. Although greater Los Angeles has the dubious distinction of including a number of Black ghetto areas,[7] other than South Central, the Black community in Venice was selected for two reasons. First, I had a number of personal and professional contacts in the community that could be approached for informants. Second, the geography and society of the Black community there was of particular interest. Unlike South Central Los Angeles, Black Venice is a compact community with discernible boundary streets that separate it from the larger white community that surrounds it.[8] Because of its small size, there exists a community feeling. A number of the informants I interviewed, though recruited from different sources, knew each other. In addition, the Black ghetto in Venice is adjacent to a low income, 'bohemian-like' white community with which it has social dealings and personal interaction. This is quite different from the physical and psychological isolation one experiences in the South Central ghetto. Of interest was whether or not the apparent differences between the two ghetto communities would visibly affect argot knowledge or usage.

TABLE 3.

Group A Eligibility Data

Informant No.	Age	Welfare Assistance	Occupation of Principal Breadwinner				Length of Residence (in years)	Police Record		
			Father	Mother	Self	Other		Stopped/ Questioned	Booked	Incarcerated
1	16	Yes		--None--			11	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	16	Yes		--None--			16	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	16	Yes		--None--			16	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	16	No	Truck Driver				14	Yes	No	No
5	17	No		Waitress			10	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	17	No	Truck Driver				17	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	17	No		Domestic			17	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	18	No		Domestic			11	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	19	Yes		--None--			16	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	19					Brother Kennelman	17	Yes	Yes	Yes
11	20		Delivery Man				13	Yes	Yes	Yes
12	17	Yes		--None--			7 1/2	Yes	No	No

Informants for Group B were selected from the: (1) Venice NYC program, (2) Venice continuation school, and (3) Venice Service Center.

The Venice NYC program is administered primarily through United Way, though the Los Angeles City Schools also participate. Much smaller in scope and number than the Los Angeles County model, it exclusively serves the low income communities in Venice. Its economic guidelines and objectives are the same as those described for the County of Los Angeles.

At the time of the field work, only six Black males were available for interview. Five of these were eligible for Group B. To supplement this group, students from the Venice continuation school were approached for interviews.

The primary objective of the Venice continuation school, which is housed on the Venice High School campus, is to provide a continuing high school education for eligible youths who are unable or unwilling to attend the traditional high school. Venice continuation school gathers its student population from a wide geographical area: Venice proper, West Los Angeles, the surrounding beach cities, and parts of the North San Fernando Valley. Again, because of the small Black male enrollment, all those attending school during the two weeks of interviews were approached. This produced six informants who met the criteria for selection.

In addition, informants were sought from the Venice Service Center. The Center is a community operation designed to provide job interviews and referrals to the underemployed and unskilled of Venice. Though its prime target population are adults, teen-agers are sometimes referred to the Center for assistance. Only those teen-age Black males who passed through the Center the day I had arranged to be there were interviewed; of these one was selected.

Although no specific attempt was made to recruit informants with a police record, as in the case of Group A, a large proportion of Venice Black youths had had some contact with the law. Of the twelve youths who qualified for inclusion in Group B, five had 'served time' in a correctional facility; all but one had been detained by the police and subjected to some manner of questioning or search. (See Table 4 for Group B eligibility data.)

c. Group C--Lower Class Whites (Lennox, California).

Hypothesis 1 required that the lower class white group used in this study live in close geographical proximity to the South Central ghetto. There were two possible choices: (1) the city of South Gate, immediately east of South Central, or (2) the unincorporated enclave of Lennox, west of South Central and separated from the Black ghetto by the city of Inglewood. Lennox was finally selected (see Appendix D).

TABLE 4.

Group B Eligibility Data

Informant No.	Age	Welfare Assistance	Occupation of Principal Breadwinner				Length of Residence (in years)	Police Record		
			Father	Mother	Self	Other		Stopped/ Questioned	Booked	Incarcerated
1	17	Yes	--None--				17	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	16	No	Car Washer/ Cleaner				16	Yes	No	No
3	16	Yes		Domestic			16	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	16	No		Domestic			14	Yes	No	No
5	16	No				Grandmother Domestic	16	Yes	Yes	No
6	16	No	Mechanic				10	Yes	Yes	On probation
7	17	No		Teacher's Aide (MDTA Prog.)			12	No	No	No
8	17	No	Truck Driver				13	Yes	No	No
9	17	No				Grandmother Domestic	17	Yes	No	No
10	17	No	Construction				17	Yes	Yes	Yes
11	17	No		Nurse's Aide (MDTA Prog.)			11	Yes	No	No
12	20	No		Domestic			10	Yes	Yes	Yes

Like Venice, Lennox is a small community whose youth demonstrate a sense of identification with the area.[9] Furthermore, Lennox is overwhelmingly white,[10] and largely low income working class.[11] Many of its residents depend upon Los Angeles International Airport with its ancilliary air transport services and industries for their livelihood. Inglewood stands as a 'buffer' community between the vast South Central ghetto and Lennox, and is itself becoming an integrated city. Of particular interest is the degree to which lower class Black and white youths, many of whom share similar interests and experiences, but live in segregated communities, interact with each other linguistically or otherwise.

The Lennox High School work experience program and the regional CYA office provided the informants for Group C. All male parolees from Lennox were referred for interview. Four CYA youths qualified for inclusion in Group C.

The Lennox High School work experience counselor provided the majority of Group C informants. He requested that low income youths, interested in a 'one day job,' sign up for an interview at the Lennox Public Library where I was located. During the week of interviewing, fifteen youths came by. Eight were finally selected for inclusion in Group C (see Table 5).

d. Group D--Middle Class Blacks (Baldwin Hills/View Park/ Winsor Hills)

Taken together, the district boundaries for Crenshaw and Dorsey High Schools encompass a large portion of the middle class Blacks in Los Angeles.[12] In order to get the widest range of representation from this area, students and graduates from both high schools were interviewed. The head counselors from the two schools were contacted, told of the criteria, and asked to refer students who were in the high school or had recently graduated, but were still living in the area.[13] Twenty students were interviewed; fourteen qualified; twelve were selected (see Table 6).

Of the twelve, two youths were involved in a special permit program. That is, they lived within the Dorsey-Crenshaw High School districts, but attended class at University High School, some distance west. It was decided to include them in the Group D population, for two reasons: (1) although they attended a school geographically removed from their neighborhood, most of their friends, recreation and social contacts were in their own community, and (2) it would be of interest to see if attendance at a predominantly white, middle class school--the very school from which Group E would be selected--would have any observable effect on the responses of these two subjects.

Some attempt was made to identify middle-class Black youths who displayed any kind of so-called 'anti-social' or 'delinquent' behavior in school. This proved difficult since agreement on what constituted disruptive or anti-social behavior varied from teacher to teacher.

TABLE 5.

Group C Eligibility Data

Informant No.	Age	Welfare Assistance	Occupation of Principal Breadwinner				Length of Residence (in years)	Police Record		
			Father	Mother	Self	Other		Stopped/ Questioned	Booked	Incarcerated
1	16	No	Grinder of Airplane Parts				9	Yes	No	No
2	16	No		Waitress			3	Yes	No	No
3	17	No		Waitress			2	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	17	No	Shipping Clk				4 1/2	Yes	No	No
5	17-1/2	No	Tailor in Factory				5 1/2	No	No	No
6	18	No	Aircraft Assembler				10	Yes	No	No
7	18	No	Tree Trimmer				11	No	No	No
8	18	No				Uncle Truck Driver	10	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	18	No	Maintenance				10	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	19	No			Deliveryman		3	Yes	Yes	Yes
11	16	No	TV Repairman's Ass't				7	Yes	No	No
12	16	No	Tailor in Factory				16	Yes	No	No

TABLE 6.

Group D Eligibility Data

Informant No.	Age	Welfare Assistance	Occupation of Principal Breadwinner				Length of Residence (in years)	Police Record		
			Father	Mother	Self	Other		Stopped/ Questioned	Booked	Incarcerated
1	15	No		Teacher			3	No	No	No
2	16	No	Air Force Colonel	--None--			2	No	No	No
3	16	No	Lawyer				16	Yes	Yes (Charge dropped)	No
4	16	1/2 No	Information Officer(Dept. of Labor)				2	No	No	No
5	17	No	Engineer				16	Yes	No	No
6	17	No	Minister				17	Yes	No	No
7	17	No		School Psychologist			8 1/2	No	No	No
8	17	No	Vice Pres. Funeral Home				12	No	No	No
9	17	No	Real Estate Salesman				6	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	18	No	Licensed Realtor				7	Yes	No	No
11	18	No	High School Vice Principal				5	Yes	No	No
12	18	No	Chemist				6	Yes	No	No

However, an attempt was made to interview identified leaders of campus protest movements or members of Black student organizations. This proved to be more successful. This was the closest I came to Black middle-class 'law-breakers.' At the time of the field interviews, the local CYA office had no youths from the district on parole.

e. Group E--Middle-Class Whites (West Los Angeles).

The district represented by the University High School boundaries is roughly the white economic and residential equivalent of the Baldwin Hills-View Park-Winsor Hills area.[14] Located near the University of California at Los Angeles, the high school district encompasses not only the wealthy areas of Bel Air and Brentwood, but the middle and low middle class area south of Wilshire Boulevard and west of Sawtelle Boulevard (see Appendix D for boundaries).

A somewhat different selection procedure was initiated through University High School. During summer school, the interview period for this group, notice was placed in the daily bulletin describing a 'UCLA language survey' that was to be conducted by a graduate student from the university. Those interested in a paid interview were to sign up in the main office.

The information requested on the sign-up sheet included a statement of the occupation of both the mother and father of the student. In this way some degree of pre-screening, on the basis of occupation, was possible. In all, 123 students signed up. A table of random numbers was used for the selection of these informants. Seventeen students were interviewed; eleven met the criteria for eligibility; seven were selected for inclusion in Group E.

As in the case of the middle-class Black youths, it was somewhat difficult to secure so-called 'delinquent' subjects from the University High School population. Finally, ten names were randomly selected from the boys' vice principal's list of so-called 'incorrigibles.' Five youths were interviewed and all met the criteria for inclusion in Group E (see Table 7).

TABLE 7.

Group E Eligibility Data

Informant No.	Age	Welfare Assistance	Occupation of Principal Breadwinner				Length of Residence (in years)	Police Record		
			Father	Mother	Self	Other		Stopped/ Questioned	Booked	Incarcerated
1	15 1/2	No	Lawyer				15 1/2	No	No	No
2	16	No	Teacher				9	Yes	Yes	Overnight
3	16 1/2	No	Owner Export/Import Co.				8 1/2	No	No	No
4	17	No	Engineer				11	No	No	No
5	17	No	Public Relations Lockheed Aircraft				6	No	No	No
6	17	No	Production Mgr. Plastics				4	Yes	Yes	4 days
7	17	No	Self-employed General Contractor				7	No	No	No
8	17	No	Freelance TV Writer				3 1/2	Yes	No	No
9	17 1/2	No	Gen. Mgr.-Owner Steel Plant				3 1/2	No	No	No
10	17 1/2	No	Mgr. New Car Sales				6	Yes	Yes	3 days
11	18	No	Teacher				7	Yes	Yes	1 day
12	18	No		Owner-Computer Matchmaker Co.			4	Yes	Yes	Probation

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 3

[1]Based upon data collected by the Employment Opportunities Division, Department of Personnel, County of Los Angeles.

[2]With the rise of Women's Liberation, this traditional lack of slang usage and its creation by women may change.

[3]Every public agency poverty program, such as the Neighborhood Youth Corps program from which a number of South Central Los Angeles and Venice informants were selected, has available the current Department of Labor 'poverty guidelines' against which to evaluate potential enrollees.

[4]Office of Employment Opportunity (Department of Labor), 'Revised OEO Income Poverty Guidelines,' November 21, 1969.

[5]At the time of the field work for this study, the five out-of-school sponsor agencies were: the County of Los Angeles, the City of Los Angeles, the State of California, United Way and the Youth Training and Employment Project (East Los Angeles) coupled with the Skill Training and Employment Project (South Central Los Angeles).

[6]I owe a particular note of thanks to both Joe Price and Walt Wright, the directors of the CYA offices. Without their help, the interviews would not have been possible.

[7]There are Black ghetto communities in Long Beach, Wilmington, South Gate, Pasadena and Pacoima.

[8]At the time of this study there was general agreement among the youths interviewed that the boundaries roughly approximated: Electric Avenue on the west, California on the south, Lincoln Boulevard on the east, and Rose Avenue on the north (see Appendix D).

[9]One of the reoccurring topics in the Group C interviews was 'the fight' that took place between Lennox youths and those from the neighboring city of Hawthorne. The dispute started over territorial rights at the Lennox Park.

[10]Based upon 1970 census figures reported in the Southern California Region Information Study, No. 5 ('Characteristics of Cities and Unincorporated Places').

[11]Based upon income figures compiled and presented to the County of Los Angeles by the Lennox School District in their request for funds under Title VI of the Emergency Employment Act (1971).

[12]Figures are based upon the: (1) 'Racial and Ethnic Survey' (Fall, 1969) of Los Angeles City Schools conducted under the auspices of the State Department of Education, and (2) 1970 census figures reported in Southern California Regional Information Study, No. 6 ('Population and Housing Data, City of Los Angeles, First Count 1970-1971').

[13]Since this segment of the interviewing took place just as summer vacation began, college youths were home and available.

[14]See footnote 12 above.

Chapter Four

COLLECTION OF DATA

A. Elicitation Environment.

'Argot, like other slang, is primarily a type of spoken language, the speech of intimate and expressive conversation' (Lerman, 1967, p. 213). In describing the context in which argot is likely to flourish, Lerman is also identifying an important methodological consideration in this study, that is, the creation of a physical and psychological environment that is 'hospitable' to the elicitation of argot and argot-related information.

Details of the settings where the interviews took place are provided in order to reveal whatever 'noise' might be in the data. Furthermore, since the setting is so important for studies of this kind, my own experiences may prove of interest for others in the collection of such data.

In terms of the field work for this paper, a hospitable environment was one that was private, more or less informal, and as unrelated to the identified 'establishment' (e.g., the schools, the CYA, the NYC program, etc.) as possible. It was also an environment in which the mood between the informant and myself was easy and relatively open. At least, this was the ideal being sought. Sometimes, one or more of the elements were literally or psychologically unobtainable. Yet, remarkably few interviews were adversely affected. In retrospect, it seems as if a number of conscious and unconscious moves could be identified as contributing to a generally successful field experience.

1. The Control Group.

a. The Teen Post.

One of the most sensitive problems that needed to be confronted, particularly in the low income ghetto, was the instinctive distrust and hostility directed at me, the 'outsider.' I was white, I was a female and I was asking questions. The description fits any number of white 'intruders,' including social case workers, probation officers, teachers, or the police. Though I had personal and professional friends living in the South Central area, that did not count for much. Leibow acknowledges that all whites are always outsiders. 'I used to play with the idea that maybe I wasn't as much of an outsider as I thought. Other events...have disabused me of this particular touch of vanity' (1967, p. ix). This was stated by someone in intimate, daily contact with a small group of Black street corner men and women for over a year. Unlike Leibow or Hannerz, who lived within walking distance of the ghetto neighborhood he worked in, I came to South Central Los Angeles for specific interviews,

spent some part of each day there for a period of less than six months, and ultimately left the area to interview another informant group in another part of the County.

My 'intruder' status coupled with the transitory nature of my visits demanded, I felt, the greatest degree of honesty and openness I could manage in communicating to others who I was, what I was doing, and why. This meant reviewing for whomever was interested or asked, my four years with the NYC program which had generated my interest in argot. What Hannerz noted in his own study was also applicable to mine:

> I could not promise that my research would benefit their community much. I could only try to make life in the community more understandable to other outsiders and not to cause the neighborhood people any inconvenience by identifying them in writing' (1969, p. 205).

In large part, my field contacts in the South Central area were with Teen Post directors or their assistants.[1] Some of the directors knew vaguely about my study. Most had no idea what I was doing.

While some of the directors were wary--they wanted to know beforehand what 'was in it' for the youths involved--and others chided me for doing another 'ghetto study,' they were generally cooperative and increasingly interested as I explained my own interest, the purpose of my study, and my intention to pay the youths for their time.[2]

Since few of the post directors informed youths of my visits, I confronted a variety of responses when I walked into any given Teen Post. Some youths were openly suspicious; others ignored me. After some time had passed, some of the teen-age males came by to check me out and 'run down their line.'

The younger children, spotting the tape recorder slung conspicuously over my shoulder, demanded to know what it was. It gave me my first opportunity to let those around me know who I was and why I was there. This was in line with Hannerz' stated practice of making 'my reasons for being there clear as soon as a convenient opportunity appeared' (1969, p. 204).

Depending upon time, circumstances and other commitments, the post director and myself discussed my study--my reasons for doing it and their feelings about my doing it. In a very important way, the director was passing judgment on my person, not on the worth of my research.

In many instances, I sat around the Teen Post talking with the director, his assistant or a variety of youths until a sufficient number of potential informants gathered. Usually, this was some time in the evening, when the older youths came by to shoot pool or play cards or ping-pong. Though curiosity over my presence continued throughout my stay, the guardedness that initially greeted me usually disappeared. Frequently, I played dominoes or ping-pong or shot pool. My dress was

informal--usually blue jeans, a sweat shirt, and sandals. The casualness of my dress was not so much an effort 'not to look like those whites who are only in the ghetto "on business"' (Hannerz, 1969, p. 206), though this was undoubtedly operating, but as a practical response to the conditions under which the field interviews took place. Taken together, my participation in games, my conversations with post youths and personnel, and my informality of dress relaxed me and those around me.

In discussing the impact of one's sex on field work, particularly in the ghetto where 'so much of...life is segregated along sex lines,' Hannerz noted: 'The sex role is an ascribed one, and the field worker may not be able to do much about its effects on his relationships in the field' (1969, p. 209).

Trying to gauge, in advance, the effects of my sex on the field interviews was difficult. My experiences with youths in the NYC program, though generally positive, were of little help. The Teen Post youth was being met in his own neighborhood--on his own terms. Whatever concern I had about possible hostility or resistance to me or the interview never materialized.

In looking back, at least two factors worked in my favor. For one, the informants knew in advance of the interview that they would be paid. Secondly, though there were altercations and disagreements between youths and the director at the post on occasion, there was also a recognition on the part of the youths that the director was concerned about the welfare of his post. Therefore, the tacit approval of the director meant that I was provisionally 'acceptable' to the potential informants.

However, the factors that figured most prominently in the success of the interviews were, in fact, my sex and the informant curiosity about me and my study.

The art of 'the rap'--'the initial verbal and non-verbal phase of a male-female relation'--(Kochman, 1970, p. 7) is a vital ingredient in the daily exchanges between Black males and females. It is a most practical cultural mechanism 'which potentially makes a woman approachable to every Black man.' And, given the verbal strategies available to her allows the Black woman 'to avoid unwanted persistence through the effective utilization of a variety of verbal and non-verbal "put downs,"' if she so chooses (Kochman, 1970, p. 7).

Unfortunately, 'the rap' is a cultural form that is often misread and misunderstood outside the Black community. If Kochman is correct, white mainstream American males do not use the same approach. Therefore, white mainstream females are ignorant of it and often insulted, frightened, or both, when confronted with the 'verbal hustle' of the Black male.

Some years ago, when I first started conducting group meetings with NYC enrollees, a young Black male spent the better part of the three hour session 'running his line down' to me. At the end of the session, I

asked him why he had been so persistent if, as it appeared, he had no intention of following through with his 'hustle.' His reply: 'Just practicing little chick, just practicing. Since that time, I have witnessed a number of Black males 'in training,' as it were. As Kochman points out: 'Even when he [the Black male] is not serious about pursuing a relationship he will "rap" to sharpen his line, his wit, or as one informant remarked, "to deposit his image"' (1970, p. 8).

Thus, it was no surprise that a number of the young males I interviewed were particularly cooperative when asked to be interviewed by a 'young lady' (a general term applied to any eligible female), and spent a large part of the interview 'depositing their image.' In many cases, the youths interviewed indicated that they would not have undergone the same interview with a male field-worker, Black or white. Whether this was more of the 'rap' or a genuine admission, I feel that being female was an asset rather than a liability in this phase of my field work.

Finally, curiosity about my person and my study seemed to favorably dispose youths toward me. Since few, if any of the youths interviewed, knew what a 'sociolinguist' did or what 'argot' or 'slang' really was, I needed to 'break it down' (explain it). My explanation was to select a few of the argot terms known to be used in a particular manner in the Black ghetto, and indicate how the same terms were used differently by whites or Chicanos, for example. In many cases, informants asked why a white woman was interested in Black language. My reply was to say that I thought the lexicon was particularly expressive and that it might show other people, outside the ghetto, not only the richness of the argot, but also how different groups of teenagers were related or not related through the argot terms they used.

My expressed interest, it would seem, peaked informant interest and pride in the use of argot. Most Black youths I interviewed were still burdened with a negative image of their speech, as the questionnaire revealed. However, much of that negativism receded during the interview as a young male would 'high sign' (show off) his knowledge of the argot. Even relatively quiet, detached youths would volunteer new terms and additional meanings for words known to them.

The actual physical conditions under which Teen Post interviews were conducted often lacked privacy, but possessed extraordinary informality. In many instances, Teen Posts were housed in large or small store fronts, reconverted rooms in ghetto housing projects, or, in one instance, adjacent to a church whose facilities were used by the director. Where 'office space' existed, its proximity to the recreation hall was such that all activities and their sounds could be heard. Constant noise from basketball games, record players, ping-pong games and general conversation was the backdrop for a number of the interviews. Furthermore, the 'interview room' was in line for periodic visits from staff and curious youngsters. For the most part, these intrusions did not adversely affect the interviews. The taped records of those interviews, however, leave something to be desired acoustically.

