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The Children of the Illiterate: Education, Work, and Mobility

With the transformation of social and productive relations in the nineteenth century came a new concern with children and youth, the next generation of workers and citizens. Through the century, more and more parents directed heightened attention toward their children's socialization, education, and futures. Simultaneously, special systems of institutions, such as the schools, were developed, signifying a novel public concern and responsibility for the young. Under the state, educational institutions increasingly stood between family and society, as both family and institutions acquired augmented and specialized roles in socialization. As Katz has summarized, the process marked "part of a general tightening of the boundaries between social institutions and between the family and community." Part of the shift first to commercial and later to industrial capitalism, the school system along with other social institutions was centralized and expanded in the context of perceptions of massive social disorders: from urban crime and poverty to cultural diversity, changing labor-force requirements, and a crisis of the young. The school's functions lay in the confrontation of these problems and their resolution through mass education, in which literacy occupied a crucial place (as we have noted). The goals of public education were of course many; they included the inculcation of habits and values, social discipline, work preparation, cultural homogenization, literacy, and the establishment of hegemony among the population.¹

¹ Katz, "The Origins of Public Education: A Reassessment," *History of Education Quarterly*, 16 (1976), 388, 381-407. On the development of educational systems, see also, Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools* (New York: Praeger, 1975, 2nd ed.) and *The Irony of Early School Reform* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968);

Prior to the complex of socioeconomic transformations that remade North America and much of the west after the mid-eighteenth century, social position depended overwhelmingly on inheritance and generational succession, in theory and commonly in fact. Social ascription ruled the social order. Accompanying the changing social order, especially in North America, and devolving especially upon the schools, was the promotion of achievement as the substitute for ascriptive continuities, among education's other functions. Ideals and social theory reversed their traditional expectations, as opportunities for intergenerational mobility and socioeconomic attainments through universal schooling acquired legitimacy, popular acceptance, and urgency. The future of the young, and in them, the guarantees of civilization, society, and progress, began to depend on the expected fulfillment of the ideology of achievement, for both continuing social status at middle-class or higher levels and for upward movement in surmounting more lowly social origins. Conversely, those without education and literacy would either fall into or remain fixed in lower-class positions. Upper Canada's preeminent educational promoter, Egerton Ryerson, voiced these new expectations, asking "Does a man wish his sons to swell the dregs of society—to proscribe them from all situations of trust and duty in the locality of their abode—to make them slaves in the land of freedom? Then let him leave them without education, and their underfoot position in society will be decided upon."² In the present century, the

Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977); Ian Davey, "Educational Reform and the Working Class," unpub. Ph.D. Diss., University of Toronto, 1975; Katz and Paul Mattingly, eds. *Education and Social Change: Themes from Ontario's Past* (New York: New York University Press, 1975); Carl Kaestle, *The Evolution of an Urban School System: New York, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973); David Tyack, *The One Best System* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974); Phillip McCann, ed., *Education and Socialization in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1977); and the work of Richard Johnson cited in Ch. 1. On youth and adolescence, see Joseph Kett, *Rites of Passage* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); Katz, *The People of Hamilton* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), ch. 5; Katz and Davey, "Youth and Early Industrialization," in *Turning Points: Historical and Sociological Essays on the Family*, ed. Sarane Boocock and John Demos (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), S81-S119; John Gillis, *Youth and History* (New York: Academic Press, 1974); Harvey J. Graff, "Patterns of Adolescence and Child Dependency in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century City," *History of Education Quarterly* (HEQ), 12 (1973), 129-143; Michael Anderson, *Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Chad Gaffield and David Levine, "Dependency and Adolescence on the Canadian Frontier," *HEQ*, 18 (1978), 35-47.

² *Journal of Education for Upper Canada*, 1 (1848), 297; Prentice, *School Promoters*; See also, Ch. 5, below, and Chs. 2-3.

emphasis on achievement has continued relatively unabated, despite an absence of justification for it to be found in empirical research, and despite persistent debate. Blau and Duncan repeat the dominant viewpoint and the democratic ideology, that "the chances of upward mobility are directly related to education. . . ." "The premise," they maintain,

hardly a startling one, of the calculation is that education is a major factor intervening between occupational status of origin and achieved occupational status. Although the amount of education attained depended in part on level of origin, it also depends on other factors. It is quite possible, therefore, that a substantial number of men receive enough education to insure a moderate amount of upward mobility, taking into account the levels at which they start.

Other students, of course, take a much more restricted view, stressing a relative lack of opportunity and an inheritance of social-class position, the reproduction of inequality from generation to generation.³ As traditional patterns of growing up were displaced by the process of change, anxieties about the place of young persons mounted. Observers focused upon the idle and vagrant youth, the working juvenile, the delinquent, as well as the school child. Most concluded that the best place for the young was nowhere but in school; the experience of education was the hope for the young as well as for their society.

The children of the illiterate adults whose lives, work, and adjustment we have studied grew up in this context of capitalist development and social transformation. Their opportunities for education and literacy, work and wealth, were formed in the commercial cities of Ontario that we are considering, set by the resources and decisions of their parents, and limited by the structures of inequality. Historians' knowledge about the role that parental circumstances and early influences contribute to personal and career development is severely limited, to be sure; this represents one of the most glaring gaps in social, psycho-, and educational history today. Nevertheless, to analyze the schooling, early work, and mobility patterns of the children of those without the benefit of education or literacy remains important. To further explore the meaning of literacy and the nature of the disadvantages that illiteracy carried, these data permit us to evaluate the familial and intergenerational effects of parental illiteracy. What did it mean to grow up as the

³ *The American Occupational Structure* (New York: Wiley, 1967), 156, 155. See also, in support of this contention, the literature by Sewell and Hauser, Laumann, Lipset and Bendix, and in opposition, Bowles and Gintis, Boudon, Jencks, all cited in Chs. 2-3. There are no historical inquiries which treat the questions directly, as yet, but see Katz, *People*, Ch. 3; Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), Ch. 5. These issues are enormously complex.

child of an illiterate father or mother? Did the circumstances of parental illiteracy adversely affect their children's chances for schooling? Were the young forced into disadvantaged positions in the labor market, inheriting parental class and status? Where did they begin their own careers?