There were some Teen Posts that were literally without a room, alcove or corner for conducting an interview. In those situations, informants were picked up or asked to come to the T-N Teen Post on West Adams Boulevard. This particular post had access to the church and its facilities mentioned above.[3]

Despite the real and imagined problems of interviewing at the Teen Post centers, these exchanges were some of the most interesting and personally enjoyable for me.

b. NYC.

The same basic problems of winning trust and alleviating suspicion prevailed with the NYC informants, despite the fact that most of the interviews were conducted at one Los Angeles County site or another. In this instance, however, establishing my 'credentials' was somewhat easier than with the Teen Post population, since I was a familiar face to most of the youths interviewed. Some of the soon-to-be informants had previously worked with me in the NYC program and the 'grapevine' had already told them about my study. Others, I had met or talked with as they waited to see their counselor. At one time or another, I had participated in most of their career planning groups. This familiarity seemed to ease the way for an open-ended interview.

The question of securing a physically 'hospitable environment ' presented some problems different from those experienced at the Teen Posts. For one thing, it was impossible to separate out the County interview facilities from the 'establishment' image. In most cases, I interviewed youths at their work sites. These included such 'intimate' County structures as General Hospital, Juvenile Hall, the new Hall of Records and the central Hall of Administration. I rationalized that however representative of the establishment the work sites were, they did, at the very most, offer a familiar environment to the enrollee.

Though scheduling rooms at these locations was a combination of luck and bluff, they did prove to be quite private--if not always intimate in size. I hoped that some of the same positive reinforcements operating in the Teen Post context--the paid interview, the enjoyment of the 'rap,' curiosity, and, most importantly, identification of me as a familiar and acceptable person--would in some measure compensate for the conditions of the physical environment. Generally speaking, this proved to be true. Once the interview started, the physical surroundings seemed relatively unimportant. For a few informants, the immediate environment made so little difference that they continued to carry on some of their daily activities, such as, attempting to 'score' (get some drugs or marijuana from me) or to sell a variety of drugs.

2. The Response Groups.

a. Group A.

A majority of the interviews conducted with Group A informants were held at the two California Youth Authority centers mentioned above. The 85th and Broadway building was relatively small. It housed the CYA offices and meeting rooms downstairs, and the owner's law offices upstairs. Youths wandered in and out of the waiting room and, sometimes, into the office of the 'p.o.' (parole officer) looking for someone to 'rap' to or 'hit up' for some money. Others waited for their scheduled meeting with their parole officers. While I was there, some of the parole officers had group sessions with a number of their wards. For the most part, the atmosphere was relaxed. Though the surroundings spoke of the 'establishment,' they did so in muted tones.

The Central Avenue CYA in Watts housed not only parole offices, but a continuation school and recreation center. Because of the school-recreation complex, it seemed less like a parole office and more like a Teen Post. The establishment overtones were even less in evidence than at the 85th and Broadway CYA. In both centers, the surroundings made available to me were informal, yet private and comfortable.

Again, I was an unfamiliar figure to the youths at both CYA offices and had to initially depend on whatever good will and trust prevailed between the agency and the ward in order to gain some tentative acceptance of myself and my project. Like the Teen Post directors, the parole officers were interested in what I was doing.

Of the groups I sampled and the agencies I drew informants from, the CYA youths presented the most difficult task in terms of winning trust. Not only was I an unknown 'outsider,' but I was also being sanctioned by representatives of an agency that, however concerned with the youths' welfare, still represented 'the Man.' And, in this particular case, 'the Man' had direct power to send a youth back to a correctional facility for violation of his parole.

It was specially important to establish my identity with these youths, independent of the agency. To that end, I spent a good deal of time prior to the actual interview just 'rapping.' My intention was to assure the young informant that I was there to 'do my own thing,' not to pass along information to his p.o. or pass moral judgment on the nature of his activities. Though the non-judgmental character of the interview process was discussed with all informants, it seemed particularly pertinent with this group.

My concern was not unwarranted. Some of the CYA youths would test the sincerity of my claim by making mention of some illegal or anti-parole activity they were presently engaged in. I assume that I tested out since the interviews, from that point on, were generally open-ended, with youths freely discussing their 'sub rosa' activities, even in the presence of the tape recorder.

The interview conditions that prevailed with the NYC youths being considered for Group A were, in all ways, analogous to those discussed with regard to the NYC control group participants.

b. Group B.

Though the three agencies tapped for this population sample were all public service operations, their institutional flavor was much less apparent than in the case of the huge County complex, with one exception.

The Venice NYC program administered by United Way was small, locally-based and quite personal. One man[4] coordinated the entire program. All grievances, placements, and work counseling sessions were handled through him. All the youths participating in the program knew him and identified him as the NYC coordinator. After talking to me at some length about the nature of my investigation, he put me in touch with eligible enrollees.

In all cases, I interviewed Venice NYC enrollees at the work site. Unlike the impersonal and sometimes intimidating circumstances found in a Los Angeles County department, these work sites were small, community-based projects. The two I visited were a child day care center and a neighborhood family service center. Both centers were relaxed and informal.

The interviews conducted at the Venice Continuation School were also informal. Prior to the actual interviews, I spent a few days sitting in on the classes and just 'hanging around' the area. Because of the relaxed nature of the instruction, the work schedule, and the classroom, students readily accepted my presence. Some of them assumed I was a teacher or teacher's aide and would, periodically, ask me questions about their lessons. I had sufficient opportunity to talk with a variety of students and tell them what I was doing.

The prime difficulty at the school was finding a place to conduct interviews. The two classrooms were in continuous use and the 'teachers' room' was nothing more than a section of one classroom that had been partitioned off from the main study area. Since the weather was pleasant, it was decided to hold the interviews on the lawn, adjacent to the classrooms.

The few interviews at the Venice Service Center were conducted under, perhaps, the most inhospitable conditions occurring in the field work. The desk of an absent work counselor was made available to me. Though the desk was in an alcove, the lack of partitioning meant that noises intruded upon the interviews. In addition, the few young men I interviewed at the center had no real contacts there nor did they know me. They were there to find work. No intermediary facilitated the interview. It was the center's receptionist who referred seemingly 'eligible' individuals to my desk. Since the youths had no idea of who I was, or what I was doing, considerable time was spent explaining my study and myself.

No one refused to cooperate. In this case, the money was undoubtedly the primary reason for staying for an interview. Once the interviews began, the nature of the questions being asked and the type of material being reviewed helped as much as anything else to put the informant at his ease.

c. Group C.

Of the five response groups, the Lennox informants presented the fewest strategical problems. Contacts were made through the Lennox High School work experience office and the local CYA parole officer.

The work counselor at the high school was extremely cooperative in referring youths to me. Since he had spent considerable time finding jobs for many of them, he was known to the youngsters who came in. The interview was described by him as a 'work assignment.' He allowed me to fill in the details when the student came by to sign up.

Since Lennox school facilities could not be used for the interviews,[5] a central meeting place needed to be found. This turned out to be the Lennox County Library whose facilities were accessible to me because of my employment with the County personnel department. The library, besides having an intimate, almost small-town atmosphere, had a particularly suitable back room for conducting interviews. It was also within walking distance of the high school. It was here also that the Lennox parole officer referred his wards.

As already described, one of the prime obstacles I had to overcome in relating to Black youths, particularly ghetto teen-agers, was my race. I did not face this problem with either the lower class or middle class white subjects. Of greater interest and concern to them was the study itself. Much of what I had said to the Black youths was repeated to them, with greater emphasis being placed on the comparative nature of the argot usage. Before the actual interview started, most of the youths and I had talked about a number of data-related areas. By the time the interview proper began, most of the white youths in both groups had accepted me and what I was about.

d. Group D.

Few logistic or psychological problems arose with this group of middle class youths. A personal friend,[6] working in the Compton-Willowbrook Model Neighborhood program, put me in touch with the director of the Crenshaw Youth Studies Counseling Service, a community crisis counseling center. In turn, the director referred me to those counselors at Dorsey and Crenshaw High Schools that he felt were particularly sensitive and attuned to the students.

The four counselors with whom I talked were cooperative, and particularly probing. Like the Teen Post directors, they were keenly interested in my motivation for conducting such a study and in the welfare of their students.

The informants themselves demonstrated little initial uneasiness or distrust in regard to me or my project. Rather, there was a genuine curiosity about my study, my schooling and my work at the County. A great deal of time was spent discussing Black student activities and organizations and some of the current events at their schools.[7]

The physical environment for the interviews was generally comfortable and informal. All interviews with this group were conducted at the Youth Counseling Center in an office or room that allowed for considerable privacy.[8]

e. Group E.

Of the five response groups, Group E was the most accessible to me. There was little resistance to me or the work I was doing. For the most part, these youths were curious, but somewhat detached. They were much more attuned to discussions that focused on the Viet Nam war, ecology, drugs, or other topics often associated with the so-called white youth culture in this country.

There was a comfortable, informal atmosphere that prevailed throughout the interviews, even though the adult school counselor's office in which the interviews took place was close and somewhat noisy from ringing telephones. Though these informants had been more or less randomly selected, many recognized each other and would exchange a few words as they passed each other in or out of the office.

B. Administration of the Interview.

As mentioned, the interview format used was essentially the same with both the control group informants and the response groups. The questionnaire was administered first; then responses to the field glossary were solicited and recorded. Because of the nature of the subject matter being investigated, all interviews were administered orally in a face-to-face situation. Of necessity, all interviews were tape recorded to allow for later analysis of data.

All interviews were recorded on a Uher 4000 Report-L portable recorder. A multidirectional hand microphone was used. In order to minimize the need to turn over tapes and interrupt the interview, most sessions were recorded at 15/16 speed. This insured approximately ninety minutes of playing time on each side of a five inch reel--the average length of an interview.

Though the interview environments differed radically, the use of the questionnaire and the field glossary provided a consistent form and structure for each interview. Since all sessions were being recorded on tape, the emphasis in the interview was on interpersonal contact and exchange rather than on note-taking.

Immediately prior to the interview, I encouraged the participant to ask any questions he might have about the interview in general, or anything that came to mind. It was at this time that I specified the amount of money he would receive and the approximate length of the interview. Early in my field work I discovered, through an unfortunate confusion of information, that you cannot leave the explanation of informant fees until the end of an interview or in the hands of another individual.[9] Once these conditions were accepted by the informant, I began the interview proper.

From the outset, I had decided to make the tape recorder an obvious part of the interview procedure. Though some field workers who have collected data on Black English have gone to extraordinary lengths to conceal their recording equipment (Loman, 1967), the nature of my study, the kind of data I was trying to elicit and my past experience precluded such secrecy. The 'hospitable environment' I hoped to evoke ran the risk of being undermined if I had to worry about concealed equipment. In addition, I felt the informant had a right to know he was being recorded, particularly because some questions probed sensitive areas of personal behavior, such as drug use, criminal activities, sex, political involvements, etc.

At the beginning of the interview, therefore, I explained to each informant the reasons for tape recording data and its confidential nature. That is, most of the note-taking would be done when I later listened to the tapes, that others who would hear these tapes would be concerned primarily with how the informant spoke rather than with what he said, and, finally, that the tapes were private documents, not for the entertainment or amusement of others.

Surprisingly few of the informants indicated open discomfort in the presence of the recorder. A few asked me to turn it off at some point when particularly personal or incriminating information was being discussed. Others, periodically glanced at it. On the whole, its open presence did not observably inhibit the exchange of information or the lively tone of most of the interviews.

Having gained the informant's permission to use the recorder, I introduced onto each tape, my name, the date of the interview and the informant's name.[10]

1. The Questionnaire.

Although the questionnaire was divided into topical categories and designed to elicit progressively more detailed and subjective information, it was also intended to be responsive to the uniqueness of the individual informant. Therefore, after discussing vital statistics and general residence and family information, I allowed the informant to generally determine the direction of the interview. That is not to imply that I did not ask the questions I had developed, only that they were asked as the informant naturally moved into a subject area.

The questionnaire had originally been designed with the South Central youth in mind. As suggested above, some of the phrasing was colloquial and in the direction of Black English. However the basic data being sought were generally applicable to all groups, although some questions were rephrased for the different groups. Questions that were inappropriate to the background or experiences of a given group were omitted.[11]

Though the tone in which I asked informants questions gave little indication of my feelings about a particular subject, some informants attempted to figure out my views. With some youths it was quite apparent. The question: 'do you smoke "weed" (marijuana) or "drop" (take) pills,' was an interesting case in point. Given the pressures exerted by his peer group to conform to the tastes or fashions of the time, and the fact of my having asked it, an informant was reluctant to answer this question in the negative. I would get responses such as, 'I've tried it (marijuana), but don't like it;' or 'pills is for fools, they make you mean, man;' or 'lots of my friends do, but I'm not interested.' The variety of responses, particularly in relation to drug use, reflected a need to be 'hip' or to be 'with it.' Few youths openly admitted fear or genuine disinterest in the use of either drugs or marijuana. As one particularly candid youth put it: 'The first question someone you meet asks you is whether you "turn on," and it's hard to say no.'

In some circumstances, I felt that the need to impress me outright was as much in evidence as the youth's need to figure out what I thought was 'hip.' Undoubtedly, the fact that I was studying argot or, as most youths understood it, 'hip' words, precipitated some youths' needs to appear 'super cool.'

What was important in administering the questionnaire was whether or not to challenge a particular youth on the degree to which he had embellished or lied about aspects of his background or the nature of his experiences in an attempt to come across as 'hip.' In many cases, other questions, and an informant's responses to them, exposed inconsistencies. However, the most significant indicator of one's 'hipness' turned out to be the glossary itself. As anticipated, knowledge of certain types of argot proved to be a good measure of an informant's life experience. For example, one youth who professed to be a heavy 'weed' smoker had not heard of the most common types of marijuana, such as 'Panama red' or 'Acapulco gold.'

Finally, questions concerning an informan't subjective response to argot usage were deferred until the field glossary had been administered. It was felt that these particular inquiries would be more meaningful to the informant after the argot list had been reviewed. Then, the informant would have a concrete frame of reference--the list--for discussing concepts such as 'argot,' 'slang' or 'hip' language.

2. The Field Glossary.

The transition between the administration of the questionnaire and the field glossary was simple enough. After a few introductory comments and examples of the type of response that was being called for, most informants understood what was wanted.

At this point, I also stressed the fact that response to the argot was not to be treated as a response to a 'test.' There were no 'right' or 'wrong' definitions, only those the informant had heard, recognized or used in his personal vocabulary. Despite this disclaimer, many of the youths involved in the study saw the field glossary as a test of or a challenge to their 'hipness.' For example, some youths became defensive when confronted with a series of items that were unknown to them. 'Where did you get these!' or, 'That's old, no one uses that anymore,' or, 'Are you sure that means ____?' were some of the responses to argot that was both known and used by others in the same community.

Many of the youths wanted to know what a term or phrase meant, after they had failed to offer a definition for it. Though I was willing enough to pass on those definitions I had recorded for a particular entry, I did not generally volunteer definitions, particularly with the response groups.

Once the preliminary remarks about the argot list were dispensed with, I began to read through the glossary. The tone and manner of my reading was intended to provide no paralinguistic information about the words and their definitions. Verbs and verb phrases were presented in the infinitive form; nouns and noun phrases were read without the benefit of a modifier; modifiers themselves were read without context. In a few cases, an idiomatic expression precluded a totally neutral reading of the entry. Also, my experience with certain nouns indicated the necessity to affix an article to the word for purposes of clarity. For example, the word 'do,' without an article or preposition preceding it, is confusing. A do means a 'hairdo;' to do someone means 'to humiliate someone.'

An informant's response to an entry was evaluated in light of what has already been said about argot knowledge in Chapter One. That is, defining argot in terms of other argot, or providing a 'situational' definition of an entry was acceptable. So for example, the expression, to cock block can be formally defined as 'an attempt on the part of one male to interfere with another male's sexual overtures toward a young woman, even if the interfering male is not interested in the female.' A more colloquial way of saying the same thing is: 'to mess up a dude's action.' A third alternative might be to reply: 'the dude's ranking the cat's play.' Finally, an informant might have difficulty defining the term at all. But, when pressed, he gives a clear-cut example of what's happening when someone is 'cock blocking.' Any of the four definitions offered above were accepted.

If an informant offered a definition for a given entry, he was asked for any additional meanings that came to mind. In some cases, soliciting

additional meanings was unnecessary. Those youths who were truly conversant with the argot readily volunteered not only primary and secondary definitions for an entry, but the status of the term among their friends and the contexts, linguistic and otherwise, in which it was most likely to occur.

When all the argot terms in the field glossary had been reviewed by a particular informant, I returned to the questions found in the section on 'Language Information.'

At the close of the interview, I asked the informant for his overall reaction to the interview. Finally, I inquired whether or not the informant had any other questions or responses. Though many would reply, 'no,' the conversation would often continue, moving into areas far afield of the argot. If an informant was going to 'hustle,' it was at the end of the interview that he usually ran down his strongest mack ('conversation to impress'). After a good deal of repartee passed back and forth, the 'hustle' ended usually as it had started, with humor and good feeling on both sides. The informant was finally asked to sign a receipt list in exchange for the money that was paid to him.

The field work experience brought me into contact with a great number and variety of youths and environments. At the beginning of this study there was some consideration of employing youthful interviewers to assist me in the field. The fact that this did not occur proved to be particularly fortuitous. In retrospect, I am increasingly convinced that having conducted all my own field interviews was exceedingly crucial to my understanding of the data. Perhaps, in large urban field studies it is impractical for the director to be involved in each step. However, the less involvement on the part of any investigator, the more chance there is of misunderstanding or overlooking the subtleties of the data collected. It is difficult at best to correlate field data that are constantly before you, let alone those removed from your direct experience.

The field work for this study began in September of 1969 and ended in October of 1970. The task of collating and analyzing the backgrounds and responses of ninety-four youths was the next order of business. The results of that data analysis are found in the next two chapters of this paper.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter Four

[1]I owe a great deal of thanks to William Elkins, executive director of Teen Post, and Lonnie Wilson, the Teen Post narcotics consultant, for their assistance and good will during this study.

[2]All informants in this study, adults excepted, were reimbursed for the interview. The flat rate was $4.00 for the interview.

[3]I am particularly indebted to Bessie Sales and her assistents for their help in facilitating interviews at the T-N Teen Post.

[4]Travis Watson was most cooperative with this part of the field work.

[5]Special school board permission would have been needed.

[6]I owe a very special note of thanks to Jack Tatum for his assistance and friendly criticism throughout the study.

[7]Two of the youths interviewed were from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and had been involved in the Isla Vista disturbance there.

[8]I am most grateful to Jerry Ritzlin and Roger Lipkis for their help.

[9]The director of the Watts CYA had informed one of the youths that he would be paid $4.00 an hour rather than $4.00 for the interview.

[10]Though no informant in this study is identified by name, the tapes needed to be identified in order to correlate other data with the informant. After the study was completed, a numerical coding system was substituted.

[11]It should be noted that very few of these changes were made, except when asking the question made no sense in terms of the informant being addressed. For example, to ask a middle class white youth what street he felt divided the east side of the South Central ghetto from the west side did not seem appropriate. On the other hand, if I felt that a youth might have some knowledge of seemingly culture-bound experiences, I would ask him anyway.

Chapter Five

RESPONSE GROUP/SUB-GROUP KNOWLEDGE OF THE ARGOT

A. Response Group Knowledge of the Argot.

To determine the extent to which each individual group possessed knowledge of the glossary, the percentage of correct responses (i.e. the number of items known) for each informant was figured. Then, the arithmetic mean and median for each twelve member response group was established. Table 8 presents the ordered mean and median scores for each of the five groups.

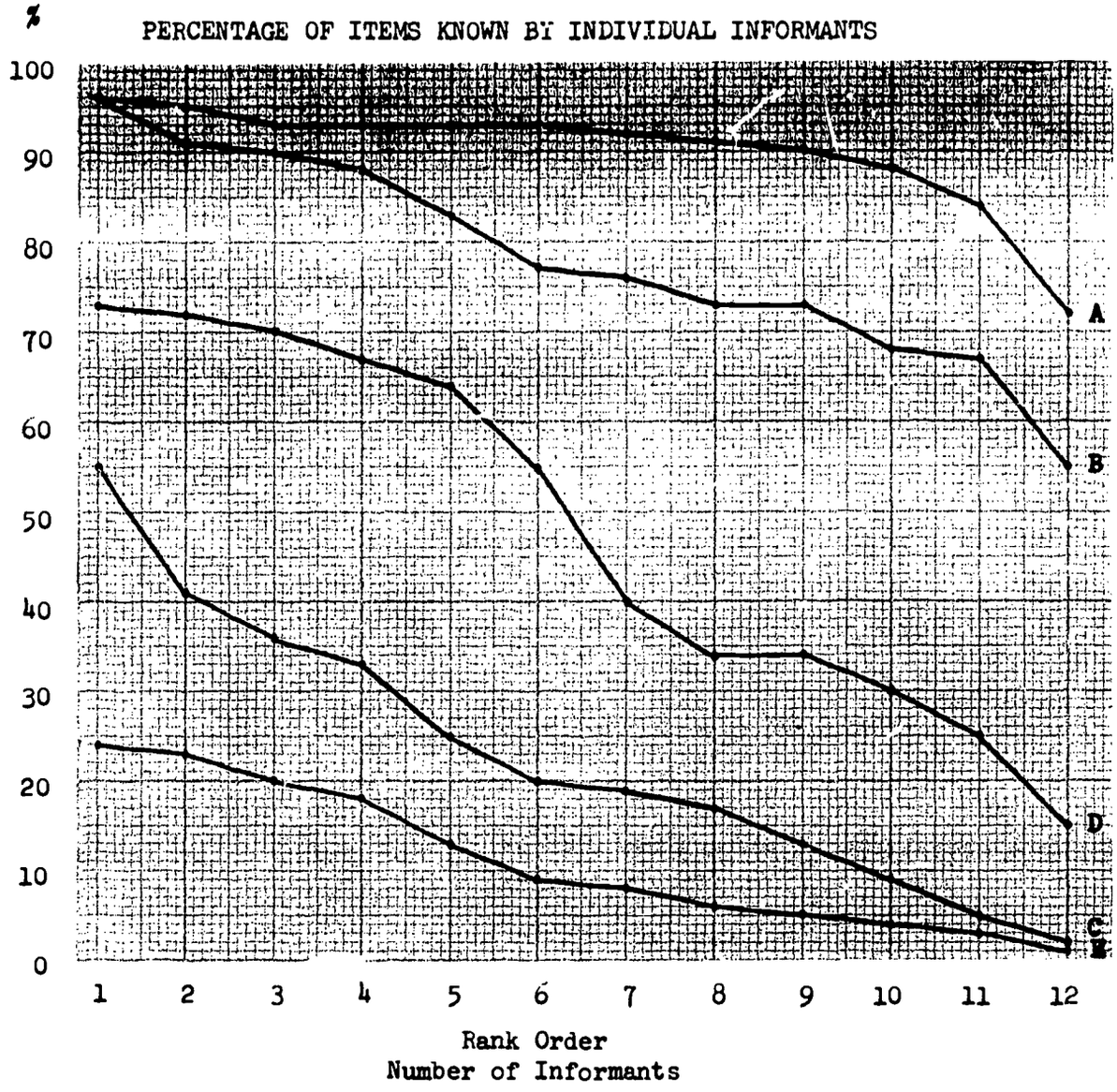
Table 8

Group	Mean	Median
Group A (lower class Blacks-South Central Los Angeles)	90%	91%
Group B (lower class Blacks-Venice, California)	78%	75%
Group D (middle class Blacks-Baldwin Hills-View Park-Winsor Hills, Los Angeles)	48%	47.5%
Group C (lower class whites-Lennox, California)	23%	18%
Group E (middle class whites-West Los Angeles, California)	11%	7%

Table 8 indicates that Group A from South Central Los Angeles knew 90% of words in the glossary, whereas the white middle class Group E knew only 11% of the items. This same rank order knowledge on the part of the response groups will be seen to repeat itself throughout the analysis of the data.

Figure 1 below indicates in graph form the percentage of items known by each informant in the five response groups. This figure illustrates why the mean knowledge of the list was greater than the median for each of the response groups, with the exception of Group A. As can be seen, there is a sharp break in both Groups A and B between the eleventh and twelfth ranked informants. Twelve percentage points separate them.

Figure 1



Whereas forty-one percentage points separate the highest and lowest ranked informants in Group B, only twenty-four percentage points intervene between the highest and lowest ranked A informants. On the whole, knowledge of the argot is more evenly distributed among Group A members than among informants in the other groups. Furthermore, Group A informants demonstrate a greater degree of argot knowledge than do informants in the other groups. In this study, degree of knowledge is defined as the number of items known by an individual or group.

For Group D, the difference between the highest and lowest ranked informant is greater than for any other response group. Fifty-eight percentage points separate them. In Group C, fifty-three percentage points

separate informants at the top and bottom. Finally, twenty-three percentage points account for the difference between the highest and lowest ranked informant in Group E.

It should be noted that approximately the same number of percentage points separate the first and last ranked members of Groups A and E. This indicates that, given the high percentage of items known by all the informants in Group A, and the low percentage of items known by members of Group E, the disparity within each of these two groups is less than one finds in the other groups.

Immediately apparent from the figures in Table 8 is the ranking along racial lines. In other words, the top three groups are the three Black groups. Group D, composed of middle class Blacks, can in a certain sense be grouped with either the top two groups of lower class Blacks or the bottom two groups of middle class and lower class whites. That is, they are literally 'middlemen' between two racial groups in terms of the degree of argot they know. Chapter Six will illustrate that D informants are social and cultural middlemen as well.

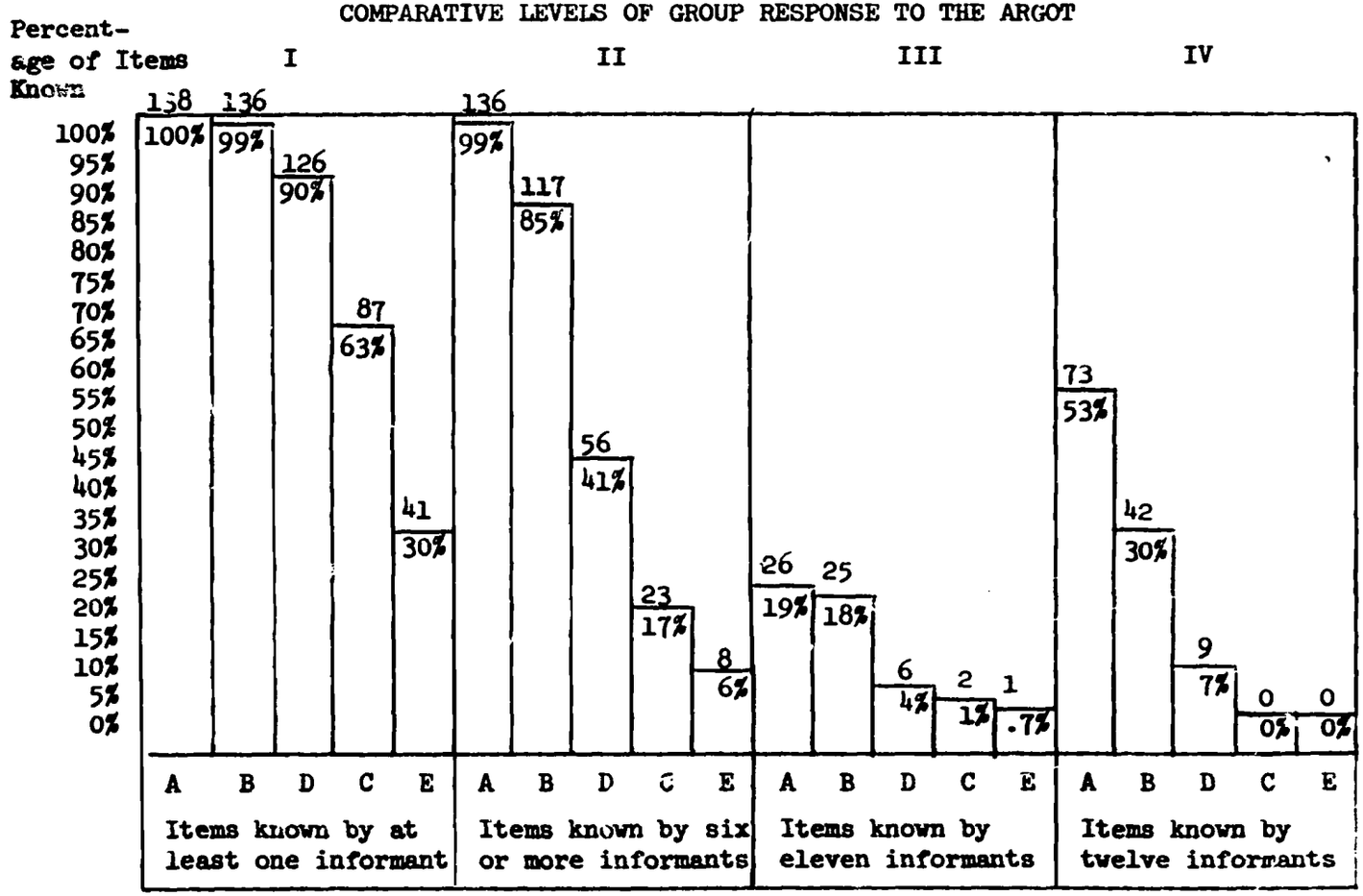
Figure 2 shows the level of response by individual groups. Level is used here to mean the number of informants in each group displaying knowledge of a single item, some specified portion of the glossary, or the entire list. In this case we are counting informants rather than number of items known. The difference in the number of items known by at least one informant as compared to the number known by six or more informants is negligible for Groups A and B. In Group A, all of the items were known by at least one member and 136 items (99% of the glossary) were known to six or more informants. Within Group B, 136 (99%) of the items were known by some member and 117 items (85%) were known by six or more informants. Groups A and B therefore display a high level of informant response to the argot list.

The level of response of Groups D, C and E is considerably lower. Group D includes at least one person who knew each of 126 items whereas only fifty-six items were known to six or more D informants. This represents a difference of seventy items or 51% of the glossary. In Group C, the difference between Columns I and II in Figure 2 is sixty-four items (46%). Finally, Group E demonstrates a thirty-three item difference (23%).

What these figures indicate is that a major portion of the argot that was known to Groups D, C and E was concentrated within sub-groups of one to five informants. In the case of Group D, the wide disparity in the number of items known at the two levels illustrated by Columns I and II suggests that those informants who did know the argot knew it to a considerable degree. The lesser differences for Groups C and E do not preclude the concentration of argot knowledge within sub-groups, but point out that less argot, on the whole, was know by the white groups.

Figure 2

COMPARATIVE LEVELS OF GROUP RESPONSE TO THE ARGOT



If we turn to Columns III and IV in Figure 2 we can see that the number of items known by eleven to twelve informants drops for all the groups. Yet there is again a sharp break between the degree of argot known by Groups A and B, and the other three groups. If we combine the figures in Columns III and IV for each group, Groups A and B show a substantial degree of argot knowledge even at this high response level. In the case of Group A, the combined figures total ninety-nine items. This represents 72% of the glossary. Group B's combined total is sixty-seven items (48%).

On the other hand, only fifteen items were known to eleven or twelve Group D informants. This accounts for 11% of the glossary. The number of items known by Groups C and E at this level of informant response was negligible. Two items were known to eleven Group C informants; none to all members. One item was known to eleven Group E informants, no item was known to all the informants.

Looking at how many informants knew how many items, Group A demonstrated a superiority over all other groups. This is to be expected, since Group A was essentially a facsimile of the control group and the earlier pilot project group. Though geographically removed from the South Central ghetto by more than ten miles, Group B also displayed a considerable knowledge of this glossary. The individual figures for Groups A and B already indicate the degree of argot that was shared between these two youthful ghetto populations. On the other hand, the comparative degree of argot knowledge exhibited by Groups A and B in one instance, and Groups C and E in the other, separates them as distinctly as their racial identity does.

Though there was a definite break in the degree of argot knowledge displayed by the two lower class Black groups on the one hand, and the middle class Black group on the other (thirty percentage points separate Groups B and D mean scores), Group D still demonstrated a substantial degree of argot comprehension with a 48% mean score. When shared knowledge of the argot is examined, Group D's relationship to the argot and to Groups A and B will become more clearly established. What is of particular interest at this point, as mentioned above, is the unique position Group D occupies in relation to the other four response groups.

Another fact revealed by the figures introduced thus far is the degree to which the argot that was known outside the two lower class Black groups was concentrated among certain informants. As we have seen with Groups A and B, the difference between the numbers of items known by one or five informants was inconsequential. However within Groups D, C and E, much of the argot that was known seems to be known by a limited number of informants. Since we are only considering individual response group knowledge of the argot at this point, it is impossible to know whether or not these small groups are comprised of the same informants, or different informants for each item. The question of which individuals knew which items will be discussed below.

Finally, we can see from the figures that not only were more items known by Groups A and B and the knowledge of them more evenly distributed among the informants (particularly within Group A), but a considerable number of the items were known to virtually all the members of these two groups. This particularly high level of informant response again serves to separate the lower class Blacks from the other response groups.

B. Inter-Group Knowledge of the Argot.

The question now to be examined concerns the number of items which were known and shared by various response groups. An item was considered 'known' to a response group if five or more members of that group registered knowledge of the item.[1] Items known by less than five members of a group will be discussed in the next section.

1. Lower Class Black Argot.

Given the 138 items in the glossary, it was found that thirty-five were known by Groups A and B. Four of these items were known exclusively by members of these two groups. The other thirty-one items were known to fewer than five informants in any of the other response groups. Eleven of the thirty-five items were known to ten or more AB informants. The higher level of AB informant response to these particular items and those known solely by Groups A and B may be seen to constitute an identifiable body of 'lower class Black argot.' (See Appendix A for an indication of this AB glossary.)

As shown, Groups A and B displayed a knowledge of the argot list that was generally superior to the other response groups both in terms of the number of items known and the number of informants who knew them. The data also show the sharing of argot between lower class Blacks in geographically separated ghettos, though they do not conclusively substantiate the existence of a well-defined lower class Black argot per se.

On the other hand, the data do not deny the possibility of a discrete lower class Black argot. As will be seen in the discussion of sub-group knowledge, the overwhelming majority of the thirty-one items known outside the two groups were known to only a small group of individuals (in some cases, no more than one two) and to the same individuals. In order to conclusively confirm or deny the reality of a discrete lower class Black argot of this sort, another comparative study in which the lexicon is larger and the population greater needs to be conducted.

2. Ghetto-specific Black Argot.

Only nine items were known to five or more members of Group A and to less than five informants in any of the other response groups. Three were known by all of Group A; four by seven to ten informants; the remaining two items were known only to five A informants. There were no items within this small argot cluster known exclusively to Group A

members. In addition, all nine items were also known to some few informants in other response groups (see Appendix A).

A small number (fourteen) of glossary items were known to more Group B informants than Group A. Though the difference between the two groups' knowledge of these items was relatively small, it does suggest (1) a reverse pattern of argot transmission from Venice to South Central, and (2) the existence of a discrete Venice argot.

The latter possibility is given some support in terms of the number of argot terms that arose in interviews with Venice youths; these items were totally unknown to me and did not appear during the compilation of the lexicon. For example, there were three items that arose in the course of the first Venice interview; these items were then administered to all Group B informants. All the Venice youths knew them. These same items were informally used with some young acquaintances of mine who have lived in South Central Los Angeles for some time. None of the items was known to the ten or more youths who were asked their meanings. Though the data for a Venice or South Central ghetto-specific argot are scattered and inconclusive, they are visible and warrant further study.

3. Black Argot.

By far, the largest and most well-formed body of shared argot terms were those known by the three Black groups (see Appendix A). Groups A, B, and D shared exclusive or predominant knowledge of fifty-nine items. This alone represents 43% of the glossary. As important as the number of items shared by the three Black groups were the number of terms in this category that were known only to Black youths in this study. Nineteen items or 14% of the list comprised this class of items.

The fifty-nine items termed 'Black argot' were particularly well-known to most members of the three Black groups. Six or more D informants knew fifty-one of the fifty-nine items. The two lower class Black groups demonstrated an even greater command of these items. Table 9 compares the lower class Black groups' proficiency with the AB items and the ABD items at various levels of informant response.

What these comparative figures indicate is that the lower class Blacks demonstrated proportionally a much greater knowledge of the Black argot than of the so-called lower class Black argot. The data not only substantiate the existence of an authentic, well-formed Black argot that cuts across economics and geography, but also underscore the lower class Blacks' particular facility with it. In fact, these data present a strong argument for the reality of a lower class Black argot.

It might be suggested that the geographical proximity between Groups A and D, when compared to Group B, accounts for the presence of shared argot between the lower class and middle class Black groups. Two items were known by Groups A and D, but by less than five members of Group B (see Appendix A).

Table 9

COMPARATIVE LEVELS OF LOWER CLASS BLACK RESPONSE TO ARGOT

	Lower class Black argot (AB items)	Black argot (ABD items)
1. Number of items	35	59
2. Number of items known by all AB informants	4	19
3. Number of items known to at least ten informants each in Groups A and B (inclusive of #2 above)	10	41
4. Number of items known to at least six informants each in Groups A and B (inclusive of #2 and #3 above)	27	58

To some extent this may be true. There are no real 'boundary lines' separating the lower class Black in South Central from his middle class counterpart in Baldwin Hills or View Park or Winsor Hills. It is one continuous community despite the economics that distinguish them. In addition, most of the middle class Black youths that were interviewed had relatives and, in some cases, close friends who still lived in the 'inner city' ghetto. Many of the informants were born there and spent their first years there. Therefore, the sharing of argot between these two economically separated but geographically joined groups may merely be a process of simple osmosis.

However, the number of items that were known by Group D members and the level of their response preclude mere geographical happenstance. The data suggest a more active process of argot acquisition. One important source of argot knowledge and dissemination within Group D is that sub-group of middle class Black informants who actively associate themselves with their peers, particularly in terms of perceived identification with certain life experiences of the ghetto youth. It is this perception of 'self' in relation to 'other' that makes this segment of the middle class Black group particularly attuned to the lower class experience and, consequently, to the argot that is used within that context. More will be said about this sub-group in the next section.

4. Assimilated Argot.

That portion of the glossary designated as 'assimilated' argot refers to items known by one or both of the white groups and shared with one or more of the Black groups; it is argot that has been incorporated into the vocabularies of the whites in this study. There are different group configurations that account for the assimilated argot (see Appendix A).

There were thirty items which comprised this category of assimilated argot. Five of these constituted a 'lower class argot' cluster (i.e. items known by Groups A, B and C); twelve other items were known by the three Black groups and the lower class white group; two items were known to the Blacks and the middle class whites; eleven were known and shared by five or more members of all response groups.

Of these thirty items, Group C shared knowledge of twenty-eight entries with other groups. This represents 20% of the glossary. Group E knew less of the assimilated argot. Aside from the eleven items E shared with all other response groups, there were two items that Group E shared with the three Black groups, to the virtual exclusion of Group C. Therefore, Group E demonstrated shared knowledge of thirteen items. This accounts for 9% of the glossary.

The level of informant response to the assimilated items on the part of the two white groups was inconsequential. Four items were known to ten informants in Group C; two items were known to eleven group members; no item was known to all the C informants. In Group E only one item was known to eleven informants; no item was known to all of Group E.

The data confirm the relative absence of argot knowledge within the white informant population represented in this study. Although the lower class white response Group C showed greater knowledge of the argot than did the white middle class Group E, neither group can be said to 'know' or 'share' the argot.

The twenty-eight items known by five or more Group C members (which were, of course, also known by the three Black groups) fall into four main semantic categories: (1) 'low riding;'[2] (2) toughness; (3) sex; and (4) drugs. The dearth of argot known by Group E makes a comparable assessment untenable. The best that can be said is that four of the thirteen items known by five or more Group E members are related to drugs.

It may be noted that this classification of Group C responses approximates some of Miller's (1958) 'focal concerns' for lower class youth generally, and delinquent youth in particular. The argot terms shared by the three lower class groups are thus seen to be related to shared life style components, regardless of racial identity. This relationship between argot knowledge and life style will be discussed below.

5. Jail Argot.

With the exception of one D informant, three items on the argot list were known only to youth who had some jail experience. They are related to sexual activities, and more specifically to homosexual activities (see Appendix A).

The argot of various criminal elements and professions has been extensively investigated by Maurer (see bibliography for a representative list). Few investigators, however, have been concerned with the argot of the youthful offender per se. The interviews conducted as part of this study suggest that jail argot is not monolithic. Some of the terms that arose in the interviews with juvenile parolees and probationers were unknown to adult ex-offenders who were asked to define them.

C. Sub-Group Knowledge of the Argot.

So far we have been concerned with response groups and their knowledge of the argot. Here we will concentrate primarily on individual informants who share three characteristics in common: (1) they are the most 'argot savvy' members within their response group, (2) they know argot terms that the majority of their response group do not, and (3) they share certain life experiences with each other.

We shall be considering only informants from Groups C, D and E since the widespread knowledge of the argot displayed by Groups A and B does not lead to any specific sub-groupings. Individuals who exemplify one or another of the characteristics noted above will be said to comprise 'sub-groups' C_s, D_s and E_s; informants who display all three of the characteristics mentioned will be said to make up 'micro-groups' C_1, D_1 and E_1. Any reference to the sub-group will also apply to the micro-group, unless otherwise indicated.

As suggested, an informant's knowledge of the argot can be viewed in two ways: (1) his over-all knowledge of the glossary, and (2) his knowledge of particular items that are unknown to his response group as a group. The former is called his 'over-all glossary' knowledge; the latter, his 'sub-group glossary' knowledge.

The number of terms and many of the particular items comprising the sub-group glossary for a given informant necessarily differed. For one, the more (or less) items known by the informant's response group, the less (or more) items remained to potentially make up the informant's sub-group glossary. Since Group D knew eighty-six items at the response group level, fifty-two items remained to which a D informant could conceivably register a correct response. Group C knew twenty-eight items, which left 110; Group E knew thirteen items, therefore,125 remained. Secondly, each informant knew different numbers of sub-group items, just as each demonstrated a different facility with the over-all glossary.

Of concern here is which of the sub-group informants knew the greatest portion of both the sub-group glossary and the over-all glossary. Table 10 indicates each sub-group member's response to the over-all glossary and to the sub-group glossary. Informants are ranked primarily according to their demonstrated proficiency with the sub-group glossary. This ordering generally coincides with their ranking in terms of the over-all glossary. Throughout this section, micro-group members are identified in the tables through the use of brackets around their informant numbers.

Table 10

SUB-GROUP KNOWLEDGE OF THE ARGOT

Sub-Group	Percentage of Sub-Group Glossary Known	Percentage of Over-All Glossary Known
D_S		
[11]	50%	73%
[12]	37%	72%
[3]	31%	70%
[5]	21%	67%
8	21%	64%
10	12%	55%
1	4%	40%
7	2%	34%
9	2%	34%
C_S		
[3]	41%	55%
[9]	27%	41%
[8]	23%	33%
[10]	15%	36%
1	5%	25%
4	3%	17%
7	2%	9%
11	.9%	20%
2	.9%	19%
E_S		
[12]	14%	24%
[10]	12%	23%
[6]	9%	20%
[2]	8%	18%
[11]	3%	13%
9	2%	8%
3	2%	5%

As Table 10 clearly shows, C_1, D_1 and E_1 knew more of the over-all glossary and the sub-group glossary available to them than any other members of their respective sub-groups or their response groups. (See Figure 1 for complete response group figures.) Earlier in this chapter I noted that a major portion of the argot known to Groups C, D and E was concentrated within sub-groupings of one to five informants. For the most part, C_1, D_1 and E_1 are those informants and the most distinct repositors of argot knowledge within their respective response groups.