Patterns of school attendance, work and leaving home, and intergenerational occupational mobility form the interrelated concerns of this chapter. This analysis shows that the circumstances that surrounded parental (especially family head's) illiteracy influenced the children's experiences in growing up. Although such children were integrated into the social processes that determined life-course experiences, their patterns of education, work, and home-leaving diverged from those of the children of most literate parents. The difference, not surprisingly, was to their disadvantage. Yet the culmination of these experiences, in so far as we may judge, did not constitute a complete deterrent to the illiterates' children's futures. Their origins were undoubtedly restrictive, and ascription was important, but parental status did not debilitate the children's chance for some success in occupations, relative to their parents' achievements. As literacy and schooling did not insure success or mobility, so illiteracy did not completely obstruct the progress of the next generation, locking them into cultures of poverty or the lowest class of society.

I

Education in mid-nineteenth-century cities was not equally available to all children, despite ideologies promoting universal, free common schooling and equality of opportunities. Schooling, even as it expanded rapidly and was systematized into large bureaucracies, remained stratified: by class, ethnicity, race, and sometimes sex—the same ascriptive characteristics that dominated the social structure, as we have seen. In Upper Canada, public school systems developed from the 1840s, expanding rapidly for the next quarter century or more. Throughout the period, the proportion of children attending school (those enrolled) increased markedly, virtually all of them attending the new, public institutions. Class, along with other ascriptive factors, continued to be the primary determinant of attendance; as enrollments rose, therefore, differences between social groups remained intact. Consequently, few children of the laboring and poor class attended long enough to reach the higher grades, and never as long as children of higher-class parents.

Moreover, even when most working class children attended, the duration of their time in school and the regularity of their attendance were limited by poverty, transience, and poor health. Periodic poverty, social inequality, the rhythms of work, and irregular attendance were inseparably linked.⁴

That the children of illiterates were disadvantaged in educational opportunity should hardly surprise us. Limited by poverty and lower-class status, and frequently by their ethnicity, their attendance was simply not always possible, nor would it always be their families' first priority. By 1861 and 1871, the hegemony of the new educational system was well established, as Davey's, Katz's and Prentice's respective research documents, and these patterns of attendance reflect this social phenomenon. Yet within the restrictions of their circumstances, illiterate parents could respond in different ways to the promise of the school and achievement. With perceptions no doubt colored by their own and others' experiences—whether of success or failure—in work, wealth, and survival, *with* and *without* the benefits of schooling, the educational decisions of illiterates did not follow the common patterns in all ways. In effect, they may well have felt, and responded to, the tensions and contradictions arising from the realizations, on one hand, that a lack of schooling had not, in many cases, had a dramatic impact on their own careers and that the acquisition of some education had not aided many close to them. This they confronted along with, on the other hand, the social pressures of educational promotion, hegemony, and some acceptance of the import of education for their children's futures. Could they have completely ignored Egerton Ryerson's warning about their sons possible swelling the dregs of society, the visible (albeit limited) returns of literacy and schooling, and the ideology of opportunity for advance-

⁴ See esp. Davey, "Reform"; Halay P. Bamman, "Patterns of School Attendance in Toronto, 1844-1878," *HEQ*, 12 (1972), 381-410; Katz and Mattingly, eds. *Education; Census of the Canadas*, 1851 (Quebec, 1853), 1861 (Quebec, 1862-63); *Census of Canada*, 1871 (Ottawa, 1873); *Reports of the Chief Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada and Ontario* (Toronto, *passim*.); C. B. Edwards, "London Public Schools, 1848-1871," *London and Middlesex Historical Society, Transactions* (1914), 14-29; F. R. Smith, "Early Schools in Kingston," *Historic Kingston*, 5 (1955-56), 25-29. Extracts of local superintendents reports, in *Reports of the Chief Superintendent*, are useful in understanding influences on attendance and local variations (original reports are kept in the Province of Ontario Archives, Toronto). See also, Kaestle, *Evolution*; Selwyn Troen, "Popular Education in Nineteenth Century St. Louis," *HEQ*, 13 (1973), 23-40; A. C. O. Ellis, "Influences on School Attendance in Victorian England," *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 21 (1973), 313-326; McCann, ed., *Education*; Maris Vinovskis, "Trends in Massachusetts Education, 1826-1860," *HEQ*, 12 (1972), 501-530. Kaestle and Vinovskis have recently completed a major study of school attendance in nineteenth-century Massachusetts.

ment and mobility that legitimated popular education's hegemony and gained for it popular assent for the imposition of the school systems? Could they simultaneously neglect the very restricted benefits of literacy to most members of their class and ethnic groups? These social contradictions formed the parameters for the illiterates' and the poor's response to the school. They permeated their educational choices and influenced their selections among the alternatives of schooling for their children, work for the support of the family economy and own experience, savings for property acquisition. Consequently, they sent their children to school, but not always as often as literate parents did, and not always with the same expectations and assumptions as the literates held. Illiterate parents, therefore, varied in their reactions to the school, and sometimes also exhibited a great desire for education and acceptance of the school.

At the aggregate level, the school attendance of illiterates' children was shaped first by the structure of local educational opportunity. Thus, in 1861, more of the school-aged children (5-16 years) of illiterates attended in Kingston (46%) and London (55%) than in Hamilton (38%). Not revealing in themselves real differences in attitudes toward schooling, however, these patterns derived from differentials in total attendance among the three cities. In Kingston, according to the census, about 62% of all eligible children attended, in London 67%, and in Hamilton 57% of all children or 59% of literates' school-aged children were enrolled.⁵ In *no one* of the three cities did the percentage attendance of illiterates' children equal that of either all children or that of the children of literate parents. Their children, though, were more likely to go to school in a city in which greater numbers attended. Community behavior, more opportunities, and the concomitant hegemonic process pressed upon their actions. This intracity variation is important. The net difference between their children's attendance and that of others is relatively consistent from place to place, representing a regular disadvantage for the children of the illiterates. Differential attendance was a constant fact in the lives of these parents and their children, whereas children in different cities nonetheless received different amounts of schooling. To what extent was this a result of parental illiteracy or parental choice?