Not only did C_1, D_1 and E_1 demonstrate the greatest degree of argot knowledge within their response groups, they also compared favorably when measured against more knowledgeable response groups. Members of D_1 demonstrated comparable or greater knowledge of the over-all glossary when compared with over a third of Group B; C_1, when measured against better than half of Group D; and E_1 when assessed against more than half of Group C.

The majority of argot knowledgeable informants in the three sub-groups are those who can be identified as participants in illegal or 'anti-social' activities. The present study shows four categories of such activities: (1) membership in a militant Black organization, (2) imprisonment, (3) involvement in illegal transactions, the most prominent being the sale and use of drugs, and (4) membership in a 'low-rider' club.

These activities themselves can be divided into two categories: (1) intra-group, i.e. activities linked to a particular sub-group or micro-group such as membership in the Black Student's Union (BSU) or a 'low-rider' club, and (2) inter-group activities, such as the use of drugs or prison experiences. Table 11 provides a detailed description of each sub-group member.

As Table 11 indicates, C_1, D_1 and E_1 dominate the various intra/inter-group activities listed. From the nature of the activities listed, we can begin to see potential experiential avenues by which argot is shared across racial, economic and geographic lines. We can also view the important role played by the micro-group informants in both the acquisition and dissemination of such argot.

Though C_1, D_1 and E_1 share certain of the experiences described in Table 11, the data also reveal that one or another of the experiences seem to dominate each of the three micro-groups and directly affect their superior knowledge of the argot.[3]

1. The Black Militant Experience.

As already indicated, the data strongly support the existence of a well-formed Black argot. It was also noted that an important source of argot knowledge and dissemination within the middle class Black group were those informants who most actively identified themselves with their lower class peers. The youths referred to are the BSU activists within Group D.

Table 11

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUB-GROUP INFORMANTS

Sub-Group	Individuals	Arrest Record (Extended) Imprisonment	Arrest Record Not Held	Low-Rider	Use of Drugs Extensive	Use of Drugs Nominal	BSU	No discernible connection with anti-social activities
D_s	1					X		
	[3]					X	X	
	[5]				X		X	
	9	X			X			
	7							X
	8							X
	10						X	
	[11]					X	X	
	[12]		X				X	
C_s	1			X		X		
	2					X		
	[3]	X		X	X			
	7							X
	[8]	X			X			
	[9]	X		X	X			
	[10]	X			X			
	[11]		X			X		
E_s	[2]	X*			X			
	3							X
	[6]	X*			X			
	9							X
	[10]	X*			X			
	[11]	X*			X			
	[12]		X		X			

* 1-4 days in jail.

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Not all knowledgeable D informants are political activists, but it is the Black middle class militant who, through his particular facility with the argot, is most clearly identified with the lower class Black in this study. This is not to say that only middle class youths who are active in Black politics identify with their lower class counterparts. Rather, the data in this particular study point in such a direction. As we can see from Tables 10 and 11, there are exceptions, the most notable being informant #8 who demonstrates no particular connection with D_s let alone with D_1. Because he is of special interest, his background will be examined in Chapter 6.

2. The Jail Experience.

Within Group C, a majority of the argot knowledge was concentrated in the responses of four informants. These four youths, who comprise C_1, are all ex-offenders with extensive arrest records. All have 'served time' in the juvenile equivalent of an adult penitentiary for on the average of two to three years.

The fact that these lower class white youths are conversant with the argot is not surprising if their jail experience is considered. It is no secret that the adult and juvenile penal institutions in this country are heavily populated with minority groups. Even in the course of this study I have seen the same type of offense committed by lower class Blacks and whites handled differently by the police involved. If it is true that lower class Blacks are more readily arrested and sentenced for 'crimes' they commit than are their white peers, so then lower class whites may be more often prosecuted for illegal acts than their middle class white counterparts.

Whether forced or friendly, the jail contact between the lower classes of both races is a daily occurrence. As Kantrowitz (1969) has observed, there is bound to be mutual argot usage in prison--however hostile some of the inter-racial relationships may be. Therefore, the relatively great degree of argot known by the ex-offenders in Group C can be attributed, in large measure, to their experiences and exchanges, verbal and otherwise, with Blacks in prison. All the youths in this ex-offender category, whether Black or white, felt that the argot they had learned was primarily the product of their jail associations.

3. The Drug Experience.

The experience that dominates the life style of E_1 is that of drugs. All of them admit to being 'heads' (heavy drug users). Informant #2 referred to himself and other drug users as 'freaks' rather than 'heads' 'long hairs' or 'hippies.' The term 'freak' was used somewhat defiantly, but with a sense of humor. As he put it: 'We're making fun of ourselves, before they [the dominant culture] do.'

The range of E_1's drug experience is extensive--synthetic marijuana, amphetamines, barbituates, psychedelics, occasional cocaine and heroin. Informant #6, who claimed to have sold drugs at his high school, described the drug scene there in the following way:

> The dope scene's really down here now compared to the way it was a year ago. It was really a big LSD scene; everybody was taking LSD, everybody. And then, everybody went crazy from it, so they quit taking that. Then it was 'uppers' [amphetamines] and 'downers' [barbituates], then that kinda cut down...I knew a couple of store robberies, and that kept the school supplied for awhile.'

Most E_1 informants have been taking drugs since they were in junior high school. Informant #12 claimed to have started using drugs when he was 11. He worked for a veterinarian when he was 14. 'I started shooting 'speed' [methedrine] then. I used to get my 'points' [needles] there. I stopped quick. I got hepatitis and I got busted at the same time.'

Though all of E_1 have been incarcerated, mostly on drug violations, all were released within a few days at the most. Unlike many of their lower class counterparts, they possess financial and familial support to aid them. As informant #6 described his short stay at Sylmar Juvenile Hall: 'I was there for four days...my parents could've gotten me out immediately, but they figured they'd let me cool off.'

The informants in E_1 have had little jail experience and show little concern for political activism, white or Black. Their link to other racial and economic groups, by their own admission, is through a shared interest in drugs and the contexts in which drugs are used. This has brought them into contact with a number of Black youths at such common gathering places as the Sunset Strip and Hollywood.

Though the three micro-groups described above cannot be said to share knowledge of the argot to the same degree as the lower class Black youths in this study, they do make a strong case for the claim made in the beginning of this thesis that race, economics or geography alone do not determine a person's knowledge of argot, that one's particular life experiences influence the language one uses. To the degree that there is a graduated knowledge and sharing of the argot, it is the micro-groups that provide the most prominent point of experiential and linguistic interface between response groups. In the next chapter, the analysis of data in terms of particular interest categories will further reveal the interaction between one's 'life style' and one's use of language.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter Five

[1]This cut-off figure is based upon discussion with Labov and Maurer (personal communications). As Maurer pointed out:

> You may not get a majority response to your list... considering its [South Central Los Angeles] geographical spread as well as its vertical depth...That is not to say the term isn't known...The fact that you find the term used or known in a sense peculiar to the subculture is justification for including it.

Labov added that a final determination of a cut-off should ultimately be based upon the investigator's 'observation of use, and intuitive responses.'

[2]Cleaver (1968) provides the following definition of a 'low rider:'

> Originally the term was coined to describe the youth who had lowered the bodies of their cars so that they rode low to the ground; also implied was the style of driving that these youngsters perfected. Sitting behind the steering wheel and slumped low down in the seat, all that could be seen of them was from their eyes up, which used to be the cool way of driving.

[3]All background data and personal commentary in the discussion that follows is taken from the questionnaire and tapes of the field interviews.

Chapter Six

INTRA/INTER CULTURAL INTERESTS AND ARGOT USAGE

A. Categories of Argot Terms.

In the preceding chapter I have discussed the data from the standpoint of the knowledge displayed by the response groups and intersecting sub-groups. The numbers of informants and the numbers of entries were compared and analyzed. In this chapter selected groups of words falling into distinct interest categories will be discussed. In addition the patterns of intra and inter-cultural interests, as revealed by shared argot, will be examined.

The glossary terms fall into the following eleven categories:

(1) Drug and drug related acts
(2) Acts of toughness
(3) Verbal and physical forms of manipulation
(4) Generalized physical activity
(5) Material possessions
(6) Personal appearance
(7) Food and alcohol
(8) Sex and sex related acts
(9) Interpersonal relations and personal names
(10) Outsiders
(11) Miscellany

Though these categories are neither mutually exclusive nor solely related to lower class or Black ghetto culture, they do allow for a meaningful discussion of the sociolinguistic dimensions of the argot. In some instances, an expression can be classified under more than one descriptive category. This has been noted whenever relevant. However, each item is assigned to one particular interest category based on the primary definition provided. Complete definitions for all terms are given in Appendix A.

Reference will be made periodically to two published glossaries already mentioned: The Underground Dictionary (Landy, 1971), and The Dictionary of Afro-American Slang (Major, 1970). Though neither of these lexicons claims to be a definitive compilation of youth culture argot or Black argot, they are recent collections representative of both. Their major function in the discussion that follows is to provide, at various points, a source of terms and definitions that compare or contrast with those used in this study. These works are used exclusively as referents and are not intended to verify the 'correctness' of a particular definition on the argot list.

1. Drugs and Drug Related Acts.

Of all the activities represented by the terms in the argot glossary, none binds together youths from different economic, racial and geographical backgrounds more visibly than interest and participation in the so-called 'drug culture.' The twenty-three drug terms on the argot list known by five or more members of the response groups are as follows: Group A (three terms); AB (seven terms); ABD (five terms); ABC (three terms); ABCD (two terms); ABDE (one term); all groups (two terms). Thus Group A knew all twenty-three of the drug terms, Group B knew twenty, Group C knew seven, Group D knew ten, and Group E knew three of these terms.

Only six of the twenty-three drug terms were exclusively known to the Black informant groups. Furthermore, middle class Blacks as a group have, at best, minimal knowledge of five of these six terms. It should be noted, however, that Group D's knowledge of drug terms is considerable, since twenty-one of the twenty-three drug terms were known by one or more D informants.

Ten of the twenty-three drug terms were known by one or more of the heavy drug users in Group E. This number does not account for the three additional entries known by other members of Group E. When we compare this combined figure of thirteen entries known by one or more Group E members to the sixteen entries known by one or more Group C informants, we see that the two white groups have approximately the same facility with the drug argot on the list.

To some extent, these numbers do not represent the same entries for both groups. Four entries, to be keyed up ('high from drugs or marijuana'); fender benders and hors d'oeuvres('any one of many pills, particularly barbituates'); and to cap out ('to pass out or fall asleep from too many pills or too much marijuana') were known by one or more sub-Group C informants, but unknown to any E youth. Conversely, the expression, to cop a match ('to secure a matchbox of marijuana') was unknown to C informants, but known to one of the heavy drug users in Group E. Of greater interest was the fact that dubee, a common 'underground' term for a marijuana cigarette (Lendy, 1971, p. 72), was known to five E informants but to only one C informant.

Predictably, the greatest degree of knowledge of these terms rests with the heavy drug users in each of the two groups.

Six of the sixteen drug terms known to some segment of Group C can be visibly linked to jail contacts. Knowledge of drug terms is much more diffused within Group C than in Group E. If we look at the drug terms according to the kinds of drugs or drug actions the argot identifies, other dimensions of shared argot usage come to light.

The twenty-three drug terms can be divided into three sub-categories: (a) marijuana (eleven terms); (b) pills (six terms), and (c) activities associated with both marijuana and pills (six terms). Only three of the

eleven marijuana items (gunny, skoofer, stencil) were know exclusively by Black subjects. These three terms are of sociolinguistic interest.

According to the adults interviewed, the term gunny is an old word which identifies a particularly strong form of marijuana found in Jamaica and Africa (Black Gungeon). Over the years, the term has become less specific, i.e. response group informants identified it with marijuana in general. The argot term is of special note because of its particularly race-bound usage. Though it was known to the majority of Blacks interviewed, the term was unknown to any of the white informants, even the heavy drug users. This suggests that despite the strong shared drug experience between the races, a reserve of 'private' terms still exists.

The entry skoofer ('marijuana cigarette') and its phonological variants (skrufer, skoofus, skrufus), was unknown outside the Black informant population, and virtually unknown outside the South Central Los Angeles informant group. One B informant knew the term. Though this demonstrates argot usage that is limited to a particular ghetto, it has its phonological counterpart in Venice. The B informant who correctly identified skoofer indicated that in Venice the term used to refer to the same thing was skoobie. To see if this were true, the term skoobie was presented to six B informants who had yet to be interviewed. All six provided the same meaning.

The similar phonological structure evidenced by the two terms suggests the possibility of the South Central term being 'misheard' by a Venice resident and perpetuated within his community in a different but related form. Or, conversely, the term skoobie may have been carried back to South Central in an altered form. Whatever the direction of transmission, these terms and others to be considered suggest a possible way in which similar argot, identifying similar or identical concepts, comes to be transmitted across geographical distances.[1]

Finally, the term stencil ('a long, thin marijuana cigarette'), like skoofer, exemplifies specific South Central argot. Though all twelve A informants knew the word, only one B informant (an ex-offender) and two D informants (BSU activists) could identify its meaning.

Turning to pill related terminology, we find a somewhat different distribution. Only one item, blunts ('diluted capsules of barbituates, particularly 'Seconal'), was totally unknown to the white informants. Furthermore, the term is restricted to usage among the lower class Blacks, particularly those from South Central, with the exception of two D informants.

To some extent, pill related terms were more widely known outside the Black informant population by middle class and lower class white drug users than terms for marijuana. What the comparative data seem to suggest is that there is more intercultural attention directed toward pill usage than to that of marijuana, given this particular informant population. The interviews tend to substantiate this statement.

Marijuana has been, and continues to be, commonly used by youths and many adults. On the other hand, the intake of barbituates, amphetamines and other pills for 'kicks' is a relatively recent occurrence--particularly among the white middle class youth today. Thus we see the greater attention by Groups C and E to this class of pharmacopia and the argot terms that identify it.

There are six terms that relate primarily to activities surrounding the use of marijuana or pills. Interestingly, only one of the six terms, to fire up ('to light up a marijuana cigarette'), has general currency outside the Black informant population. Four of the six terms (to be keyed, to cap out, to be wide (wired), and throw me out with (item)...) are part of the Black argot on the list and virtually unknown, as defined by the control group, to either C or E informants, even to the heavy drug users. Furthermore, these expressions descriptive of both pill and marijuana usage were more widely known among middle class Black informants than many of the more specific pill or marijuana argot.

A fifth item in this group, to flake ('to pass out' or 'fall asleep as a result of taking too many drugs or too much marijuana'), has its phonological cognate in Venice argot, similar to the case of skoofer/skoobie. Though only six of the Venice youths knew the term to flake, as compared with all of the South Central informants, all B informants knew the expression to flag for the same drugged condition. Conversely, no South Central youth demonstrated knowledge of the Venice term. This would suggest that the original term was to flake and that it originated in the South Central area.

The expression to throw me out with something ('to give me something, particularly marijuana, pills or money') also has a similar form in Venice argot. The Venice expression for the same activity is kick me down with something. Once again, we can see the development of similar or parallel terms for comparable or identical concepts within two ghetto informant populations.

This phenomenon of similar structures for similar or identical activities is particularly evident within the body of drug related argot.

The phonological or grammatical similarity for similar concepts is also found between racially separated informant groups. A prime example of parallel terminology that divides informants along racial and class lines is the term black moat ('a particularly potent form of marijuana'), and the various forms of the word found within different informant groups. Without exception, the Blacks who identified the term referred to it as black mo; the lower class whites who recognized the term referred to it as black mota; and the middle class whites who knew it called it black mole or black mold.

The Spanish constraint requiring final vowels would change the moat to mota. The form black mo' is not surprising since in many Black English

dialects there is a regular 'final consonant' deletion rule (see Labov, 1967a, p. 25). The white form mold for moat could represent a 'reinterpretation,' that is, not being able to assign a semantic reading for moat, a known word is substituted. This is a common occurrence when words are borrowed, e.g. 'cole slaw' pronounced 'cold slaw.'

Though the drug terminology on this list is the most obvious intercultural link among the five informant groups, it also differentiates the groups along a number of lines. For one, it more clearly separates out the heavy drug users among the white informant population, particularly the middle class youth, than it does the Blacks interviewed. Half of the drug terms on the list are absent from the middle class Black group's argot, but more or less reflect usage restricted to Venice and/or South Central. Therefore, we cannot talk, within this interest category, about race-bound terms as much as experience-bound terminology.

Secondly, the drug terms on this list seem to undergo a phonological metamorphosis as one moves from South Central to Venice. No other single body of terms in this glossary contains this number of phonologically similar forms for identical concepts. Though this may be a matter of chance selection of the argot, it is, nonetheless, an interesting phenomenon indicative of the possible manner of argot transmission.

Finally, the argot list represents two kinds of drug activity, the taking of pills and the smoking of marijuana. It does not include terms for 'hard drugs' (heroin, cocaine, opium, etc.). It is interesting to note that the field work did not uncover much interest or involvement in the use of hard drugs on the part of the majority of youths interviewed. With the exception of one B informant who admitted that he was 'strung out behind smack' (heroin), none of the informants regularly used or admitted to regular use of hard drugs. As the data imply and the interviews indicate, particular interest and conversation focused more often on the use of pills than on marijuana. The three groups that demonstrated the keenest interest in such discussions, and were particularly conversant with the argot related to pill use, were the heavy drug users from South Central, Venice and University High School. In this instance, shared argot, shared experiences and shared interest visibly bind together disparate racial and economic informant groups.

2. Acts of Toughness.

If the shared drug terminology on this list tends to highlight the most apparent point of intercultural interest between the ghetto Blacks and the middle class whites, the argot describing acts of toughness regroups the informant population along other lines. That is, shared terms identifying acts of toughness not only tend to cement the lower class groups in general, but particularly link the three lower class groups through their common jail experience.

There are sixteen entries on the argot list that primarily identify acts of toughness. With the exception of two expressions (to vamp someone,

'to sneak up on someone and hit them,' or to turn out a set 'to put an end to a party in any number of ways'), one or more C informants correctly identified the meaning of fourteen terms. Nine of these fourteen expressions were known only to one or more of the ex-offenders in Group C. On the other hand, only four terms in this category were known to one or more E informants, with only one of these four terms being known to five or more group members. All the entries but one were know to Group B as a group. To vamp someone was unknown to the Venice informants. All the entries descriptive of acts of toughness were known to one or more Group D informants.

A few of the terms are worth individual note. The expression to bust (pop) a cap on someone ('to shoot a gun at someone') was often mistakenly identified by white informants, particularly middle class whites. The expression was heard as to bust a cap, or to pop a cap ('to take a pill, particularly LSD'). Either the truncated phrase was a part of the informant's argot, or it was a phrase lending itself to interpretation, whether or not it was actually used or known as such.

The expression to vamp someone is particularly interesting because of its limited usage. Nine South Central Los Angeles youths and four middle class Blacks correctly identified it. Three of those Group D informants were BSU members. No one else knew its meaning.

The expression to vamp has been used by Black Panther Party members, both in conversation and in their publications, to refer to the harassment tactics engaged in by the police. Since the Panther Party has one of its headquarters in South Central Los Angeles and its paper is easily acquired there, it is not surprising that South Central youths would know this particular expression. Nor is it surprising that three BSU youths in Group D would know the expression. As mentioned before, the BSU youths are particularly attuned to militant Black actions. On the other hand, it is reported that the Black Panther Party has never gained a foothold in Venice.

These facts reveal that exposure to common experiences (in this case, the Black militant movement) leads to the inclusion of shared argot in the lexicons of individuals, despite other differences which separate them.

Though the middle class Blacks and the lower class whites tend to know a comparable number of terms in this category, there are some entries that are unique to the lower class whites because of their jail experiences, for example the AB argot term, if you feel froggish (froggy), take a leap (a challenge to fight). According to the adult informants in this study, this is an old expression that has been in use for many years, yet only one middle class Black youth knew it. On the other hand, three of the Group C ex-offenders readily identified it and claimed to have first heard it in jail. The same can be said for the expression to (bust) pop a cap on someone. Again, the expression is more widely known among lower class white jail youth than among middle class Blacks.

The fact that terms depicting toughness are generally well-known to the middle class Black informant is not particularly surprising. Whether or not overt acts of toughness, such as physical violence, occur frequently in the experience of the D informant, the concept of toughness is still positively valued as a personal attribute. The militant stance of the BSU members interviewed, coupled with the general tenor of aggressiveness displayed in the Group D interviews, tends to substantiate this. As one BSU youth put it: 'All the brothers have to be tough. To the "Man" you're all niggers.'

On the other hand, the middle class white informant tends neither to identify with acts of toughness nor the argot describing them. 'Make love not war' is a white middle class sentiment.[2] The 'love-ins' and 'be-ins' of the mid-60's were basically a white phenomenon. In response to the question: 'What do you think the militant Black and white organizations are trying to do?' the typical white middle class response revealed dismay and confusion over the violent tactics being employed.

Finally, the lower class white's identification with acts of toughness, revealed through knowledge of the argot, relates to his daily life and the experiences that link him to his Black class counterpart. Furthermore, jail is a great educator. The majority of Group C ex-offenders indicated that many of the terms for toughness on this list were first heard by them during skirmishes, both physical and verbal, with incarcerated Black youths. As I have indicated before, acquisition of argot may be through forced association as well as voluntary participation in a group. This category of shared argot seems to be a good case in point.

3. Verbal and Physical Forms of Manipulation.

There are twenty-five entries on the argot list that I have identified with acts of manipulation. By this I mean those physical, verbal and material demonstrations on the part of one individual that have as their prime end the manipulation, advantage-taking, or showing up of another person. Given the youths in this study, I have found these terms to be a particularly keen indicator of different life styles, values, and interests that bring together or separate different segments of the informant population.

In his discussion of language behavior in the Black ghetto, Kochman goes so far as to say:

> ...language is used by Negroes living within the ghetto primarily for the purpose of manipulating and controlling people and situations....The purpose for which language is used suggests that the speaker views the social situations into which he moves as essentially agonistic [sic], by which I mean that he sees his environment as consisting of a series of transactions which require that he be continually ready to take advantage of a person or situation or defend himself against being victimized (1968a, p. 38).

Essentially, Kochman is describing the street rationality of the ghetto (see Horton, 1967). However, this manipulative action-taking is not necessarily confined to the lower class Black, nor is it solely a defensive stance. As Kochman admits, it is difficult to imagine a Black male youth, whatever his economic circumstance, who has not witnessed or participated in a variety of manipulative verbal acts as he has grown up. Whether or not one agrees with Kochman's estimate of the primary purposes of language use, the data in this thesis substantiate the important role played by verbal manipulation, as well as physical and material manipulation, in the lives of Black males.

Of the twenty-five terms for manipulative action in the glossary, only one entry, to fiend on someone ('to show someone up--particularly in your car--by dropping the car to the ground through the use of hydraulic lifts') was unknown to middle class Black youths. Only two Venice informants knew it. It was known to all twelve A informants. On the other hand, the expression to fonk on someone, which means exactly the same thing as to fiend on someone, is part of the shared vocabulary of the three Black groups. The former expression is a prime example of a South Central specific term, identifying a well-known Black activity.

Thirteen of the twenty-four manipulative action terms are part of the ABD argot. Two of these items, to style ('to show off what you have') and to swoop ('to come upon someone quickly, particularly a young lady, either on foot or in a car'), were known by all Black informants.

Manipulative activities and the terms that describe them are part of the Black experience, regardless of economic or social background. Generally speaking, the types of manipulations described by the argot and shared by Blacks run the gamut of verbal, physical and material maneuvers. However, the distribution of knowledge among the Black informants does suggest that ostentatious display and manipulation of material possessions is more visible among lower class Black youths than among their middle class Black counterparts. Given the fact that the ghetto youth has less to display, it is not surprising that he should display what he does have more intently than the middle class Black youth. (See Frazier, 1957, for another point of view.)

If we turn to an examination of lower class white informant response to manipulative terms, we find a different picture. There are seven items in this category that were totally unknown to any Group C informant, including the ex-offender. This is of particular note, since four of these seven unknown terms, to lean ('to lean inward toward the middle of the car while driving--suggests the presence of a console and/or center arm rest,') to fiend on someone (see above), to fonk on someone (see above), and to high sign ('to show off what you have or do--particularly your car or girl friend'), can be directly identified with 'low-rider' activities--an area of special interest to both lower class white and Black informants. It should be mentioned, however, that the majority of manipulative terms that relate to the car were known and shared by the lower class groups, particularly among the respective 'low-rider' sets. What the

data suggest here, in relation to Group C's knowledge, is that some terms remain secret to a group, regardless of shared interests. A common life style or a similar set of experiences are not the only prerequisites for shared lexicons, though they surely enhance the prospect for such inter-cultural linguistic usage taking place. More will be said about this point below.

If we turn to Group E, we find that the group shared knowledge of four items (to bo gart something, to be down on someone's case, to ride shotgun, to shine someone on) with the other four response groups. An additional seven entries in this category were known at the E sub-group level-- five terms by a single E informant; each of the other two terms, by two and three informants respectively. Taken together, Group E's knowledge of argot identifying manipulative acts is particularly limited. Furthermore, only two of the eleven items known by one or more E informants are specifically concerned with a 'low-rider' or car related activity, and one of those items (to style) refers to manipulation beyond one's car.

Just as Group E has virtually no knowledge of terms related to acts of toughness, it has limited knowledge of terminology descriptive of manipulation--particularly car-oriented actions. Once again, the middle class white informant does not share with Blacks or a portion of the lower class white population a concern for the manipulative acts (verbal, physical or possessional) described by the argot. This is not to say that he is not a manipulator, only that his manipulative proclivities are not well represented by the terminology in this glossary.

What is of additional interest in this category is the specific meaning assigned to a few of the terms by the white informants. The definitions tend to differentiate the races. For example, to bo gart was known at the response group level by all groups. Its general definition is 'to take more than one's share of something' or 'to apply physical coercion to gain one's end.' With the exception of C informant #3, the fifteen white youths who provided a definition for the term limited that definition to 'hogging a joint' ('taking more than one's share of a marijuana cigarette').

Similarly, the control group definition of the expression to burn someone was: 'to steal something from another, particularly another male's woman.' It was also the definition provided by the majority of Black response group informants. On the other hand, nine E informants and eight C informants indicated it to mean 'to accept money and give no drug in return' (Landy, 1971, p. 42), or 'to exchange diluted or phony drugs for money.' Once again, C informant #3 identified the term as the Black population had.

These are but two of several items on the list that have different primary meanings for different racial groups. We will see other examples of racially differentiated argot definitions below.

Such data suggest that terms descriptive of general activity or behavior tend to be specified in terms of the particular group's priorities and concerns. Differentiation of argot meaning can be an important indicator of points of intercultural discontinuity between and among groups that are otherwise linked together, racially, economically or experientially.

4. Generalized Physical Behavior.

The six terms that constitute this category provide little additional information about informant interests or responses. Essentially, this group of terms is an addendum to the interest category concerned with forms of manipulation. There are, however, a few observations of interest.

For one, the terms which depict general physical activities such as walking or talking tend to reinforce the prior claim that general activity or behavior tends to be specified in terms of a particular group or individual's priorities. So, for example, two of the terms in this category, to get down and to get it on can generally be defined as 'to do whatever you are going to do; to get started.' However, the specific acts selected by the informants to exemplify 'what one does' divide the informant populations once again, in terms of racial and class priorities. For most of the Black informants the term to get down meant (1)'to have sexual intercourse,' (2) 'to fight,' (3) 'to dance,' (4) 'to take some kind of drug or smoke marijuana.' For the white informants who knew the term at all, it meant almost exclusively, 'to take some kind of drug or smoke marijuana.' The more well-known expression, to get it on, most often meant 'a fight' for Blacks; for white informants, it meant 'to get high' (to take drugs or smoke marijuana).

Finally, there are two items, to vamp and to tip that are linked to race and ghetto respectively. The first term, which means 'to leave from somewhere,' was totally unknown to white informants. The second term, which also means to leave some place, but with the additional meaning of 'being some place you should not be, particularly with another man's woman,' is a ghetto-specific expression that was known only to lower class Blacks in this study. According to the adults interviewed, the latter expression is an old term that seems to have been retained in the ghetto-specific argot pool, though it is used less frequently than equivalent terms, such as to creep. The former term, to vamp, had only been recently heard by the adults and may be a new expression.

5. Material Possessions.

There are thirteen terms on the argot list that relate to or identify material possessions. Four of them are part of the AB argot, seven are part of the ABD argot, one term is a Group A term, and one item is part of the argot known to all the response groups.

Though the largest number of items identifying material possessions are known by all Black informants, there is a discernibly higher level of knowledge displayed by the two lower class Black groups than by their middle class counterparts. This was also true of the category describing manipulative acts, though the level is more noticeable here because there are fewer terms. For example, nine of the thirteen terms in this category were known by ten to twelve AB informants, whereas only two were known by comparable numbers within Group D. In addition, three of the seven material possession terms that were part of the ABD argot were known to only five D informants, indicating a relatively limited knowledge of these terms within Group D.

We have already acknowledged the importance of material possessions and attendant acts of display in the life style of the young Black male. Though both middle class and lower class Black youths, by their own admission, front off ('show off what they have'), the data continue to reveal that the ghetto Black is more keenly aware of the terms related to display of both his possessions and himself than the middle class Black and appears, therefore, to be more conscious of display than the D informants.

For the most part, then, terms descriptive of material possessions and their display are most well known among the lower class Black informants. However, there are three terms within this category that are not only well known and mutually shared among the three Black groups, but are also descriptive of possessions much in style and frequently seen among the Black informant population in general. The three terms are apple hats, bisquits, and three quarter length piece.

Apples or apple hats ('big-brimmed caps'), were, at the time of the field work, extremely popular items among Black youths, particularly young males. In more recent months, some young whites have adopted the style. The first time I saw this particular type of cap being worn by a young male was over five years ago in Watts. Before that time, I had seen it worn primarily by older men. Today, it has become a popular item of apparel and all but one of the Black informants knew the argot term that identified it. Interestingly, a few of the white youths I interviewed were wearing apple hats; yet, not one of them identified the term for it. The term, if not the faddish cap, has remained 'private' among the Black informants in this study.

If apple hats have become somewhat of a cross-cultural fad, the three quarter length piece ('a three quarter length leather or suede jacket, often belted') is primarily a Black fashion. Though a large majority of Black youths interviewed identified the term's meaning, only one white youth (C informant #3) knew it. My personal observations tend to support the argot data. Though the jacket style is extraordinarily popular among both Black male youths and adults, I have not seen it worn outside the Black community with the frequency that I have observed among Blacks.

The term bisquits ('male shoes with a large toe area, similar to "Ivy League" type shoes') is another expression known by a major portion of the Black informants interviewed and the sole C informant, #3. Though knowledge of the term is almost the exclusive domain of the Blacks interviewed, it is not solely a 'Black' argot term. I have heard white 'surfers' use it to refer to the same shoe style. Whether or not the term is white or Black in origin, the style is quite popular among Black male youths and adults.

In the case of these three terms, we again see that something that is important is named.

On the other hand, there are terms within this category that seem to differentiate lower class and middle class Black tastes in wearing apparel. For example, the term, old man comforts, refers to a type of shoe that comes in either high or low tops (most often the former) and resembles an orthopedic shoe worn by old men. At the time of this study, this shoe was a popular item in South Central Los Angeles, and to a lesser extent in Venice. At least ten of the ghetto informants interviewed were wearing them. I have seldom seen them worn by middle class Black youths in the Baldwin Hills-View Park-Winsor Hills area. The argot generally reflects this. With one exception, all the lower class Blacks knew the term; only half the middle class Blacks could identify its meaning. None of the whites knew the expression.

Thousand eyes, unlike old man comforts, is a modish 'Florsheim' type shoe with a number of perforations in the toe. I have often seen it worn by older males in South Central. Though the term was known to all but one of the lower class Black informants, it was familiar to only four D informants. It seems once again that both the style of the shoe and the term that identifies it are less popular among the middle class Black youth than among the ghetto youth.

This difference in familiarity with certain old argot terms descriptive of old styles or tastes is an important one. It reinforces the claim made in the Introduction that the ghetto-specific argot pool will more often house old terms than the Black argot per se. These old terms are retained for long periods of time because they still reflect on-going tastes, activities or experiences for the ghetto youth that seem to have been discarded or minimized by the middle class Black. This ghetto-specific conservation of old terms descriptive of on-going tastes will become even more apparent when we discuss argot related to food, alcohol, and personal appearance.

White informant response to this particular category of terms was negligible. Even those ex-offenders in Group C who had experienced repeated contact with Black youths in jail demonstrated little knowledge of these terms. This is especially interesting, since seven of the terms in this category are related to cars. Four of the expressions, to freak off something ('to fix something up, particularly your car'); a hoopdie, a hoopie ('a car'); a kitty, a cat, a kitty-cat ('a Cadillac'); a blade

('a large car, particularly a Cadillac') were totally unknown to the 'low-rider' contingency in Group C. A fifth car item, gangster ride ('an old car, particularly one resembling Al Capone's or other gangsters of the twenties' and thirties''), was known to only one of the five self-identified 'low-riders' in Group C. A sixth term, identifying a Buick Riviera, Riv, was well-known to the C 'low-riders.' The seventh term, short ('a car'), and all its phonetic variations, e.g. shot, shaw, shawl, shout, was known by all response groups.

We have already seen a certain degree of unfamiliarity among white 'low-riders' with car-related terminology in section 3 (manipulative acts). There are a number of possible explanations for this apparent lack of car-related argot knowledge on the part of the C group. One explanation is that the informants in Group C who have identified themselves as 'low-riders' are lying or embellishing. However, I personally observed in each of the five cases some mark of identification with a 'low-rider' club or set (e.g., low-rider club plaques in one's car, club jackets, cars that had been 'lowered' or painted metallic colors, etc.). Another explanation for the relatively negligible response to the car-related terminology is one already suggested, namely, that certain terms, even those relating to a seemingly cross-cultural or inter-racial activity or interest, still retain a high degree of secrecy among a given group--in this case, among lower class Black youths. The data seem to indicate that the expression 'low-rider' may very well be a cover term that superficially brings together youths of different races. That is, there are Black 'low-riders' and white 'low-riders' and each may well have their specific argot terms. There is evidence that the low-rider clubs are very much like other kinds of social clubs in which peers of like interests and similar backgrounds come together. If this is the case, it would lend support to distinct Black-white 'low-rider' argot. This is not to overlook the fact that there is still a body of shared argot related to a common interest in cars that does transcend race and geography.

Whether or not all the Black youths who identified the car-related argot are 'low-riders' is secondary. In this instance, as in others, there seem to be some terms in the Black argot pool that are known to Black youths because they are Black rather than because the terms relate to a particular experience that vitally interests them. In this instance, knowledge of the argot is more a matter of proximics, i.e., being around those interested in an activity, than personal involvement. A phenomenon can be of such wide-spread importance to a particular subculture that even 'non-participants,' the so-called 'lames' living within that culture come to know of the phenomenon and some of the terms that describe it. This is true of middle class white non-drug users in relation to certain of the drug terms on this list. In this case, the display and identification of possessions, particularly one's car and clothes, are of special import to the Black ghetto youth.

6. Personal Appearance

There are six terms in the glossary that describe one's person or appearance. Three of the six entries are part of the AB argot; two are part of the ABD argot; the sixth term is shared by Groups A and D.

Though there are only six terms listed in this particular category, they are of interest in differentiating the groups. White knowledge of these six items was non-existent. Only one item was known to one C informant--to be clean ('to be well-dressed'). Black informant knowledge of the terms was focused predominantly within the lower class Black groups, with South Central informants displaying the highest level of knowledge. However, it is of interest to note the kind of personal appearance being described by the argot and the possible implications involved.

Two of the South Central ghetto-specific argot terms, a do and fried, dyed and swooped to the side, are expressions describing hair that has been straightened in emulation of the white man. A do has come to have more generalized meaning, however, and applies to any 'hairdo.' The two terms were known to less than half the Venice informants and, with very few exceptions, to none of the middle class Black informants.

It would seem that the expressions have fallen into relative disuse among the Black informants in the study. This could be explained in terms of the concern with 'Black identity' seen among all segments of the Black population, and the concomitant censure that is directed at those actions and behaviors imitative of whites. This is true for a sizeable portion of the Black population interviewed. Yet, the data and personal observation also suggest that old styles, like the old terms describing them, persist in the South Central ghetto. It is fallacious to assume that every Black person, youth or adult, sports a 'natural' or 'Afro' hair style. There are still a number of Black residents in South Central who wear a close-cropped or 'straightened' hairdo.

Although the sociological implication of the range and type of hair styles displayed by Blacks is enormously interesting, it is not the concern of this study.[3] What is of prime interest is that terms descriptive of certain hair styles have been retained in the vocabulary of a number of ghetto youths.

In addition to the few items in this section that seem to have fallen into relative disuse among the young Blacks interviewed, there are other equally old terms that describe a manner of appearance that is still much in favor among Black males. The terms, to be decked to death, to be clean, and to be silked to the bone, all describe, with somewhat different stress and nuance, the act of being well-dressed. Interestingly, the expression to be decked to death is one of two terms on the argot list that was known at the response group level by A and D, but by only four Venice youths. It is possible to explain AD knowledge of the item in terms of geography, or, perhaps, the particular informant population.

Mention should be made of the racially different meanings assigned to the expression, to be clean. The vast majority of Black informants defined it in terms of being well dressed. With the exception of C informant #3 who defined it as the Black youths had, all other white informants who defined it offered the definition 'to be free of drugs on your person,' or 'to have given up drug usage.' Once again, the meaning assigned to an expression divides the informants along racial lines.

What is more interesting about the three terms noted above is the obvious source of the reference, that is, the well-dressed, well-groomed, silked to the bone ('dressed in silk from your underwear outward') appearance of the pimp.[4] For a large number of the Black youths interviewed, both lower and middle class, the image and implication of the pimp's role is still particularly attractive. And, through the manner of one's conversation to a young lady, through one's dress, through one's car, and through the number of young ladies strung out behind you ('in love or infatuated with you'), the young Black male emulates the stance of the consummate hustler among hustlers. Though there are a number of terms in the glossary that could be directly or indirectly identified with the action or behavior of the pimp, these few terms related to dress are most descriptive of his person, and knowledge of them marks a continued interest in the pimp style among the Black informants interviewed.[5]

7. Food and Alcohol.

There are seven terms in the glossary that relate to food and eating or alcohol and drinking. One entry, to scarf ('to eat') was known at the response level by all the groups; another term for eating, to chuck, is part of the AB argot and was known to only one C informant (ex-offender #3) and two D informants. The other five entries were known only to the Black informant population. In fact, these five terms were known to only a few of the middle class Blacks; only one entry for eating, to grease, was part of the ABD argot.

The conservation of old terms that still describe relevant activities within the lower class informant's environment is especially apparent with the terms descriptive of alcohol and drinking. For example, four of the seven entries in this category, L.I.Q., short dog, grapes, pluck, identify kinds of liquor (particularly wine) and the place it is bought. All four items are part of the lower class Black argot; one of them, L.I.Q., was unknown to the middle class Black youths; the other three terms were known to no more than three D informants.

These four terms have been part of the South Central ghetto argot for some time, according to the adults interviewed. They continue to be known and used by the AB informants in this study, but not generally by the middle class Black group. Though drinking is admittedly an important part of coming up ('growing up') in the Black community as well as the

white community (though less so among all youth today), it is a more visible reality in the lower class ghetto than in the secluded homes of Winsor Hills or Bel-Air.

Passing mention should be made about the term to scarf or to scoff. It is a good example of an argot term primarily associated with Black usage that has been transmitted, and more or less assimilated, across racial and economic lines. In fact, more whites in this study knew the term than middle class Blacks. It will be interesting to note the degree to which the so-called assimilated argot on this particular list becomes part of the common pool of American slang. Some of the terms in the glossary already have; others, by the time of this writing, will have undoubtedly moved from the province of argot to slang.

8. Sex and Sex Related Acts.

There are fifteen terms in the glossary directly related to sex. Several of the response groups knew some portion of these terms: A (three terms); AB (four terms); ABD (four terms); AD (one term); ABC (one term); and ABCD (two terms).

Though knowledge of these entries seems particularly diffused among the response groups, the relationship between shared argot and shared experience is not. Knowledge of sex related terminology among the white middle class informants was negligible. None of the fifteen terms was known at the response group level. Two terms, to get some booty ('to have sex') and to get some leg ('to have sex') were known, respectively, by three and four E informants. Three other terms, to catch ('to win over a young lady, with the hope of having sex with her') and poontang ('the female sex organ'), and cock ('the female sex organ'), were each known by a single E informant. These five entries represent all the sexual terminology known to some portion of Group E.

Though the middle class white informant does not seem to share with Blacks a knowledge of the sex related argot on this list, the lower class white ex-offender does. Perhaps no category of argot on this list, with the possible exception of terms related to acts of toughness, seems to so clearly link together the lower class Blacks and whites through the shared experience of jail. Ten of the fifteen sex related terms were known to the ex-offenders in Group C; eight of those ten items were known only by the ex-offenders in Group C. Not only the number, but the kinds of sexual references known to ex-jail youths in C are of interest.

As stated earlier, there are a small number of so-called 'jail terms' that seem to be visibly correlated with a shared jail experience. For the most part, those items sub-Group C knows and shares with the lower class Blacks are terms descriptive of homosexual or bisexual activities. (See Chapter Five for discussion of jail argot.) The significance of shared knowledge of such homosexual or bisexual argot is important because it once again highlights a phenomenon that takes on importance in

a circumscribed environment; and the terms for such phenomena are therefore learned by all participants.

Though other sexual terms of a non-homosexual nature were also known and shared by the informants being considered here, this correlation between the jail experience and the language involved is particularly apparent in even this select sample of argot terms.

There were, in addition, terms known exclusively by the Black population, particularly the lower class Blacks. There are four terms that fall into this category.

The expressions, to do the thing and to do the do, are both references to sexual intercourse. The first expression is another example of a term that distinguishes Black informants from white informants in terms of the meaning assigned to the expression. In Black terms, the expression is sexual; in white terms, the expression is significantly altered (to do your thing) and means 'to do whatever you want.'

It seems to be the case that a number of Black argot terms, when they pass into white usage, become generalized in meaning rather than specified in terms of a particular group interest or maintained in the original Black sense. So, for example, to do your (the) thing takes on a general reference rather than a specific sexual meaning. We can witness the same move away from the specific sexual meaning of such terms as TCB[6] ('to take care of business--often sexual in nature') and uptight ('feeling good, as one does when he is "up-tight" sexually with another'). Conversely, we have already discussed the white informant population's shift from a generalized meaning to a specific drug related meaning in terms such as to bo gart, to get down, to get it on and to burn someone.