Different social groups and individuals of course responded to the

⁵ Attending school, as the term is employed in this chapter, corresponds only to the category of the census (and also the Superintendent's *Reports*) "Attending school during the year." It is not a measure of regular (daily, monthly, etc.) attendance, but of enrollments. The Chief Superintendent's reports for this time indicate that most children attended in the range of 50-100 days each year, increasing to over 100 by the 1870s. Ian Davey's dissertation ("Educational Reform and the Working Class," University of Toronto, 1975), esp. Ch. 5, provides the best discussion of attendance available.

availability of education and its promise in different ways. In these patterns of response, the determinants of attendance are found, for the decisions made by parents or by the children themselves derived primarily from two sources. The premium placed on the value of and the need for schooling contributes one factor; the second, and perhaps more important, basis follows from the extent to which limited family resources, poverty, irregularity of work, the necessity of a child's working, and the like, permitted the necessary investments to be made. These are not mutually exclusive factors; moreover, to them may be added the discrimination, formal or informal, against some children, such as blacks or Catholics. With these considerations, we may ask, What were the determinants of attendance and how did they influence the decisions of literate- and illiterate-headed families? The mean percentage of children per family attending school, of those aged 5-16, provides the data: Of the children of the Hamilton literates, 54% attended, compared with 35% of illiterates in Hamilton, 42% in Kingston, and 50% in London. These total patterns were determined by the families' class and occupation, ethnicity, and family circumstances.

Occupational class, with its broad correlation with wealth, clearly shaped the social structure of school attendance in these cities. This held among literates and illiterates, as highest-ranking parents sent a larger proportion of their children to school (Table 4.1). As the data reveal, a direct relationship tied occupational class to proportions of children attending, from the children of nonmanual-working parents downward. This common pattern reflects the roles that the availability of surplus family resources, or poverty, played in the allocation of education and the extent to which education among the children, like literacy among their parents, was socially stratified. It reveals as well the social function of education, inasmuch as it served to reproduce the social structure intergenerationally; those ranking highest were able to secure more education for their children in the interests of maintaining social position.⁶

The illiterates, consequently, with only one exception, sent their children less often regardless of occupational class. The Hamilton comparison shows this most directly, as the intraclass differences ranged from 10 to 20%. Even the largely poor unskilled literate parents sent more of their young, and only among the semiskilled did illiterate attendance equal that of the others. This differential is especially significant, for we have seen that very little benefit accrued to literate men in unskilled

⁶ See Davey, "Reform"; Katz, "Who Went to School?" *HEQ*, 12 (1972), 432-454, and "Origins of Public Education"; the literature cited in Note 2, esp. Boudon and Bowles and Gintis.

Table 4.1
School Attendance, 1861, by Head of Household Characteristics:
Mean Percentage of Children 5-16 Attending

	Hamilton literate ^s		Hamilton illiterate ^s		Kingston illiterate ^s		London illiterate ^s	
	<i>N</i> ^a	% ^b	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Mean	1657	54.2	201	35.2	83	41.6	70	49.5
Ethnicity								
Irish Catholic	272	41.1	136	35.0	47	44.3	27	49.3
Irish Protestant	251	56.1	19	27.9	11	41.7	7	39.3
Scottish Presbyterian	282	61.1	2	50.0	3	50.0	5	53.3
English Protestant	450	57.1	17	39.2	3	66.7	11	55.3
Canadian Protestant	125	58.9	4	25.0	3	55.6	3	16.7
Canadian Catholic	15	48.9	—	—	4	41.7	—	—
Black	19	39.5	14	48.2	2	0.0	4	72.5
Others	243	52.5	9	25.9	10	23.3	13	48.6
Occupation								
Professional	125	62.5	1	—	—	—	—	—
Nonmanual	232	51.2	5	40.0	3	33.3	1	83.3
Skilled	553	59.1	31	38.9	13	56.4	12	56.3
Semiskilled	107	47.3	12	48.1	17	54.9	4	50.0
Unskilled	283	42.9	112	32.9	38	40.0	35	49.3
None	352	52.5	40	34.8	12	13.9	18	41.1
Sex								
Male	1451	54.6	153	34.4	69	43.3	49	52.8
Female	205	51.6	45	40.2	12	38.9	19	46.1
Number of children								
0-2	453	47.9	77	32.5	25	40.7	19	31.6
3-5	949	54.3	101	36.7	51	41.5	40	51.9
6+	255	64.8	23	37.4	7	45.9	11	71.4
Household size								
1-3	145	46.6	38	47.1	9	51.9	10	50.0
4-7	1079	52.4	124	42.3	63	39.2	46	47.3
8+	433	61.1	36	36.8	9	57.9	13	60.3
Number of children, 5-16								
1	587	41.2	83	45.6	34	41.2	25	30.0
2	444	57.8	50	42.3	18	36.1	22	56.8
3	329	63.5	36	38.6	18	66.1	11	66.7
4	193	64.1	18	33.5	7	17.9	7	53.6
5	72	63.9	9	30.2	3	60.0	3	73.3
6	28	62.5	2	0.0	1	0.0	1	83.3
7	4	75.0	—	—	—	—	—	—

^a *N* = Number of families.

^b % = Percent of children.

or semiskilled jobs. The children of unskilled literates attended at a rate 10% higher (43 to 33%) in Hamilton, yet they were only slightly less often poor (78 to 85%). This small difference in wealth can hardly account for the entire difference. Conversely, semiskilled illiterates sent their children as often (43%) with virtually no difference in wealth separating them from literate parents. In Hamilton and Kingston, these illiterates' children's attendance equalled or exceeded that of the skilled illiterates as well.

The contradictions of economic circumstances and social perceptions in the face of hegemony emerge clearly from these patterns of schooling. The illiterates at the semiskilled level were the one group least disadvantaged when compared with literates; to some degree, their more equal resources could be translated into more equal educational access, far exceeding the attendance of the unskilled in two cities. Yet equal resources (or a lack of differential disadvantage) do not provide a complete explanation when the unskilled are considered, although the 20% separating the literate from the illiterate skilled workers' children also reflects the important role of poverty. Poverty and scarce resources undoubtedly established the critical boundaries in which choices were made; within these parameters other factors were at work.

Ethnicity was one. Ethnic inequality and stratification differentiated the social structure of school attendance much as it had determined the structures of occupational class, wealth, and literacy itself. Not surprisingly, then, a similar ranking of groups orders the attendance patterns, as in the other dimensions of inequality in the urban society. Within each ethnic group, the illiterates sent fewer of their children, with the extent of difference relating directly to the status and wealth differentials. To be specific: English Protestants (and the Scottish) ranked high among either literates or illiterates, whereas the Irish sent their children least often (Table 4.1). Group differences show this as well, illustrating again the role of poverty and limited life chances in parental decisions.