Such diversified data suggest the complexity involved in intercultural argot transmission. It promises to be a rich source of continued investigation.[7]

The other term mentioned above, to do the do, seems to reflect usage that is related to geographical proximity of informants rather than to race or economics in particular. That is, the expression is one of two entries in the glossary shared at the response group level by A and D. It was known to only three Venice youths.

Two entries among the sex-related terminology, to freak off with someone and to get over are part of the AB argot on the list. The first expression means 'to have sex in a number of unconventional ways.' It was totally unknown beyond the two lower class Black informant groups. The second term, which means 'to succeed in your sexual advances toward a young lady,' was known to only two BSU youths in Group D, but was known to all twenty-four lower class Black informants.

Before considering the next category of argot terms, mention should be made of one final sex-related item, the definition of which separates the informants along racial lines. The expression cock is such a term.

All but one of the Black informants identified the term to mean 'a female's sexual organ;' only six white youths, three of whom were C ex-offenders, provided this definition. The majority of white informants who did provide a definition for the term indicated it to mean the penis. This particular argot term is a long-standing example of differential usage between whites and Blacks.[8]

9. Interpersonal Relations and Personal Names.

There are a group of terms on this argot list that can be said to label or identify another person and his actions. To the degree that the expression is positive or negative, the term can also be said to designate our feelings or attitudes toward him. So for example, if we call another person an 'ass', we not only label him but indicate our attitude toward him. The fourteen argot terms in this category function in much the same manner. They are primarily 'naming' terms. Of these fourteen items, eleven are part of the ABD argot; each of the three other terms are distributed among three groupings of informants: A, AB and ABCD.

Outside of the Black informant population, naming terms were best known by C ex-offenders. One or more of this C sub-group accounted for knowledge of nine of these argot terms. Given the voluntary and forced intimacy of the penal institution, whether adult or juvenile, it is not surprising that the lower class white ex-offender was familiar with a number of these name terms. As Kantrowitz (1969) indicated, the naming of individuals is exceedingly important in prison as a way of identifying the participants in the 'inmate culture,' and assigning them to their respective racial groups.

What is of particular interest about the C ex-offenders' knowledge of certain of these items is that a preponderance of the terms known are descriptive of a negative attitude. So, for example, six of the nine items correctly identified by C ex-offenders, were terms implying negative, or at best, neutral identification of an individual. On the other hand, four terms describing positive identification of another were virtually unknown to the ex-offenders in Group C. Though the data are limited, it appears that the pressure and friction generated in the prison environment between different racial groups tends to emphasize the portion of the naming vocabulary reflective of that condition, i.e. negative rather than positive terms. Thus, the majority of C ex-offenders were familiar with such terms as a lame ('an inexperienced person--particularly in sexual matters'); a poot-butt ('a socially inexperienced person; someone who doesn't know "what's happening"'), a rootie-poot (same as poot-butt), and a Tom ('a Black person who emulates whites or seeks their favor in any number of ways').

On the other hand, this same group was unfamiliar with terms such as main stuff ('a best friend, most often one's girl friend'); or main squeeze (the same as main stuff); or stuff ('a girl friend or a

young lady in general'); or cuz ('an associate, a general term of greeting usually acknowledging another Black person'). These terms are probably not available to the C jail youth. That is, their secrecy is maintained even in the forced intimacy of jail. This is particularly true where the relations between Blacks and whites may be strained. (See Kantrowitz, 1969, for a discussion of the secrecy dimension reflected in the vocabulary of race relations in prison.)

Only one term in this category was known to a large number of middle class white youths--the expression lame mentioned above. It was known to the four heavy drug users in Group E. The E youths who correctly identified the term acknowledged the Black argot expression lame, but offered the term lamer as the white argot analogue. This is an additional example of the phonological changes which accompany the extension of an argot term into the white community.

The virtual absence of knowledge of the naming argot among white middle class informants may reflect the continuing chasm between the white middle class youth and the ghetto Black. Though these two groups may meet each other within the world of drug transactions and superficial acquaintanceships, terms denoting personal relationships, either positive or negative, are not shared. Relationship terms of the sort identified in this argot glossary are still primarily an intra-racial lexical phenomenon, at the most, 'shared' between Black and white youths in jail.

Four of the terms in this category (main stuff, main squeeze, high yellow, chicken head) were unknown to any white informant. Three of the terms reflect dimensions of the argot that differentiate Black and white usage, as well as usage within the Black informant population.

The terms main stuff and stuff were assigned different meanings by the Blacks and whites interviewed. A majority of the Blacks provided the primary definitions already noted for the terms. The whites who offered a definition assigned drug-related meanings to both terms. Main stuff was defined as 'the drug one used regularly;' stuff was applied to a variety of drugs (notably heroin) and to marijuana.

Though the term stuff (and by association main stuff) has historically been associated with drugs within the Black culture, it has taken on another meaning in this study, with this Black population. Though the two terms were also assigned drug-related definitions by Black informants, the first, primary response to these words was an identifying name for one's friend, or girl friend, or a young lady in general.

As we have seen before, there are a number of old terms retained in the ghetto and unknown beyond it. There are in addition, as exemplified by these terms, expressions that have been transmitted outside the ghetto with their original meaning intact and used outside in that sense. However, they have undergone semantic changes within the ghetto, thus creating different meanings between Blacks and whites.

High yellow (yella) ('an unusually light-skinned Afro-American, particularly a girl') is an interesting expression because it represents another of the argot terms that was little known outside the Black ghettos sampled, and had been identified as one of the old Black argot terms. This AB entry was known to only two middle class Blacks, though the term and what it intimates about 'color consciousness' within the Black culture is a long-standing one.[9]

It is difficult to determine why so many middle class Black youths were unable to identify the meaning of an expression that has been part of the Black idiom for many years. Perhaps, the increasing awareness of one's Black identity relegated such a term to the argot junk heap. Yet, the two Black youths in Group D who did identify the term's meaning were both political activists. It can be argued that they, above all, would be attuned to such terms by virtue of their more intense involvement in moves to obliterate such a self-defeating categorization of one's people. This seems a simplistic explanation for a complex phenomenon.

Perhaps, all that can be concluded from the limited data is that old terms are retained in the argot pool because they are reflections of Black history, and to the extent the terms are still used, reveal ongoing social and psychological realities.

Finally the term chickenhead ('a particularly unattractive girl, usually one that has very close-cropped hair; an unkempt girl') is of interest because like skoofer/skoobie and flake/flag it has its equivalent in Venice argot--tackhead. Though only four Venice youths identified the meaning of this South Central argot term, all twelve B informants provided the term tackhead or tackyhead as the Venice semantic counterpart.

Venice folk etymology (i.e., the informants interviewed) explains the terms tackhead/tackyhead as having derived from the term 'tacky' ('an adjective describing something cheap, badly made or ill conceived, in this case a young lady'). South Central 'etymologists' within the control group and Group A derive the term chickenhead from the chicken-like appearance of a young lady with close-cropped hair. Whatever the origin of the two terms, they are identical in meaning.

More than any other category of terms discussed thus far, argot naming persons or identifying personal relationships can be uniquely identified as part of the Black idiom.

Hannerz, in his observations of Washington, D.C. ghetto life, saw what he termed the 'vocabulary of soul' in operation. According to him, it functions above all to bind Black people together into a brotherhood of shared experience that 'no outsider is expected to understand' (1969, p. 157). Nowhere is the brotherhood of being Black more evident than in this category of terms where pejorative names are not only applied seriously but 'in affectionate mockery [to] signalize the understanding

that they [Black people] are separate from the outside world' (1969, p. 157).

10. The Outsiders.

> Just as black people are taught the meaning of blackness by other blacks, they learn about white people and race relations within the ghetto community rather than in face-to-face contacts with whites. White people are being typed by black people,..just as white people among themselves are typing black people. In both cases the vocabulary becomes a cultural storehouse for hostility, a part of the community's own information about its external affairs which is seldom contradicted by other sources' (Hannerz, 1969, pp. 165-6).

This statement reveals the psychological and social importance of the argot described in this section. The statement also suggests another dimension exhibited by these terms, namely, that expressions of racial derision are generally 'in-house,' to be used by the Black community out of earshot of the persons or class of people they deride. These terms function much as the naming terms do, that is, as part of the private vocabulary of the Black. The informant responses to this body of argot substantiate the essentially secret nature of these terms.

Of the seven terms descriptive of the white person, five are part of the AB or ABD argot on the list. The other two terms, paddy and honky (both derogatory names for whites) have interesting patterns of shared usage and distribution. Paddy is an old Black argot term found in both the Major and Landy dictionaries. Its appearance in Landy's lexicon suggests that it has become relatively well-known among that segment of the 'underground' he refers to as the 'dopers.' Yet the term, which is part of the ABCD argot, was known to only two of the heavy drug users in Group E and to no other members of the middle class white group. On the other hand, the expression honky is part of the ABDE argot, but surprisingly was known to only one C informant (one of the four ex-offenders in that group).

Without more data it is impossible to determine the reasons for this particular distribution of white informant response to the two items. It would seem that the ex-offenders in Group C ought to have been familiar with such a commonly used term as honky, since they demonstrate knowledge of lesser known items in this category. Correspondingly, it is surprising that only two members of Group E knew the equally common expression, paddy. One would expect this term to have been part of their personal experience, or, at the very least, to have arisen sometime during their readings or discussions in high school. With the exception of the term honky, Group E did not know any other terms in this category.

Hannerz has observed that the ghetto Black has little exposure to the white man in his daily dealings and, therefore, bases his responses on

the few whites he does encounter, such as the police, the shopkeeper, the pawn broker or the social case worker. I have observed that the same is true of the white middle class youths. That is, aside from their drug dealings, most of the informants interviewed have little or no ongoing contact with ghetto Blacks. None of the E informants had ever been to the South Central ghetto.

The terms described in this category are most often heard by whites (when they are heard at all) in moments of Black anger, hostility or frustration. The middle class white youth in this study has not been in the emotional or physical context that potentially fosters such pejoratives. For the most part, the E informant's contact with South Central Blacks has been a friendly often times momentary exchange on 'the Strip,' in Hollywood, or at a party. Again, I am speaking about the middle class white informants interviewed for this study. It is not surprising, therefore, to find the middle class white youth ignorant of the very terms that are used to 'put him down.'

On the other hand, one would expect the lower class white informant to know considerably more of these terms than his middle class racial counterpart, since his daily dealings might bring him into more frequent, even hostile contact with South Central Blacks. Again, this is not the case. Although Lennox is particularly close to the South Central ghetto, few of the C informants interviewed (a few of the 'low-riders' excepted) have more than passing contact with Black youths. There seem to be more hostile exchanges between rival white car clubs in the lower class Lennox-Lawndale-Hawthorne area than between any two racial groups.

This isolation from the Black ghetto is reflected in Group C's lack of knowledge of the derogatory names for whites listed in the glossary. With the exception of the term already mentioned, paddy, none of the other words in this category was known at the response group level. On the other hand, six of the seven terms in this group were known by one or more of the C ex-offenders. As already suggested, the shared jail experience often, unfortunately, encourages an antagonistic atmosphere between whites and Blacks within which reciprocal name-calling might well occur.

Only one pejorative, gray ('white person'), was unknown to any of the C ex-offender group. This expression dates back to the 1930's (Major, 1970, p. 61) and seems to have fallen into disuse among a portion of the Black youths interviewed. Yet other equally dated terms, such as honky, paddy, and peckerwood, were well-known. Perhaps, it is infrequently used by this particular group. Or perhaps, it like the other old pejoratives on the list has given way to more graphic expressions for the white man.

The expression beast is included among Major's entries and is interesting from the standpoint of this study because it separates the lower class and middle class Black youths in terms of usage. All the lower class Blacks knew the term; only three D informants (BSU members) correctly identified its meaning; three C jail youths and one E drug user also knew it.

The fact that so few D youths knew the term may be mere chance. However, it may also be true that the stronger, more graphic connotation of the term beast, when compared to less harsh names for the white man such as honky or paddy, more keenly approximates the stronger negative feelings experienced by the lower class Black in comparison to the middle class Black youth.

Heise (1966) has noted that one selects words whose connotations are in line with one's personal feelings about the subject or object being described. In so doing, the person 'avoids dissonance, by using only those words which are congruent with their personal experience' (p. 230). It is my feeling that a number of these terms can be discussed in this light.

Finally, the expression Irvine ('the police') warrants attention. The term was known to all the control group in addition to all the Black response group informants. A single C ex-offender correctly identified its meaning. If any term on this list can be said to relate to the Black idiom, it is Irvine. In effect unknown to any white, it, along with the other 'pure' or virtually pure entries in this glossary, provides strong support for the existence of a Black argot that binds Blacks together across geography and economics and remains unknown to any sizeable segment of the dominant white culture.

11. Miscellany.

There are six terms on the argot list that do not lend themselves to any category. Along with the terms in sections 9 and 10, they provide additional indication of a well-formed private Black argot. Only one of the six expressions, funky ('something unusual, good or bad'), was known by all the response groups. It has, more or less, assumed slang status. However, it too has a Black meaning unknown to any of the whites interviewed. A number of the Black informants also identified funky to mean 'having a strong body odor.'

Another entry, git-go/get-go ('beginning') was known to two of the C ex-offenders. Both claimed to have first heard the terms used in prison. The remaining four entries were unknown, with one exception, outside the Black informant population. Each of them is worth noting.

The expression what it is? ('a greeting, similar to "what's happening?"'), like Irvine above, was known to all the Blacks interviewed. Three C ex-offenders and one E informant identified its meaning. The expression is part of a longer, almost ritualized greeting that is uniquely Black as the 'speech events' cited by Labov (1968) are Black. One variation of this extended greeting proceeds as follows:

Speaker one: 'What it is, brother?' (What's happening?)
Speaker two: 'What it was.' (What has already happened.)
Speaker one: 'What's it gonna be?' (What'll we do?)

Like the dozens or the older term of greeting, what's happening? (and the possible reply: ain't nothin' to it), one can call upon different responses to the initial verbal opening, much as one responds to an opening move in chess. I have yet to hear a white youth engage in this type of elaborate and ritualized verbal exchange.

It is also interesting to note the syntactic structures of the greetings cited above in that the expression, what it is, is used interrogatively and does not 'obey' the grammatical rules of standard American which requires the transposition of the copula (or auxiliary) and subject after a Wh interrogative.

Two of the expressions in this category are part of the AB argot. They are: mother's day ('the first and sixteenth of each month'), and bunny gunny or bani gani ('what's happening?,' 'what's new?'). The expression mother's day is closely related to the experience of many ghetto youths. The term refers to the two days when Aid to Dependent Children relief checks are received by females on welfare. Only the lower class Blacks in this study knew the expression. No middle class Black identified its meaning. Once again we see an instance in which a phenomenon that is important is named. None of the twelve D informants or their families had received aid from the County, to the best of their knowledge. The vast majority of the lower class Blacks interviewed for this study had.

The other AB argot term in this category, bunny gunny (beni gani) is one of the few entries on this particular list that can be seen to derive directly from the Black power movement. This term of greeting is an apparent distortion of the Swahili expression abari ghani which means 'what news?' Though the entry is part of the AB argot, it was known to twice as many South Central informants as Venice youths.

At the time of the South Central field work for this study, the US organization, which stresses the African heritage and culture of the transplanted Black American, had its headquarters in South Central Los Angeles. It was the US organization that popularized Swahili, both through formal classes held at South Central high schools, such as Fremont, and informally.

Though none of the youths who knew the expression abani gani had attended formal classes in Swahili, they had incorporated this expression and a variety of other foreign language phrases into their vocabulary. Most of them could be identified with particular political organizations. For example, the Swahili expression, tutoa nana, means 'until later;' 'see you later.' A number of the South Central youths interviewed for this study used the expression, tuton nada to express the same thought. In Swahili, jema sana means 'very fine;' the South Central equivalent for the same sentiment was jeme sati.

Because of the Muslim influence, smatterings of Arabic were also used by South Central informants. For instance, a few youths identified the

identified the expressions assalah alink and aka linka solon to mean 'peace be with you.' In Arabic, the same meaning is ascribed to the phrase salaam aleikum or its variant, aleikum salaam.

One can expect a number of terms associated with Black nationalism to find their way into the Black idiom. Whether or not the youths using these terms identify with the movement is a question that warrants further investigation. If response to the questionnaire is any indication of Black youthful involvement in Black political organizations, it is minimal at best.

The terms and expressions isolated out for discussion in this chapter are representative of the multi-dimensional informant responses to the argot glossary. Though the many nuances of inter-cultural or intra-cultural usage have only been touched upon, the preceding discussion does suggest the wealth of sociolinguistic information that can be derived from even this limited collection of argot terms when administered to a variety of economic, geographic and racial groups.

B. Summary.

The particular patterns of argot sharing revealed above highlight a number of intra-cultural and inter-cultural concerns within the informant population.

The greatest single body of shared argot that cut across race, economics and geography was that related to drugs and drug activities. The heavy drug users in both white groups and among the Blacks, particularly the lower class Black youths, monopolized knowledge of the terms in this category. Of considerable interest were the terms descriptive of pills. Of special note in this category were the number of phonological and semantic cognates for glossary terms that differentiated the groups racially, economically and geographically. With the exception of this category, the middle class whites did not display concentrated knowledge of any other category of argot terms.

If terms that characterized drugs and drug activities bound together white and Black youths (especially the middle class white drug users and the lower class Blacks), then terms related to acts of toughness, the care, maintenance and display of one's car, and some of the names assigned to whites and Blacks were of inter-cultural concern to lower class youths, regardless of race. This was particularly evident among those lower class youths who have 'served time' in jail.

Yet, a majority of the interests and concerns represented by the argot were race-bound. In each of the categories mentioned above, i.e. drugs, acts of toughness, car and car related activities, and names for Blacks and whites, many terms were virtually unknown to the white informants. When we looked at argot related to material possessions, personal appearance, food and alcohol, generalized physical behavior and argot miscellany, the scope of 'secret terms' was seen to widen. These categories not only separated out the white and Black informants, but also

differentiated lower class and middle class Black youths. Terms related to conscious or ostentatious display of oneself or one's possessions were more widely known by lower class Black youths than by middle class Blacks. Nonetheless, both lower class and middle class Blacks demonstrated concern with personal and material display, and a number of fashions and styles were shared within the Black informant population, as well as the terms describing them.

The terms that most visibly differentiated the lower class and middle class Blacks were old terms related to food and alcohol, personal appearance, material possessions and certain argot miscellany. In fact, the South Central informant population tended to exhibit the greatest knowledge of and continued concern with a number of these activities and behaviors. The retention of these old terms in the vocabulary of the South Central informant in particular seemed to reflect their continued importance in describing on-going tastes and fashions, and the social and psychological realities of ghetto life. The argot can be said to constitute part of the oral history comprising the Black experience.

Aside from separating out particular intra-cultural and inter-cultural concerns among the informants, the study illustrated a number of ways in which argot was transmitted or transformed across race, economics and geography. As already noted, a number of the drug terms on the list had phonological cognates among various informant groups. Conversely, a number of the same argot terms possessed different meanings for groups of informants. These clearly differentiated white and Black informants, with the middle class Black group often standing between the two races in terms of their particular definition of items.

In addition, terms descriptive of generalized behavior or activity within the Black milieu were often used by white informants in a specified or circumscribed sense. Often, the meanings were particularized in terms of drugs or drug use. Conversely, certain argot terms with specified meanings within the Black population took on generalized meanings when transmitted beyond the Black community. This was visible with some sex terms. Whether or not argot meanings were made general or specific by the white or Black informants, the assigned definitions reflected a ranking of experiences in order of their importance to the particular group.

C. Case Histories of Three Informants.

The responses of three of the informants to the argot list can be considered 'atypical,' given their backgrounds and peer experiences. In addition, their responses to the argot deviate from others in their own groups.

1. E.T. (Group A).

In terms of background and life experiences, E.T. closely resembles the Group A informants. He was born and raised in Los Angeles and has spent all of his 16 years in or around the Watts area. Like an unfortunate number of other ghetto youths interviewed, E.T. comes from a broken home. He lives presently with his mother, his step-father and his six brothers and two sisters. In addition to these siblings, he has 'lots of step-brothers and sisters.' His family receives aid from the County and, at present, no one is working in the family.

Most of his adolescence has been spent out of school. He attended Jefferson High School for one day, but 'I just didn't like it, so I didn't go anymore.' He is presently attending school at the California Youth Authority field office in Watts. When asked about his friends, he indicated that since he's been out of the 'joint' this time, he's 'cut them loose' because 'they be connin' me into ditchin' [school] all the time.' He claims that his closest friends are now his brother who is 18 and his nephew who is 22.

Like so many of the other South Central youths interviewed, E.T. claims to know a number of the present and past gang members in the area, but is not, himself, a participant. Again, like others interviewed, his response to the Black organizations ranges from seeming disinterest: 'I don't be too much interested in them,' to fear for his personal safety: 'Them old crazy people. They might get to shootin' anytime and I be right off in the middle of it, gettin' shot up.' When asked what he thought the Panthers were trying to do in the community, he indicated that he had never been down to a meeting (though he lives within walking distance of the Central Avenue headquarters). His response to other of the Black organizations located in the South Central area, such as the Muslims and US, was again seeming disinterest.

Though his arrest record is less extensive than some of the other Group A youths interviewed, it does not represent the least number of offenses attributed to an A informant. He has 'done time' for assault with intent to commit murder (a fist fight with a Chicano youth), 'grand theft auto' (had stolen a modified police car), and, after being sentenced to one of the County probation camps, he went AWOL. He has served approximately two and one-half years in a variety of institutions.

Finally, when he was asked how he learned the 'slang' he knew, his reply was vague ('everywhere'). When pressed on this point, his final response was: 'I don't be messin' around with those dudes. They gets me into trouble and I cain't afford to mess up again.' Slang was associated with 'bad company.'

Superficially, E.T. approximates others found in his response group. However, as Hannerz (1969) points out, 'there are many who are in the ghetto but not of the ghetto in the sense of exhibiting much of a life style peculiar to the community' (p. 15). Though he is referring in

this instance to ghetto dwellers who approximate the middle class 'virtues' of a steady job, coming together for regular family meals, and helping youngsters with homework, he is also talking about a particular stance or manner of dealing with one's environment that highlights or minimizes ghetto-specific behavior.

In the case of E.T., a number of the behaviors associated with Black 'maleness,' as suggested by Hannerz, are apparently tangential to his life or absent from his behavior. He claims not to smoke 'weed,' drink, or take drugs. This was verified to a large extent by his parole officer. He is not inclined to 'pick fights' as a way of displaying his toughness. The incident with the Chicano youth that landed him in jail was provoked by the latter who repeatedly called him a 'mother-fucker' and 'nigger.'

He did not demonstrate the interest in clothes and current fashions that many of the other youths interviewed did, both in their person and their conversation. This, too, was confirmed by his parole officer.

Finally, his verbal response was limited in the interview. Most of his answers to the questions and the argot were brief and close-ended. Whereas other Black youths interviewed commented at length upon this or that question or argot item, E.T. did not. Since his uncommunicativeness could have been a result of the interview situation and not necessarily indicative of his ordinary verbal behavior, I asked both his parole officer and other youths who knew him about his conversation. The opinion was that he was a quiet, rather detached youth who trusted few people and tended to keep to himself. One youth who was at camp with him recalled that he seldom initiated conversations and usually spoke only when spoken to.

Thus, in a number of ways, E.T. does not fit the general picture offered by Hannerz of ghetto-specific male behavior. If we are to believe that there is some link between culture and language use--in this instance the ghetto-specific behavior and subcultural patterns they reinforce and the use of argot as one type of expressive role behavior--E.T. stands somewhat outside his peer group via his argot responses.

Within Group A, the individual level of informant knowledge of the argot ranged from a high of 96% to a low of 72%. The informant demonstrating the lowest percentage of knowledge of the argot was E.T. The next lowest informant score was 84%. This represented a 12% difference in the two levels of informant knowledge (see Figure 1). Seventy-two percent is certainly a respectable degree of knowledge. However the degree to which an informant can be said to 'know' the argot varies significantly. When compared to the rest of Group A, E.T. demonstrated a relatively low degree of knowledge of the glossary. Furthermore, the terms which were unfamiliar to him were themselves of interest in separating him linguistically and behaviorally from the rest of the group.

Of the thirty-eight terms unknown to E.T., sixteen were AB terms, generally of a low level of recognition and usage among the two lower class Black informant groups. In addition, five were A terms. Ten additional entries were part of the ABD argot. Again, they were lesser known terms among Black youths. Finally, there were seven unknown items that fell into a variety of argot clusters.

Those terms unknown to E.T. were generally of one sort, the lesser known entries within one or more of the Black groups. This suggests that E.T., while aware of the more popular items on the list, tended to have less familiarity with what can be called, 'in-group' terms.

The significance of this discussion for this particular study is the relationship it seems to establish between the character of one's actions and behavior and one's knowledge of argot that describes certain so-called ghetto-specific concerns and interests. Being a lower class Black youth, then, is not the only criterion, or even the prime criterion in some cases, for argot mastery as is shown in this instance.

2. R.M. (Group C). (Informant #3)

If E.T. demonstrated a relatively limited knowledge of the argot, when compared to the other members of his group, R.M., on the other hand, outranked not only both groups of whites interviewed, but demonstrated knowledge of the argot equal to or greater than eight Black informants. He displayed a 55% level of correct response to the argot list (see Figure 1). The closest ranking informant in Group C had a 41% correct response level. This represents a 14% point difference between the first and second ranked C informants alone. Furthermore, R.M. demonstrates interest in a number of the 'focal concerns' cited by Miller (1958) that are characteristic of the lower class youth, particularly the lower class delinquent youth. He is an avid 'low-rider' and is a member of the 'Disciples,' an Inglewood car club. He is particularly conversant with the low-rider clubs in the area. When asked what he and his friends like to do over the weekend, he replied: 'Either we go down [to Lennox Park] to fight...or get loaded.' As with the old South Central Los Angeles gangs, there are dividing lines between car clubs and, like the gangs, they will 'jump on' another low-rider club if they 'mess with us.'

He has been exposed to a number of living arrangements. His mother has been married three times. Like a number of Black ghetto youths he never knew his real father. His last step-father and R.M. never got along. 'He's like a cop...I was young and he'd beat on me...if something happened it was me...' Since almost four years of his adolescent life has been spent in some penal institution, he has had little contact with either parent. He has only been 'on the outs' for four months and is staying with his unmarried uncle for the time being.

He has had few jobs and almost no education outside of an institution. His offenses include: incorrigibility, grand theft auto, burglary, three assaults, and one assault with intent to commit murder (he attacked his

last step-father). Two of his sentences were extended because he beat up on fellow inmates in one of the institutions. The elements of toughness, trouble, excitement and, to some degree, autonomy that Miller speaks of are apparent in R.M.'s makeup and background experiences.

Though R.M. was in continual contact with Black inmates for nearly four years of his life, he is avidly anti-Black. His account of his prison experience was to say that there was no choice but to be integrated, but that he and a group of his friends stayed apart from Blacks. 'I'm prejudiced' was his reply to the query of how he got along with minority groups. Yet, some of his closest friends are Chicanos. To him, minority group status is one and the same with being Black. His sole reference to Blacks was to call them 'niggers.' This was said as a matter of course, without conscious thought or particular malice, but rather as a common term in his vocabulary. It is therefore ironical to note that R.M. demonstrated a knowledge of the argot that not only surpassed all other Group C informants but was greater than or equal to several Black youths. Furthermore, he was the only informant in Group C who knew thirteen items that were otherwise unknown to members of his informant group.

The question of why a youth who professes such intense and long-standing dislike for Blacks should be so attuned to an argot that is comprised of a majority of Black expressions is an interesting one. As I have already pointed out, prison is an experience that brings together youths from a variety of racial and geographical backgrounds. Whether or not that forced integration is convivial is another matter. In the case of R.M. it was not, yet he claimed to have learned many of the terms he correctly identified from his contacts with 'niggers.' It was particularly strange to see someone who so disliked Blacks emulating a hair style that has become associated with the Blacks in recent times, namely, the 'natural.'

Though the psychological implications of R.M.'s acceptance and rejection of uniquely Black behavior is intriguing, it is not the province of this study. What is of note is the degree to which language, in this instance the argot, can be seen as a form of 'protective coloration' in an identified hostile environment.

Another explanation for R.M.'s particular acuity with the argot is an extension of the one above. Many of the items on the argot list would be important to R.M. because of his low-rider, drug and jail experiences. Beyond that, the terms that were known almost exclusively to Black youths and to a few whites (R.M. among them) were known because they represent important phenomena. In this instance they represent association with negative phenomena, for example terms such as honky, peckerwood, beast, and devil. In this case the admonition to 'know thy enemy' sheds some light on R.M.'s sensitivity to Black argot. The more one knows about the so-called 'enemy,' the better the chance of outwitting him. In jail, this becomes particularly important information.

As in the case of E.T. in Group A, there are undoubtedly other factors that determine R.M.'s particular knowledge of the argot list. However, this explanation attempts to account for argot knowledge as both a protective mechanism and an experiental reservoir.

3. B.T. (Group D).

In his account of the Black bourgeoisie, Frazier (1957) describes the Negro student and the behavior he is taught to display:

> First, students were taught to speak English correctly and thus avoid the ungrammatical speech and dialect of the Negro masses. They were expected to be courteous, speak softly and never exhibit the spontaneous boisterousness of ordinary Negroes. When they walked down the street, people should be able to say, "There goes an X college girl or boy"' (p. 71).

Though that description of the middle class Black student was written by Frazier in 1957, it aptly characterizes B.T. Of all the Black youths interviewed in this study and the original pilot project, none as patently identifies himself with the 'Black bourgeoisie,' in his manner, speech and personal commitment, as does B.T.

B.T. was born and raised on the 'westside' of the Black community. That is, he never lived in the heart of the Black lower class ghetto. Unlike a number of his peers, both lower and middle class, he has a single sibling, a sister who is taking fashion design at Los Angeles Trade Tech. Though he lives in the Crenshaw High School district, he secured a transfer to Dorsey High School. This is the school from which he graduated. When asked his reasons for transferring, his reply was: 'The atmosphere. Crenshaw is big and it's beautiful and brand new and is just in the wrong place.' [Why?] 'Because...the farther South you get in the city, you have the larger accumulation of Negroes in the city. That area [near Crenshaw High School] is becoming predominantly Black and therefore alot of times the kids that go there kinda 'jive' around; sometimes its not really too cool.' Even Dorsey High School had its problems for B.T., and the use of security guards on campus, he felt, was not stringent enough: 'It's not as tight as it should be. If there was tighter security there wouldn't be so much ruckus.'

He is presently attending West Los Angeles Junior College before he goes on to a four year college. His parents want him to attend Harvard. He is a science major who recently switched to mathematics. His professional goal is still undecided, although dentistry intrigues him.

In terms of status and family income, B.T.'s background can be considered upper middle class. The family owns a five bedroom home in View Park which is primarily an upper middle class neighborhood. Material possessions are numerous and expensive: a pool, three cars, with a fourth on the way for his graduation, trips abroad and to Mexico and the Caribbean.

When asked whether or not he was a member of any of the Black organizations, he said no. When asked what he thought of them, his reply was to mention that five or six of his friends were involved in the Panthers but that one heard so many conflicting stories about the Panthers that it was hard to know what was true. 'I listen to them [his friends], but I'm really neutral.' Then, reflecting on his own potential involvement he mused aloud: 'It's a possibility, they could kinda mess things up for me when I get to be grown,...it's a possibility.' He went on to say that the only real Black power is money, power and intelligence. He rejects violence and revolutionary tactics. He feels the revolutionaries 'are going about it in the wrong way.'

He does not smoke, drink, or take drugs ('I tried it once [barbituates], like a bird flapping its wings'), nor has he been arrested. His explanation for never having been stopped or hassled by the police: 'I think it has alot to do with your appearance...because I think the rougher and the meaner you look, they have a tendency to stop you before they stop someone else.'

Just as being Black and living in the South Central ghetto does not necessarily mean that one assumes the ghetto-specific behavior--including the language it embraces, being admittedly 'bourgeoisie' and Black does not, a priori, mitigate against one's familiarity or use of a Black argot (see Stewart on middle class Black code switching, 1966). B.T. is a particularly good case in point. Although he professes allegiance to no Black political organization nor does he demonstrate particular interest in Black culture, per se, including the Black idiom, he knew 64% of the expressions on the list. This puts him in the linguistic company of the BSU activists in his group and suggests, perhaps, that like R.M. in Group C but for different reasons, B.T. has acquired a facility with the argot as a form of 'protective coloration.' This would seem to fit in with B.T.'s admitted concern with keeping up with what's happening, 'without sticking you're neck out.'

FOOTNOTES

Chapter Six

[1]A study of the changes which a particular item undergoes, even in so short a distance, should contribute information to the general field of historical/comparative linguistics.

[2]Compare this popular bumper sticker expression to the one pasted on the back fender of a young Black's car in downtown Los Angeles: 'When I die, bury me face down so the whole world can kiss my ass.'

[3]See The Black Woman (1970), an anthology of writings by Black women, for an interesting group dialog concerned with the 'natural' and 'Afro' hairdos.

[4]See Iceberg Slim, Pimp the Story of My Life, 1969.

[5]The advertising agencies are obviously aware of the continued attractiveness of the 'pimp' style for many Black males and females. Currently, there is a billboard ad for 'Winston' cigarettes that is much in evidence throughout the Black community. In the foreground an attractive Black male is pictured wearing a modified 'cowboy' outfit: a bright yellow, long sleeved shirt, a red scarf around his neck and a particularly stylish cowboy hat. He also sports a pair of dark sunglasses. In the background is an admiring female. The message that accompanies the picture reads: 'Real and rich and Winston.' It is interesting to observe that the male figure selected is not one dressed in a dashiki or in a leather jacket or beret or, for that matter, in a suit and tie.

[6]A billboard advertisement for Broadway Federal Savings in Los Angeles reads. 'Taking care of business.'

[7]This of course is not unique to such terms. It is often the case that the words in the standard language undergo either 'generalization' or 'narrowing' at one time, for example, the word 'cheek' meant 'jaw.' It's meaning was narrowed. Or the slang word 'kisser' which first referred to the mouth was generalized to mean the 'face.' 'Manuscript' originally meant 'that which is written by hand.' 'Place' formally referred to an open square in a village or town with the present meaning extended to any location. 'Citizen' meant 'city dweller.' 'Knave' meant 'servant (German--knabe).'

[8]Compare with the respective definitions offered by Major (1970, p. 38) and Landy (1971, p. 53) for the term cock.

[9]See the chapter entitled 'Marriage and Love,' in Black Rage (1968) for a discussion of Black 'color consciousness.'

Chapter Seven

CONCLUSION

With some qualifications, the data presented in this study support the four hypotheses posed in Chapter 1.

1. Lower class Blacks use and share a special argot unknown to lower class whites, even when the two groups live in close proximity.

The data confirmed the existence of a well-formed argot generated and validated in South Central Los Angeles and well-known to all members of the South Central response group. For the most part, the lower class white informants demonstrated limited knowledge of the argot used in this study. This is despite the fact that they live in close proximity to a sizeable segment of the South Central youths represented in this investigation and share certain life styles and daily experiences associated with the lower class milieu. Argot knowledge among lower class whites tended to be concentrated within a small informant nucleus who had had extensive contact with Black youths through mutual jail experiences. More will be said about this group below.

Not only was the argot well-known to the vast majority of South Central youths, but a small segment of the glossary proved to be known almost exclusively by South Central Blacks. The presence of this set of argot terms gives some support to the existence of a South Central lexicon unknown beyond the ghetto by either Blacks or whites.

2. The argot cuts across geographical boundaries; lower class Blacks living in geographically separated ghettos share a common argot.

Despite the fact that more than ten miles separates South Central Los Angeles from Venice, California, the lower class Black informants in Venice demonstrated a mastery of the argot that was roughly comparable to that exhibited by the South Central informant population, and considerably greater than that of the middle class Black youths who are situated closer to the South Central ghetto. However, greater numbers of South Central informants knew more items, individually and as a group, than any other informant group.

The argot was not only known and shared across geographical distances by the two lower class Black populations, but a portion of the glossary was known primarily or exclusively by both Venice and South Central youths. On the other hand, there was some indication that Venice, as well as South Central, had a discrete argot lexicon. Phonological similarities between some of the Venice generated terms and the expressions used in this study suggest the possibility of a two-way transmission of argot between the lower class Black populations.

3. This body of argot is shared by middle class Blacks.

The data revealed that race predominated over economics or geography in the sharing of the argot list. The most sizeable body of common argot was that known and shared by the three Black informant groups. Furthermore, a discernible portion of the glossary was known only by Black youths in this study. These terms formed the largest single body of argot known solely by any set of informants.

Though middle class Blacks did not demonstrate the same degree of proficiency with the argot that the two lower class Black groups did, they exhibited a level of knowledge generally superior to that of the two white groups. As in the case of the lower class white youths, the middle class Black group contained a small cluster of informants who proved to be particularly proficient with the argot and keenly attuned to the experiences of their ghetto counterparts. They will be discussed below. Both linguistically and culturally, the middle class Black youths in this study seemed to function as 'middlemen' between the two races.

4. A prime factor affecting shared argot usage is shared life experiences.

Though the argot was most well-known among Blacks in general and lower class Black youths in particular, less than a quarter of the glossary was known 'exclusively' by one or another of the response groups. The vast majority of the glossary known beyond the particularly knowledgeable lower class Black youths was concentrated among sub-sets of informants within the middle class Black group and the two white groups.

These argot knowledgeable informants were associated with each other and informants outside their response groups through an array of common life experiences. These experiences were subsumed under the general rubric of illegal or anti-social activity. These experiences were (1) intra-group, i.e. linked to particular sub-groups of informants such as membership in the Black Student's Union or a 'low-rider' club, and (2) inter-group, i.e. the use of drugs or prison experience. One or another of these experiences dominated each of the three 'micro-groups' (i.e. most knowledgeable sub-sets of informants) and directly affected their superior facility with the argot. The most knowledgeable nucleus within the middle class Black group were the political activists; within the lower class white group, the ex-offenders with extensive records of imprisonment; within the middle class white group, the heavy drug users.

These micro-groups provided the most prominent point of experiential and linguistic interface between the response groups and made a substantial case for the claim that race, economics or geography alone do not determine a person's knowledge of the argot. One's particular life experiences affect the language one uses.

The most well-known category of argot among middle class whites in general, and the micro-group particularly, proved to be drug related terms; among the lower class white group and the micro-group, terms dealing with acts of toughness and certain items descriptive of the care, maintenance and display of one's car were most visibly shared with the Black informants.

On the other hand, argot descriptive of verbal and physical manipulation, material possessions, interpersonal relations, names for non-whites and argot miscellany tended to differentiate Blacks and whites. The generally low level of white response to these argot categories of shared Black concern and interest gave support to the claim for a 'private' vocabulary among the Blacks in this study representing important cultural concerns.

Older and lesser known items among Black informants that described material possessions, manipulative acts and terms for personal appearance and alcohol tended to differentiate the middle class Blacks and the lower class Blacks, and, also, the two lower class Black groups. A number of these items described or defined old or outdated cultural phenomena. Yet, they were 'conserved' in the ghetto youth's vocabulary (most particularly that of the South Central informant) as linguistic markers which still depict significant and on-going intra-ghetto life experiences.

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APPENDIX A

Key to the Glossary

Since a variety of information is being presented in the glossary, the format warrants explanation. The argot items are arranged alphabetically according to the first key word in the entry. Some argot terms or phrases that are identical in meaning and similar in structure are offered as one entry. These multiple entries are either set off by commas, e.g. ACE, ACE BOON COON, ACE COON POON; or the words that vary within the phrase are placed in brackets, e.g.

$$\left\{\begin{matrix}\text{MO} \\ \text{BLACK MOAT}\end{matrix}\right\}$$

Where the pronunciation of a word or phrase is not self-evident, a phonetic transcription is offered.

Most of the argot entries list a single definition; some list two or three. In all cases, informant response is based upon the first meaning cited. Secondary definitions acknowledge the existence of less current or well-known meanings offered for various terms.

The designation 'Category' refers to the particular interest category(s) to which each item is assigned. The eleven categories are represented in the glossary by the following abbreviations:

1. Drug and drug related acts (DR)
2. Acts of toughness (T)
3. Verbal and physical forms of manipulation (MA)
4. Generalized physical activity (PhA)
5. Material possessions (P)
6. Personal appearance (AP)
7. Food and eating (FE)/Alcohol and drinking (AL)
8. Sex and sex related acts (SX)
9. Interpersonal relations and personal names (RL)
10. Outsiders (O)
11. Miscellany (MS)

'Argot Group' refers to the particular response groups who shared knowledge of the item at the group level. 'Group Response' indicates the number of informants in each group who knew the item.