Among the groups, the attendance of blacks is most striking, especially when the extent of parental illiteracy and the evident racial discrimination are considered. Sending more of their young than any ethnic group in London (73%) and ranking second to the more prosperous English in Hamilton (48%), they hungered for the schooling of their young, exceeding the attendance of *literate* blacks' children by almost 10 percentage points, or 25%. With the same economic resources as the literates, their actions indicate a difference in attitudes and values toward education, paralleling the great investments that Herbert Gutman has discovered among former slaves in the postbellum United States South. It is probable that these illiterate blacks were more often former

slaves than literates would have been—fugitives who had been systematically denied common schooling by the slave society of their youth.⁷ They apparently sought for their children that which they themselves could not obtain legally, and rarely illegally, in many places. The numbers are too small for firm conclusions, yet they do suggest that these illiterates chose to use their resources toward a different strategy of securing schooling for their young.

The Irish Catholics, the largest ethnic group among the illiterates and the poorest among either literates or illiterates, sent relatively few of their children to school. Regardless of occupation or parental literacy, their attendance rate was among the lowest, although by 1861 separate schools were available to those wanting to escape the pan-Protestant domination of the public school system. The literates, who were almost as poverty-stricken as illiterate parents (64 to 78% poor), sent more of their school-aged youth, but the difference was not large: 6 percentage points in Hamilton, 41 to 35%. Severely limited resources, irregularity of work, frequent movement and illness, and the need for child labor combined with perceptions of their underfoot position in a society stratified against their progress, to produce low attendance rates. The awareness that achievement of literacy and some education only slightly reduced their ascriptive disadvantages weighed among the influences on their decisions, leading them to choose alternatives to more schooling. Consequently, unskilled literates sent no more children than illiterates (33%), with virtually equal proportions poor. And conversely, the skilled literate parents, with greater wealth as a reward, sent more of their sons and daughters. Resources to expend, and perceptions of the value of educational advancement, made the major differences.

Semiskilled illiterate parents, however, formed a revealing exception to the processes of inequality and decision making that resulted in less education for the children of Irish Catholics. The major contributors to the equal attendance rate among all semiskilled workers' children, these illiterates (though few in number) far exceeded the enrollments of literate Irish Catholics: 72 to 41%. Their success in wealth and especially in homeownership (examined in Chapter 2) allowed them to free resources which might then be invested in the children's education. In his

⁷ Gutman's study of black education remains unpublished. See W. R. Taylor, "Toward A Definition of Orthodoxy," *Harvard Educational Review*, 36 (1966), 412-426; Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (New York: Pantheon, 1974). See Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971) for accounts of provision for education of blacks; local studies are sadly lacking. For evidence of discrimination, see the testimony in *American Freedman's Inquiry Commission, 1863-1864* (National Archives of the United States), excerpts of which appear in Canadian Social History Project, *Report*, 5 (1973-1974), 38-84. See also, Ch. 2, note 20.

Newburyport study, Stephan Thernstrom concluded that the ambitions of Irish Catholic laborers for savings and property greatly restricted the chances of their children's attending school; other studies of school attendance consistently report higher attendance rates for the children of home and property owners.⁸ The question involves both the chronological ordering of savings, ownership, and school attendance among family priorities and choices, and the availability of separate (parochial) schools; schooling did not always take first place among family strategies. Rather, as in Hamilton, and in Kingston, the success of the poor and illiterate in acquiring property created an impetus toward schooling virtually unrivalled by any others, literate or illiterate. Homeownership and education were not simple dichotomous choices to these parents. To save toward purchase did not preclude their children's schooling; it could delay education, though, as the two were linked in the process of adaptation. Illiterates' reasons to doubt the school's benefits conflicted with its legitimating hegemony and ideological support. Education, if not always the first priority of the poor and illiterate, would follow upon the attainment of more immediate, and perhaps essential, goals. If they chose to neglect schooling, that was presumably a temporary decision to be reconsidered when it became more feasible and reasonable for them to do so.

Reaching the semiskilled ranks could represent a real accomplishment to illiterates. Importantly too, they were closer to skilled work, perhaps recognizing the impact of literacy on artisanal attainment and its full rewards. This would distinguish them from the unskilled illiterates, whose children attended even less often than the wealth differentials might indicate. Further away from higher levels of status and reward, with survival more difficult, and with little evidence of returns to literacy among the educated at their level, schooling for unskilled illiterates' children need not rank so high. In these ways, illiterate parents—and other poor, too—probably saw their own positions and the role of literacy in their attainments as relevant to their decisions about the future of their children in schooling. Although the hegemony of the school and the moral economy cannot be doubted, parental and familial circumstances and perceptions could either reinforce them or compete

⁸ See Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 155-157, 22-25; Davey, "Reform"; Katz, "Who Went to School." See also Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians*, Ch. 5; the unpublished work of David Hogan, esp. his "Capitalism and Schooling: A History of the Political Economy of Education in Chicago, 1880-1930," unpub. PhD. Diss., University of Illinois, Urbana. 1978, "Education and The Making of The Working Class, 1880-1930," *HEQ*, 18 (1978), 227-270.

with them, diminishing the pressures and urgency of the children's education. In some cases, therefore, the significance of schooling was heightened; in others, circumstances led to alternative uses of resources for homeownership, savings, or simply surviving, with less pressure to secure education.

The timing of adaptation to the cities, moreover, was crucial to these decisions, as the experience of the Irish and the semiskilled indicates. Schooling, we may conclude, need not always be the most important investment or alternative to these parents, despite the power of the educational ideology and its promotion. Homeownership was undoubtedly more valuable, yet this approach need not erase all opportunities for schooling, as some have argued about the poor and immigrant. After property, savings, or gains in work and wealth had been made, education could then increase in significance. Schooling, consequently, did not always assume the highest priority, although attendance rates and their clear relationship to class and wealth show that it could be very important; wealth and resources, of course, created the parameters within which all subsequent actions took place.

The behavior of persisters' children, discussed in Section II of this chapter, reinforces this argument. Hardly exceptional in wealth, occupation, or ethnicity, illiterates who persisted to 1871 sent more of their children to school in Hamilton and London in 1861 than their more transient peers, although not as many as literates. Their distinction lay in homeownership and successful adaptation.

The McCowell family of Hamilton provides a case in point. The family, headed by an illiterate, Irish Catholic teamster, persisted through the decade. Of the five children, the three of school age (one boy, two girls) attended school in 1861. A decade later, the two remaining children (a boy and a girl), now of school age, went to school. The older children were still living at home. One daughter was a schoolteacher, one son a clerk, another daughter a dressmaker; their father was still an illiterate teamster and carter. Schooling may not have been a first priority of poor families as they faced the economic constraints on their lives, but once those constraints were reduced, schooling became more important and was adopted more frequently as a phase of familial strategies.

Schooling followed other achievements. Limited resources and the insecurity of the working class in commercial and early industrial urban society restricted schooling for the majority of illiterates, as for others in the working class. They contended with the same pressures and processes that determined educational opportunities for many others and weighed the relative advantages of schooling in the light of their

own circumstances, perceptions, and its promotion; they often sent their children. They obviously saw reasons for educating their young and accepted the hegemony of the school; largely their decisions were mediated by the same forces which influenced literates. Poverty acted as the primary constraint, yet many also grasped that social inequalities restricted their opportunities beyond their lack of education, contributing to decisions that delayed, or restricted the value of their children's schooling. For some, the child's labors or assistance around the house seemed more valuable than the time spent sitting in a classroom; others simply could not afford clothing, shoes, or fees. Within this framework of inequality, severe constraints, and hopes of opportunity through education, individual families made their choices.

The factors that shaped family life, in the context of class and ethnicity, were also direct influences on schooling in the mid-nineteenth-century cities. Family cycle and size were among the determinants of school attendance. Proportions attending, for example, increased directly with the size of the family, among both literate- and illiterate-headed domestic units. Attendance varied among illiterates' children less regularly with household size, however (Table 4.1). In Hamilton and Kingston, the size of the family influenced attendance rates much less than among literates; only 5 percentage points separated large from small families. While it contributed to their decisions, reflecting age and adaptation too, size for them was a less important consideration, limited as they were so often by poverty. (London's difference probably derives from the much greater educational opportunities available in that city.) The differing significance of large families between literates and illiterates affected these patterns as well; recall that for illiterates more children were often a greater burden on limited resources, rather than the sign of wealth they represented among literate-headed families.

The variable impact of family size, and household size to a lesser extent, reflects the perceived uses of the school by different families in their educational strategies as well as the socioeconomic correlates of the domestic units' composition. For literate-headed families, the linear relationship between their size and the proportions in school illustrates at once the connection between wealth and family size and the role of the school as a baby- or child sitter for the young. This role was obviously less important to illiterates, as greater numbers of children, of school age or not, made much less difference in determining their attendance: 5% in Hamilton and Kingston to 17% for the literates. For those with very limited resources, and other approaches to family maintenance, the choice to send a child to school was more narrow, restricted

to the attendance of selected few at any one time. Of Hamilton's illiterates, moreover, a smaller number of eligible children in fact increased the likelihood of any one's attending.

Larger families, in this way, drained precious resources, limiting chances for schooling as they had also obstructed economic success. Scarce resources served to limit the chances of schooling for children from larger, illiterate-headed families. Analogously, larger households did not function to increase attendance as directly as among literates; here relatives or boarders, often elderly, could usefully substitute for the school in childcare and supervision. Finally, we may note that illiterate female-headed families, despite their prevalence and poverty, succeeded remarkably often in sending their children to school. Youngsters from such families attended almost as frequently as those from male-headed units in Kingston and London (5 and 6% less) and more often in Hamilton (40 to 34%). To mothers who were also household heads, and who had smaller families, the school served important purposes. Economic circumstances and family factors combined to determine the school attendance strategies of these illiterates. Faced with great limitations on their behavior and the social contradictions of schooling in an unequal society, they sent their children when they could, choosing among the options within their grasp.

In a study of changing patterns of school attendance in Hamilton in 1851 and 1861, Michael Katz concluded that schooling reflected *and* reinforced the unequal social structure of that city. He further hypothesized that differential benefits from education were maintained by higher-class groups in the face of absolute gains in attendance of the lower class; Ian Davey has replicated and extended these findings in his analysis of the response of the working class to educational reform.⁹ The schooling of the children of these urban illiterates, importantly, fits squarely into that interpretation which has it that social inequality was transmitted intergenerationally through differential access to education. Yet their disadvantages in schooling were, with partial exceptions in some cases—persisters, blacks, the semiskilled—even more nearly absolute than relative as their children obtained less educational access than those of literates of the same ethnic groups and occupational classes. Poverty and its concomitants and their alternative, but strategic use of limited resources joined to create the gap in opportunities for educational experiences for these children. We need to ask if this signified, on the one hand, a denial of the children's chances for betterment, a sacrifice of the child's future for the family's present condition, and Ryerson's

⁹ "Who Went to School," 445; Davey, "Reform."

"underfoot position" of "slaves in the land of freedom," or, on the other hand, an approach to familial security that did not drastically debilitate the children and their hopes.

II

To begin to address these questions, and those with which the chapter began, we must shift the focus. We have thus far centered upon aggregates of children in their families of origin, to examine the determinants of schooling; complementing this analysis are the age-specific relationships among schooling, work, and leaving home for the individual children. Since data on career paths, and class and wealth destinations, are not available, only through the early positions of these children and the routes they took may we estimate the significance of their familial beginnings for their futures. These aspects of the process of growing up distinguished the experiences of the children of illiterate parents from those of literates, as with school attendance, and sexually differentiated them in the process, while the "modernization" of childhood and youth marked the boundaries through its homogenizing force. The result, a blend of commonality and divergence, created different patterns of maturation and socialization for these disadvantaged young persons, showing at once the poverty of their origins but also the important possibility that those origins may not have left the children "underfoot" and relegated to unskilled positions in lives of poverty. To discover this process requires first the identification of the ages at which their life courses were marked by, respectively, schooling, the onset of work, and home-leaving.¹⁰

Age-specific profiles of the children reveal that not only did fewer children of illiterates attend school, but that they attended for fewer years (Figure 4.1, Table 4.2). Since they probably went to classes less regularly, class and ethnic differentials were reinforced and their disadvantages exacerbated. Consequently, when the individual children's schooling is tabulated (rather than that of statistical means of families), 59% of the literates' 5-16-year-olds attended during 1861, compared with

¹⁰ See Katz, *People*, Ch. 5; Graff, "Patterns"; Laurence A. Glasco, "Ethnicity and Social Structure: Irish, Germans, and Native-Born of Buffalo, N.Y., 1850-1860," unpub. PhD. Diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1973, and "The Life Cycles and Household Structures of American Ethnic Groups," *Journal of Urban History*, 1 (1975), 339-364; Richard Wall, "The Age at Leaving Home," *Journal of Family History*, 3 (1978), 181-202.