APPENDIX A

Glossary

	Entry	Definition	Category	Argot Group	Group Response A	B	C	D	E
1.	ACE, ACE BOON COON, ACE COON POON	a close friend	RL	ABD	12	7	3	6	0
2.	APPLE HATS, APPLES	large-brimmed oversized caps	P	ABD	12	11	0	12	0
3.	to BASE ON SOMEONE	to verbally disparage someone	MA/T	AB	10	12	1	2	0
4.	the BEAST	a white person	O	AB	12	12	3	3	1
5.	BISQUITS	an 'Ivy League' type male shoe with a particularly large toe area	P	ABD	12	12	1	7	0
6.	GUNNY, BLACK {GUNGEON / GUNNY}	a particularly potent form of marijuana grown in Jamaica and Africa	DR	ABD	12	11	0	6	0
7.	BLACK {MO / MOAT}	a strong, dark form of marijuana	DR	ABC	12	7	6	2	2
8.	a BLADE	i. a Cadillac, particularly a Coup de Ville or Fleetwood ii. any large, late model car iii. a knife	P	AB	6	5	0	2	0
9.	to BLOW HIM AWAY	to kill someone; to shoot someone	T	ABD	12	11	4	6	0
10.	to BLOW ON SOMEONE	i. to be particularly aggressive verbally with another, esp. a female; to monopolize a conversation with the intensity and longevity of your comments ii. to verbally 'put down' another person	MA	ABD	8	9	1	8	0

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Entry	Definition	Category	Argot Group	Group Response A	B	C	D	E
11. BLUNTS	i. diluted capsules of 'Seconal' ii. any 'black market' barbituate	DR	AB	11	5	0	2	0
12. to BO {GART / GARD}	to take advantage; to take more than one's share of something	MA/T	ABCDE	12	12	9	10	7
13. a BOMBER	a large marijuana cigarette	DR	ABCDE	12	11	8	6	6
14. BULLETS, BULLETHEADS	i. large capsules of 'Seconal' ii. any barbituate in bullet-headed capsule form	DR	ABC	12	8	5	3	4
15. BONNY GONNY [banij ganij], BUNNY GUNNY	an expression of greeting, i.e. 'what's happening?'	MS	AB	11	5	0	4	0
16. to BURN SOMEONE	i. to 'steal' a male's woman from him ii. to cheat, rob or otherwise take advantage of someone	MA/T	ABD	11	10	1	8	0
17. BUSH	i. marijuana ii. the female pubes iii. hair	DR/SX/AP	AB	11	6	3	2	2
18. to {BUST / POP} A CAP ON SOMEONE	to shoot a gun at someone	T	AB	12	11	2	1	0
19. to CAP ON SOMEONE	to verbally 'put down' another or another's family	MA	ABD	9	7	3	9	0
20. to CAP OUT	to pass out or fall asleep from excessive marijuana or pills	DR	ABD	11	7	1	8	0

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	Entry	Definition	Category	Argot Group	Group Response A	B	C	D	E
21.	to CATCH	to 'win over' a female with the intention of having sexual intercourse with her	SX	ABD	12	12	0	11	1
22.	CHICAGO GREEN	a particular type of marijuana	DR	AB	8	5	1	2	1
23.	a CHICKENHEAD	a female with short-cropped hair; any unkempt, unattractive female	RL	A	7	4	0	0	0
24.	to CHUCK	to eat	FE	AB	11	7	1	2	0
25.	CHUMP CHANGE	i. a small sum of money, usually less than a dollar ii. money for basic needs	MS	ABD	12	12	0	6	0
26.	to be CLEAN	i. to be nicely dressed ii. to be free of drugs on one's person iii. to no longer take drugs	AP/DR	ABD	12	10	1	5	0
27.	COCK	the female sexual organ	SX	ABCD	12	12	5	11	1
28.	to COCK BLOCK	to interfere with a male's attempt to 'win over' a female, even if the other male is not interested in the female himself	MA	AB	11	11	0	1	0
29.	to COP A MATCH	to secure a matchbox of marijuana from someone	DR	AB	10	10	0	3	1

	Entry	Definition	Category	Argot Group	Group Response A	B	C	D	E
30.	to CREEP	i. to be some place you don't belong--particularly at the house of a female whose man is not at home; to sneak up behind someone and hit him ii. to drive slowly with one's parking lights on	MA/PhA T	ABD	12	12	4	5	0
31.	CUZ [kʌz]	i. shortened form for 'cousin'; used as a term of address, esp. between Blacks greeting one another ii. a friend	RL	ABD	8	11	1	7	0
32.	to DANCE ON YOUR LIFTS	to operate the hydraulic lifts on one's car so that the body is made to bounce up and down (used to 'show off' one's car and equipment)	MA	ABCD	12	12	5	7	0
33.	to be DECKED TO DEATH	to be particularly well-dressed	AP	AD	12	4	0	7	0
34.	the DEVIL	a white person	O	ABD	12	7	2	6	1
35.	a DO	a hair do	AP	AB	8	5	0	3	0
36.	to DO THE DO	to have sexual intercourse with a female	SX	AD	8	3	0	8	0
37.	to DO THE THING	to have sexual intercourse with a female	SX	ABD	12	8	0	5	0
38.	you DON'T HAVE PAPERS ON ME	'you don't own me;' 'you're not married to me'	RL	ABD	11	8	1	5	0

	Entry	Definition	Category	Argot Group	Group Response A	B	C	D	E
39.	DON'T LET YOUR MOUTH OVERLOAD YOUR ASS DON'T LET YOUR MOUTH BUY WHAT YOUR ASS CAN'T PAY FOR DON'T LET YOUR MOUTH WRITE A CHECK YOUR ASS CAN'T CASH	don't talk too much	T	AB	11	9	1	2	0
40.	to be DOWN ON SOMEONE'S CASE	to verbally harass someone	MA/T	ABCDE	12	12	10	12	5
41.	to DROP YOUR RIDE	to abruptly drop the body of one's car to the ground through the use of hydraulic lifts (used particularly to show off one's car and equipment)	MA	ABD	12	12	4	7	0
42.	a DUBEE	a marijuana cigarette	DR	ABDE	10	12	1	5	5
43.	F-40s	1 1/2 grains of 'Seconal' (so called because the Eli Lily drug company stamps this particular barbituate with the identifying letter and number 'F40')	DR	ABCD	12	10	7	6	4
44.	FENDER BENDERS	i. barbituates, esp. 'Seconal' ii. any type of pill	DR	AB	10	9	3	1	0
45.	to FIEND ON SOMEONE	to show up someone, particularly while in one's car by using hydraulic lifts to abruptly drop the body to the ground	MA	A	12	2	0	0	0

	Entry	Definition	Category	Argot Group	Group Response A	B	C	D	E
46.	to FIRE UP	to light up a marijuana cigarette	DR	ABCDE	12	12	11	11	5
47.	to FLAKE	to pass out or fall asleep from excessive marijuana or pills	DR	AB	12	6	0	3	0
48.	to FONK ON SOMEONE	to show up someone, particularly while in one's car by using hydraulic lifts to abruptly drop the body to the ground	MA	ABD	12	11	0	6	0
49.	FONKY, FUNKY	i. something unusual, either good or bad ii. smelly	MS	ABCDE	12	11	10	12	11
50.	to FREAK OFF SOMETHING	to fix up something, particularly to equip one's car with the latest accessories	P	AB	12	12	0	3	0
51.	FRIED, DYED AND {SWOOPED / COMBED} TO THE SIDE	a Black person's hair that has been straightened and styled in emulation of the white man	AP	AB	7	5	0	1	0
52.	FOUL	cold-blooded; ruthless	T	ABD	12	12	3	8	2
53.	to FREAK OFF WITH SOMEONE	to have sexual intercourse in any number of unconventional ways	SX	AB	7	6	0	0	0
54.	a GANGSTER RIDE	an old model car, esp. from the era of the 30's and 40's; any old model car, with or without the latest accessories	P	AB	12	5	1	3	0

	Entry	Definition	Category	Argot Group	Group Response A	B	C	D	E
55.	to GET DOWN	to do whatever one is going to do, esp. fight, have sexual intercourse, dance, take pills or smoke marijuana	PhA	ABD	12	12	4	8	2
56.	to GET IT ON	to begin anything, esp. a fight, sexual intercourse, taking drugs, or smoking marijuana	PhA	ABCDE	12	12	9	12	9
57.	to GET OVER	to 'win over' a female, particularly with sexual intercourse as the end	SX	AB	12	12	0	2	0
58.	to GET SOME BOOTIE	i. to have sexual intercourse ii. with a female ii. to have anal intercourse, esp. with another male	SX	ABD	11	11	4	9	3
59.	to GET SOME {DUKE / DUKE SHOOT}	to have anal intercourse, particularly with another male	SX	(JAIL)	8	4	2	1	0
60.	to GET SOME {EYE / BROWN EYE}	to have anal intercourse, particularly with another male	SX	(JAIL)	6	5	2	0	0
61.	to GET SOME LEG	to have sexual intercourse with a female	SX	ABCD	12	12	6	11	4
62.	the {GIT GO / GET GO}	the beginning	MS	ABD	12	12	2	7	0
63.	to GO DOWN	to help a friend when he is in trouble, esp. when a fight is imminent	T	ABD	11	12	2	6	0

	Entry	Definition	Category	Argot Group	Group Response A	B	C	D	E
64.	to GO FOR WHAT YOU KNOW	to accomplish the best you can (used particularly within the context of a fight)	T	AB	12	12	2	3	0
65.	GRAPES	wine	AL	AB	7	6	0	1	0
66.	to GUSSLE, to GONSLE [gʌsl̩] [gansl̩]	to fight	T	AB	9	5	1	4	0
67.	a GRAY	a white person	O	ABD	8	9	0	7	0
68.	to GREASE [grijz]	to eat	FE	ABD	6	10	0	7	0
69.	to HAVE YOUR NOSE WIDE OPEN	i. to be particularly infatuated or in love with another person ii. to be 'snorting' cocaine	MA/DR	AB	7	9	0	4	0
70.	HEADS	males, esp. Black males	RL	ABD	12	9	1	7	0
71.	to HEAT YOUR SPRINGS	to have the back springs of one's car heated so that the back end drops and becomes permanently lowered	PhA/P	ABC	12	10	9	2	0
72.	to HIGH SIGN	i. to show off what one has, e.g. car, clothes, girlfriend, etc. ii. to display the colors, sign, etc. of one's special group affiliation	MA	ABD	12	11	0	6	0

	Entry	Definition	Category	Argot Group	Group Response A	B	C	D	E
73.	HIGH {YELLA / YELLOW / YALLER} [yɛlə] [yælr̩]	a particularly light-skinned Afro-American, esp. a female	RL	AB	9	8	0	2	0
74.	HONKY	a white person	O	ABDE	12	12	1	12	6
75.	a {HOOPDIE / HOOPIE}	a car	P	ABD	12	12	0	5	0
76.	HORS D'OEUVRES	capsules of 'Seconal'	DR	A	5	0	1	1	0
77.	IF YOU FEEL {FROGGISH / FROGGY} {LEAP / TAKE A LEAP}	a challenge to fight: 'if you think you can beat me, come ahead'	T	AB	11	7	3	1	0
78.	IRVINE [rrvajn]	the police	O	ABD	12	12	1	12	0
79.	to JACK UP SOMEONE	to physically assault someone, particularly with the intention of robbing them	T	ABCD	12	12	10	8	4
80.	JIBS	lips; mouth	AP	AB	10	6	0	2	0
81.	to be KEYED	to be 'high' on drugs	DR	ABD	11	6	1	6	0
82.	a KITTY, CAT, KITTY CAT	a Cadillac	P	ABD	6	7	0	5	0
83.	a LAME	a socially inexperienced person; someone who doesn't know 'what's happening'	RL	ABCD	12	12	8	10	4
84.	to LAY SOME PIPE	to have sexual intercourse with a female	SX	A	7	3	0	2	0

	Entry	Definition	Category	Argot Group	Group Response A	B	C	D	E
85.	to LEAN	a style of driving one's car in which the driver leans toward the right hand side of the car as if resting his elbow on a console or arm rest--whether or not it actually exists--while maneuvering the car with the left hand (popular among 'low-riders')	MA	ABD	11	10	0	5	0
86.	{LILYS / LILY F40s}	1 1/2 grains of 'Seconal' (so called because the Eli Lily drug company stamps this particular barbituate with the identifying letter and number 'F40')	DR	ABC	11	10	6	2	4
87.	L.I.Q.	liquor store	AL	AB	7	6	0	0	0
88.	to MACK	i. to talk, particularly to a female with the intention of impressing her ii. to kiss	MA	ABD	12	12	0	8	1
89.	MAIN SQUEEZE	one's best friend; one's primary girl friend	RL	ABD	9	11	0	6	0
90.	MAIN STUFF	i. one's primary girl friend ii. a close friend	RL	ABD	11	9	0	6	0
91.	MAIN WHORE [how]	i. one's main woman--sexually, romantically or both ii. a pimp's number one money-making prostitute	RL	ABD	12	10	2	8	0

	Entry	Definition	Category	Argot Group	Group Response A	B	C	D	E
92.	ME AND YOU	a challenge to fight: 'there's just me and you, so let's fight'	T	ABCD	12	11	6	5	0
93.	MOTHER'S DAY	the first and sixteenth of each month (the two days that County welfare checks are issued to women receiving aid)	MS	AB	9	7	0	0	0
94.	to OFF SOMEONE	to hit someone quickly before he can retaliate; to kill someone	T	ABD	12	11	2	8	0
95.	OLD MAN COMFORTS	a high or low top male shoe resembling orthopedic shoes worn by old men	P	ABD	12	11	0	6	0
96.	a PADDY	a white person	O	ABCD	12	12	6	10	2
97.	a PECKERWOOD	a white person	O	ABD	12	10	3	9	0
98.	PLUCK	wine	AL	AB	10	6	0	1	0
99.	POONTANG	a sexually desirable female; a female's sexual organ	SX	ABC	7	9	5	3	1
100.	a POOT-BUTT	a 'square;' someone who doesn't know 'what's happening' (often refers to a young child)	RL	ABD	12	12	4	9	0
101.	to PUT HER ON THE BLOCK	to have a female working for one as a prostitute	SX	AB	12	9	4	4	0
102.	to RANK SOMEONE	to interfere with another male's attempt to 'win over' a female; to verbally 'put someone down'	MA	ABD	12	12	3	6	1

	Entry	Definition	Category	Argot Group	Group Response A	B	C	D	E
103.	to RIDE {PUSSY / PUNK / THE BITCH'S SEAT}	to ride in the front seat of a car between two other males	MA	ABCD	10	12	8	10	3
104.	to RIDE SHOTGUN	i. to ride in the front seat of a car on the passenger's side ii. to ride in the middle between two other males, either in the front or back seat of a car iii. to ride in a car as the 'look-out' for any trouble that might occur	MA/T	ABCDE	12	12	11	9	8
105.	to RIP {OFF / ON} SOMEONE	to have sexual intercourse with a female	SX	ABD	12	12	2	10	0
106.	to RIP OFF SOMETHING	to steal something	T	ABCDE	12	12	9	11	7
107.	a RIV	a Buick Riviera	P	ABD	10	11	4	5	0
108.	to ROCK OUT	to pass out or fall asleep from excessive marijuana or pills	DR	A	5	4	0	0	0
109.	a ROOTIE-POOT	a 'square;' someone who doesn't know 'what's happening' (often refers to a young child)	RL	ABD	12	11	3	9	0
110.	to RUN OFF AT THE JIBS	to talk too much	PhA	ABD	11	12	4	8	1
111.	to {RUN / ROLL} SETS ON SOMEONE	to hit a person with a series of double-fisted blows so quickly he is unable to retaliate	T	ABD	12	9	4	6	0
112.	to {SCARF / SCOFF}	to eat	FE	ABCDE	11	10	8	5	7

	Entry	Definition	Category	Argot Group	Group Response A	B	C	D	E
113.	to SCOPE ON SOMEONE	to look intently at someone, esp. a female	MA	ABCD	12	12	5	9	2
114.	to SEND SOMEONE ON A {HUMBUG / HOMBUG}	to give someone false directions or instructions or information	MA	AB	11	12	2	3	0
115.	to SHINE SOMEONE ON	to ignore someone	MA	ABCDE	12	12	9	10	5
116.	a SHORT, SHOT, SHAW, SHOUT, SHAWL	a car	P	ABCDE	11	10	10	5	5
117.	a SHORT DOG	a small bottle of wine, esp. 'Ripple' or 'Silver Satin'	AL	AB	12	11	0	3	0
118.	to be SILKED TO THE BONE	i. to be exceptionally well-dressed to the extent that all clothes and accessories are made of silk ii. an exceptionally well-dressed person	AP	ABD	12	8	0	6	0
119.	SKOOFER, SKRUFER, SKOOFUS, SKRUFUS	a marijuana cigarette	DR	A	10	1	0	0	0
120.	STENCILS	long, thin marijuana cigarettes	DR	A	12	1	0	2	0
121.	STUFF	i. any sexually attractive female ii. drugs, esp. heroin	RL/SX DR	ABD	12	11	0	6	0
122.	STOMS, STUMS, STUMBLERS	barbituates, particularly 'Seconal'	DR	ABCD	12	12	7	6	4

	Entry	Definition	Category	Argot Group	Group Response A	B	C	D	E
123.	to STYLE	to show off what one has, e.g. car, clothes, girlfriend, etc.	MA	ABD	12	12	3	12	1
124.	to SWOOP	i. to come upon someone suddenly, as the police do when they make an arrest; to make a fast 'pickup' of a girl ii. a caravan of cars moving in a serpentine fashion down a street	MA	ABD	12	12	3	12	1
125.	THOUSAND EYES	male 'Florsheim' type shoes with a number of perforations in the toes	P	AB	12	11	2	4	0
126.	THREE QUARTER LENGTH PIECE	a three-quarter length leather or suede jacket, often belted	P	ABD	12	10	1	8	0
127.	THROW ME OUT WITH...	give me a marijuana cigarette, pills, money, etc.	DR	ABD	12	10	1	7	1
128.	a THUMP	a fight	T	ABCD	12	12	8	11	2
129.	to TIP	to leave; to be going some place one doesn't belong, e.g. to the home of a female whose man is not present	PhA/MA	AB	8	10	0	0	0
130.	a TOM	i. any Black person who attempts to emulate or please the white man; someone who has 'sold out to whitey' ii. a Black informer	RL	ABD	10	11	3	10	0

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	Entry	Definition	Category	Argot Group	Group Response A	B	C	D	E
131.	to TURN OUT A SET	to permanently disrupt a party in any number of ways, e.g. a fight, through verbal harassment, 'freaking out' on a drug, etc.	T	ABD	12	12	0	8	0
132.	to TURN SOMEONE OUT	i. to introduce someone to his first homosexual experience ii. to introduce someone to his first experience with sex, drugs, etc.	SX	(JAIL)	11	3	3	0	0
133.	to VAMP	to leave	PhA	ABD	9	5	0	5	0
134.	to VAMP SOMEONE	to hit someone from behind; to sneak up on someone for the purpose of hitting them	T	A	9	0	0	4	0
135.	WHAT IT IS!	an expression of greeting similar to 'what's happening?'	MS	ABD	12	12	3	12	1
136.	WHORE BOOTS [how buts]	knee or thigh high boots (associated with prostitutes who were seen to wear them frequently)	P	A	12	3	0	2	0
137.	to BE {WIDE / WIRED}	to be 'high' on drugs	DR	ABD	11	6	1	7	1
138.	to WOOF	i. to playfully 'put another person down' verbally; to joke around ii. to talk	MA	ABD	12	11	2	9	1

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE (ADULT-PRE)

(CONFIDENTIAL)

NAME _____ AGE___ BIRTHPLACE _____

ADDRESS _____ OCCUPATION _____

MARITAL STATUS _____ NUMBER OF CHILDREN (AGES) _____

RESIDENCE HISTORY: HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU LIVED IN LOS ANGELES?____

PLEASE LIST PLACES OF RESIDENCE IN THE LAST 10 YEARS (APPROXIMATE DATES) PARTICULARLY IN L.A.

_____

_____

_____

SCHOOLING: PLEASE LIST SCHOOL ATTENDED: (APPROXIMATE DATES--LOCATIONS)

_____

_____

ARE YOU A MEMBER OR SYMPATHETIC TO THE AIMS OF ANY BLACK SOCIETY, SECT, ORGANIZATION, ETC.?_____ IF SO, WHICH ORGANIZATIONS?

_____

_____

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN INCARCERATED? _____ IF SO, WHERE? HOW LONG? WHAT OFFENSE?

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE (TEEN FORM)

NAME_____ ADDRESS_____

PHONE NUMBER _____ AGE_____ NEAREST CROSS STREET_____

* *

RESIDENCE INFORMATION

1. Where were you born? Were you raised there too? (If "no") Where?

2. Where have you stayed besides L.A.? (Places and dates)

3. (If not from L.A.) Where are you from originally? How long have you stayed in L.A.?

4. Can you give me some idea of the different places you've stayed, say, from about five?

5. How long have you stayed at your present place?

FAMILY BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Who all are the members of your family? (Get mother, father, brothers, sisters, etc.) (Ages of siblings)
tions)

2. Do you have any kids? (If "yes") How many? How old?

3. Do you stay with your family? (If "no") Who do you stay with?

4. Who all works in your family? Who else? What do they do?

5. Do you (your family) get help from welfare? unemployment? somewhere else?

6. Is your father living? (If not mentioned.)

FAMILY RESIDENCE INFORMATION

1. Do you know where your mother (father) was born? raised?

2. Do you know where your grandma (grandpa) was born? raised?

SCHOOL HISTORY

1. Do you go to school? (If "yes") What school do you go to?
(If "no") What grade did you finish? Where?

2. Have you gone to any other school besides_____? (If "yes") Which one(s)?

3. Which one did you like best (least)? Why?

4. Are your partners at your school? (If "no") Where do they go?

5. What school has the reputation for being the toughest? Why?

WORK HISTORY

1. Have you ever worked? (If "yes") What did you do? Where at? (Get a list of past jobs)

2. Do you work now? (If "yes") What do you do?

3. What do you really want to do?

TRAVEL PATTERNS

1. Besides _____, do you have close kin, partners or associates in other parts of L.A. that you see? (If "yes") Where do they stay? How often do you see them?

2. Do you hang out on the East (West) side or somewhere else? (If "somewhere else") Where?

3. Do most of your partners live on the East (West) side? (If "not all or most") Where do they stay?

4. Do you have a ride? Do your partners have rides?

5. Where do you and your partners go to do it up, say, on the weekends?

6. Do you ever get down to the beach, like say, Venice? (Use map, if necessary) (If "yes") Do you know any dudes down around there?

7. What's the dividing line between the East and the West, do you think?

PEER GROUP ASSOCIATIONS

1. Are all or most of your partners and associates Black? (If "no") Do you have any white or Chicano associates?

2. Who's your real ace? What's he like?

3. Do you have a special young lady? What's she like?

4. Do you and your partners run the dozens on each other? (If "yes") Like what are some of the numbers you run down?

SPECIAL NAME

1. Besides your regular name, do you have a special name or nickname that you go by? (If "yes") How did you come by it? Who all calls you by it?

GANG ASSOCIATION

1. Do you or did you belong to one of the gangs? (If "yes") Which one? Did your gang have a special language? (If "yes") Like what?

2. I've been told by guys who were gang members that after the riots alot of the gangs split up--is that true, you think?

3. Do you think that it's true that guys like the Gladiators went and joined up with US, or that the Businessmen went with the Muslims? (If "yes") Why do you think they did?

4. What do you think Panthers, US, Muslims are trying to do?

ARREST RECORD

1. Have you ever been picked up or actually busted by the cops? (If "yes") For what?

2. Did you go to the joint? Which one?

3. What was it like?

LANGUAGE INFORMATION

1. What do you think slang or hip language means?

2. Do you think that Blacks have a special hip language?

3. Do you think that kids coming up are schooled to use a special language? When do you think that kids mostly use slang--between what ages?

4. If you didn't know something your partner ran down, would you ask him what he meant or just sorta figure it out?

5. Would you run the words we've been talking about down to the moms? The pops? Your little sisters and brothers? Some white dude? the Man? Who?

APPENDIX D

Geographical Boundaries for Core Group and Response Group Populations