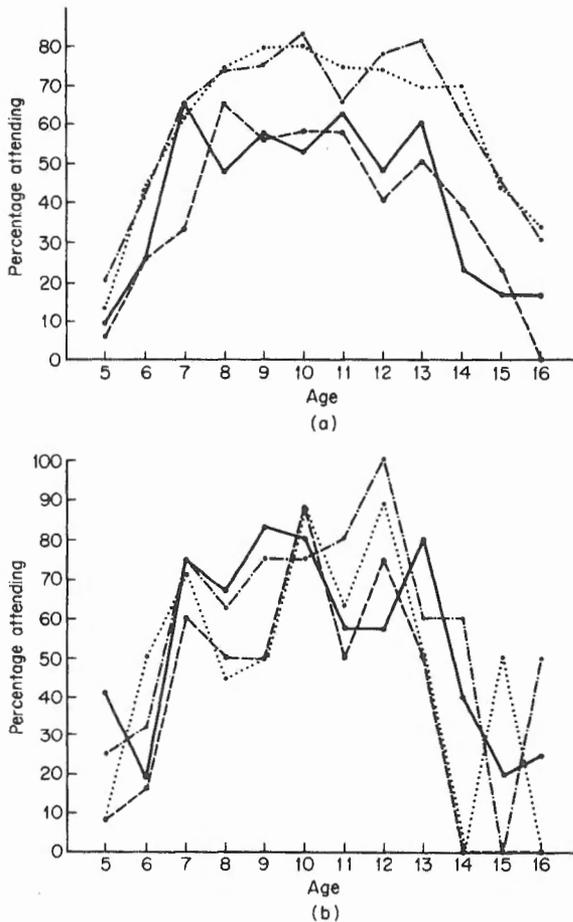


Figure 4.1 School attendance by age, 1861: males and females. (a) Hamilton: literates' and illiterates' children. (---) literate males, $N = 2026$, $\% = 59.6$. (•••) literate females, $N = 1933$; $\% = 57.8$. (—) illiterate males, $N = 228$; $\% = 39.5$. (---) illiterate females, $N = 202$; $\% = 36.6$. (b) Kingston and London: children of illiterates. (—) Kingston males, $N = 94$; $\% = 51.1$ (---) Kingston females, $N = 87$; $\% = 39.1$. (---) London males, $N = 73$; $\% = 60.3$. (•••) London females, $N = 84$; $\% = 51.2$.

38% of Hamilton's illiterates' children, 46% of Kingston's, and 55% in London. In the first place, patterns of attendance diverged by sex from the near parity of the literates' children (an important new development itself) to the sexually unequal experience of the illiterates'. When illiterates were able and willing to send a child to school, most often a son was selected; his education was more highly valued than a

sister's would have been when limited assets and future needs were considered. Attendance of sons thus exceeded that of daughters in each city, differentiating educational opportunities, and varying from a small, 4 percentage point difference among Hamilton's illiterates to 10 percentage points (20 and 25%) in the other cities. Indicating further differences in work and home-leaving patterns by sex, males predominated in any educational opportunities and any returns to such investments.

Overall, illiterates' children were able to attend school for a shorter period of time than other children, a result primarily of poverty, although patterns varied by class and ethnicity more than by literacy of parents. Yet, the reform of education and the process of modernizing and homogenizing childhood and youth established a series of ages of most-frequent attendance common to most children, regardless of their sex or their parents' literacy.¹¹ Ages 7 to 14 marked the period of schooling for literates' youngsters; these were the ages at which over one-half and more often two-thirds went to school (Figure 4.1, Table 4.2). These ages were also the time of education, when possible economically, for the children of illiterates, with local variations due to differentials in the structures of opportunity across the three cities. At very few ages (only at 7 and 11 in Hamilton) did the attendance rates of illiterates' school-aged children equal that of literates', with the child's sex also punctuating these patterns of schooling. Despite the constant differentials, a basis for a common experience existed through the age-grading of the school experience, which gave to many youngsters some shared occasions and regularity in the timing of their life courses. In addition, these data reinforce the earlier conclusion that illiteracy itself was not by any means universally transmitted across the generations; the great majority of illiterates' offspring would acquire some schooling, even if less than that of most of the literates'. The children of persisting illiterates, as expected, were able to attend even more frequently: 11 and 20% more often in Hamilton and London. Education was a path to which they could turn when more critical problems of survival were satisfied; home-owning and adaptation provided a stimulus toward increased educational participation, in attendance rates and in length of stay in school. But even these youngsters did not obtain as much exposure to the school as those of literates.

¹¹ On the variability of experience before this period, see Kett, *Rites* and "Growing Up in Rural New England, 1800-1840," in *Anonymous Americans*, ed. T. K. Hareven (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 1-16. Katz, *People*, Gillis, *Youth*, discuss the effects of modernization on the adolescent experience. See also, for vivid presentations, Ralph Connor, *Glengarry Schooldays* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1902); Edward Eggleston, *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957).

Table 4.2
Children at Home, 1861, of Households Heads

Age	Hamilton literates						Hamilton illiterates					
	<i>N</i>	%	M	F	Percentage in school	Percentage with occupation	<i>N</i>	%	M	F	Percentage in school	Percentage with occupation
1-4	2247	31.1	1121	1124	1.2	0.0	206	26.4	106	100	0.9	0.0
5	491	6.4	240	251	16.9	0.0	51	6.5	21	30	7.8	0.0
6	432	5.6	218	213	42.8	0.2	45	5.8	24	21	26.7	0.0
7	383	5.0	170	213	62.9	0.0	41	5.2	20	21	48.8	0.0
8	348	4.5	191	157	73.6	0.0	44	5.6	21	23	56.8	0.0
9	334	4.4	159	174	77.2	0.0	36	4.6	18	18	55.6	0.0
10	344	4.5	184	160	81.4	0.0	35	4.5	21	14	54.3	0.0
11	288	3.8	157	131	75.7	0.7	33	4.2	19	14	60.6	0.0
12	335	4.4	167	168	75.8	0.0	32	4.1	17	15	43.8	6.2
13	272	3.5	140	132	75.0	0.0	20	2.6	12	8	55.0	5.0
14	250	3.3	131	119	65.6	2.4	30	3.8	17	13	33.3	3.3
15	242	3.2	138	104	44.2	6.6	32	4.1	19	13	18.8	9.4
16	243	3.2	131	111	31.7	12.4	31	4.0	19	12	9.7	19.4
17	212	2.8	104	108	22.2	17.0	17	2.2	7	10	5.9	35.3
18	205	2.7	95	110	11.7	20.6	25	3.2	11	14	0.0	28.0
19	170	2.2	90	80	4.7	31.2	15	1.9	9	6	0.0	46.7
20+	882	11.5	435	447	0.9	42.0	90	11.5	48	42	0.0	55.6
Total	7678	Mean age: 9.9	3871	3802	Mean 5-16: 58.7		783	Mean age: 10.2	409	374	Mean 5-16: 38.1	

Age	Kingston illiterates						London illiterates					
	N	%	M	F	Percentage in school	Percentage with occupation	N	%	M	F	Percentage in school	Percentage with occupation
1-4	101	28.6	50	50	0.9	0.0	94	28.9	50	44	1.1	0.0
5	26	7.4	15	11	26.9	0.0	17	5.2	8	9	17.6	0.0
6	17	4.8	11	6	17.6	0.0	15	4.6	9	6	40.0	0.0
7	18	5.1	8	10	66.7	0.0	19	5.8	8	11	73.7	0.0
8	18	5.1	12	6	61.1	0.0	20	6.2	11	9	55.0	0.0
9	14	4.0	6	8	64.3	0.0	14	4.3	4	10	57.1	0.0
10	13	3.7	5	8	84.6	0.0	15	4.6	8	7	80.0	0.0
11	13	3.7	7	6	53.8	7.7	13	4.0	5	8	69.2	0.0
12	15	4.2	7	8	66.7	0.0	15	4.6	6	9	93.3	0.0
13	11	3.1	5	6	63.6	18.2	7	2.2	5	2	57.1	0.0
14	14	4.0	10	4	28.6	7.1	10	3.1	5	5	30.0	0.0
15	10	2.8	4	5	10.0	20.0	6	1.8	2	4	33.3	16.7
16	13	3.7	4	9	7.7	38.5	6	1.8	2	4	16.7	16.7
17	12	3.4	5	7	0.0	8.3	12	3.7	8	4	0.0	16.7
18	14	4.0	8	6	0.0	42.9	8	2.5	6	2	12.5	25.0
19	8	2.3	5	3	0.0	50.0	7	2.2	4	3	0.0	14.3
20+	36	10.2	23	13	0.0	52.8	46	14.2	28	18	0.0	37.0
Total	353	Mean age: 9.8	185	166	Mean 5-16: 45.6		324	Mean age: 10.6	169	155	Mean 5-16: 55.4	

Socially stratified educational systems, restricted resources, the insecurities of lower class life, and parental choices (as well as the actions of the children themselves) combined to result in less schooling for the children of illiterate parents. Beginning slightly later and concluding somewhat earlier, they spent less of their youth in the schoolroom. The same social processes, nevertheless, age-graded and homogenized most of their experiences with that of other children; and virtually all children in these cities, by 1861, gained access to some period of education, even if a restricted one. Despite the major divergence in their experiences, these elements of commonality compensated for their impoverished origins to some extent, making the school a part of their childhood and early adolescence in ways their parents had not experienced.

Schooling, especially around the mid-century and for the children of the working class, did not dominate the experience of growing up, as it so often does today. Work formed an important part of the adolescent years for many young persons; early work could contribute, and sometimes greatly, to the development and socialization of many children. Although data such as those from censuses can be misleading, much work being, no doubt, unreported or disguised, child or juvenile labor could coexist with infrequent or irregular school attendance. Casual labor, moreover, was far from regularly reported. Nevertheless, work during adolescence was very common. With employment in a wide variety of jobs, from common labor to service and clerical jobs, juvenile work actually increased with the transition from a commercial to an industrial economic base.¹²

Until they turned 16 no more than 10% of the children residing at home and of literate parents were reported to be working, although the beginnings of their work careers often came earlier, varying with family class, needs, and income (Table 4.2). Some of course had left home earlier and were working, living as boarders, or with relatives, or as resident domestics. Despite their lower rate and shorter duration of school attendance, illiterates' children did not rush into work dramatically earlier when still living at home. For them, 15 and 16 overwhelmingly marked the years at which reported work commenced, indicating another common transition in the life course. More of the illiterates' children, nevertheless, were employed at earlier ages, contributing to their families and in some cases gaining worthwhile skills and experience. This is most striking in Kingston, where 18% held jobs at 13 and 8% at 11; in Hamilton also, more of such children worked than literates': 6% at 12, 5% at 13. The children of persisting illiterates also started to work earlier. A number of factors

¹² See Davey, "Reform," Ch. 4; Katz and Davey, "Youth." On casual juvenile labor, see Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

combined to form these patterns of earlier work. A poor family, persistent or transient, needed the additional income a child or adolescent could earn, however small that amount. The ill health or death of a wage-earner such as a father, seasonality or irregularity of work for such a one, frequent relocation, and traditional expectations for the employment of the young contributed to these patterns, as they created major family needs for additional earnings and reflected the deep insecurities of urban life. Sometimes, no doubt, parental evaluations of the common-school curriculum as perhaps irrelevant to the requirements of their children's future careers probably joined with economic conditions to reduce schooling and hasten the start of working. And the illiterates and other working-class parents who chose not to invest in further education may well have perceived in work experience a more valuable instructor in the ways of the world and a more valuable preparation for later life, and therefore encouraged—or forced—some of their children to start their working lives early. As we know, this process had benefitted some of the fathers in their careers.¹³ The culmination of factors, as they intersected in the children's lives, resulted in greater proportions of illiterates' youths at work by age sixteen; 19, 39, and 17% were employed in Hamilton, Kingston, and London, respectively, to 12% of literates' children. Work consequently formed a larger and more central part in the adolescent socialization and experiences of illiterates' children, while it helped to meet family needs.

The early jobs of the sons of illiterate-headed families, not surprisingly, were often unskilled common laboring positions (Table 4.3A). After the age of 16, though, they had a better-than-even chance for higher-ranking work. In Hamilton, for example, two 17-year-olds were carpenters; one 18-year-old was a clerk and two others a lathemaker and a tinsmith; one 19-year-old was a plumber; and two 21-year-olds were a clerk and a carpenter. Across the three cities, in fact, only one-third of working sons at home were employed as unskilled laborers, as many of their fathers had been. Almost 40% of the children held skilled positions in their early careers; another 8% worked in nonmanual posts. The children of the persisters fared slightly better. For those who remained at home through the teen years, the facts of less schooling; parental poverty, insecurity, and illiteracy; and earlier work did not prevent occupational diversity and improved status. Their patterns of growing up did not foreclose all opportunities and consign them only to the ranks of the unskilled, as the McCowells illustrate. The son of Henry Wynn, an Irish Catholic laborer, also became a clerk. Obviously, very

¹³ Ch. 2, above; Davey, "Reform," Chs. 5 and 6; Chs. 5 and 7, below.

Table 4.3
Occupations of Children Residing at Home, 1861 and 1871

	Illiterates		Hamilton (total population)		Illiterate persisters	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
A. 1861						
Nonmanual	11	7.9	86	30.8	2	4.8
Skilled	53	38.4	129	46.2	17	40.5
Semiskilled	25	18.1	12	4.3	9	21.4
Unskilled	49	35.5	52	18.6	14	33.3
B. 1871						
Nonmanual	19	9.3	257	23.9		
Skilled	98	48.0	601	56.1		
Semiskilled	52	25.5	63	5.9		
Unskilled	35	17.2	150	14.0		

few traversed the line between manual and nonmanual jobs, blurred as it was, or crossed class lines; they remained overwhelmingly within the working class but were nonetheless able to progress occupationally. Their early work statuses give good reason to suppose that their socialization and experiences in the cities provided a valuable education in their own right, compensating in part for other ascriptive and familial disadvantages.¹⁴

Daughters did not fare as well in this sexually stratified society. They worked as domestic day servants (eight), seamstresses (five), milliners, dressmakers (four), and tailoresses. Before consigning them to lower status in a sacrifice for more education and better jobs for their brothers, we must note that these were the most common occupations for *all* women who worked in the urban society and especially for young women. It is hardly surprising that these daughters would secure this kind of work, if work they must, regardless of their parents' poverty or illiteracy.¹⁵

Many youngsters in each of the cities neither worked nor went to

¹⁴ See, for relevant suggestions, Daniel Calhoun, "The City as Teacher," *HEQ*, 9 (1969), 312-325.

¹⁵ On the work of women and girls, see Katz, *People*, Ch. 2; Davey, "Reform", Ch. 4; D. S. Cross, "The Neglected Majority: The Changing Role of Women in 19th Century Montreal," *Histoire sociale*, 6 (1973), 202-223; Glasco, "Ethnicity"; D. J. Walkowitz, "Working-Class Women in the Gilded Age," *Journal of Social History*, 5 (1972), 464-490; Alice Kessler-Harris, "Stratifying by Sex: Understanding the History of Working Women," in *Labor Market Segmentation*, ed. R. C. Edwards, Michael Reich, and D. M. Gordon (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1975), 217-242.

school in their early- or mid-adolescent years (Table 4.2). By the mid-teens, a majority of all children who lived at home were "officially" unoccupied, contributing to what many middle-class contemporaries and reformers saw as a crisis of idle and vagrant youth and a reason for increased provision of education. Some of course held casual or part-time jobs or assisted at home. The children of illiterates shared in this phenomenon of the commercial city, too, being as often on the streets as at work or in school. Commercial capitalism and urbanization, in conjunction with an increase in population, marked a decline in juvenile work opportunities, especially for the working-class youth. Illiterates' youngsters suffered at least as often as any other adolescents from this enforced idleness. With the onset of industrialization, in the 1860s and 1870s, and the further expansion of schooling, however, the children of the working class were much more often "occupied."¹⁶

The experiences of growing up for the illiterates' children were also differentiated by their patterns of leaving home. As indicated by the family formation strategies analyzed in Chapter 2, the early life courses of many of these young persons were punctuated by a precocious separation from their families, representing a break more striking than their less deviant paths of school attendance and work. Age-specific patterns of home-leaving began earlier and were more sexually-stratified for illiterates' children than for literates'. This is demonstrated by examining the number of children at home at each age, relative to other ages and to the sex ratios, with assumptions based in simple, stable population projections and the regularity of fertility among the female population (the estimates allow for differential infant mortality).¹⁷ In this manner, we may isolate the key ages at which children left their homes; thus, a decline in the number of children present at some ages, regularly sustained, will illustrate the process and timing of departure from the family home.

Illiterates' children commonly left home, the data indicate, 3 to 4 years earlier than those of literates (Table 4.2). Poverty undoubtedly underlay these decisions. The ages of 9, 13 to 15 (coinciding with the start of work), and 17 were the pivotal years for them, contrasting with those of 13, 16, and 21 for the literates' children. In Hamilton, for ex-

¹⁶ On the contemporary "crisis" of youth, see Katz, *People*, Ch. 5 and "The Origins of Public Education"; Davey, "Reform," Ch. 4; Katz and Davey, "Youth"; Kett, *Rites*.

¹⁷ See again, Katz, *People*, Ch. 5; Graff, "Patterns"; Glasco, "Ethnicity"; Anderson, *Family Structure*, for methodological considerations in cross-sectional life-cycle and cohort analysis and for other applications. Wall, "Age" provides some caveats. The method provides approximations of course, indicating trends rather than precise movements.

ample, the percentage of illiterates' children at home fell from 5.6 to 4.6 (44 to 36) from ages 8 to 9 and from 4.1 to 2.6 (32 to 20) from 12 to 13, similar to the changes in the other cities. The behavior of literates' youngsters differed; their departures came several years later, but were quite similarly marked. The persisting illiterates, as part of their strategy of controlling family size toward survival, success and adaptation, and allocation of the scarce resources to which their poverty limited them, dispatched their young much the same as other illiterate-headed families.

Daughters, in fact, left home earlier than their brothers, their representation falling more sharply at these ages and creating the imbalanced sex ratios among children at home noted above. Males predominated among those at home at each of the major points of home-leaving. This earlier departure, no doubt for domestic work and residence in the home of others, constituted one significant reason for their lesser access to schooling. With severe economic constraints, their departures were prefigured and their "careers" the expected ones; there could be little motivation or opportunity to invest more heavily in education for their life preparation. The daughters of illiterates who persisted in the cities, in sharp contrast to other illiterates and many literates, remained at home longer; the persisting families' ratios of children at home are nearly equal. For settled families, it was apparently less important to send out the young females into service and thereby to further reduce family size and dependency ratios. The others, in putting out adolescent girls, seized an avenue of reducing family burdens while providing a place for the child not available to sons, who were forced by limited work and low pay to stay home longer. They could also contribute more tangibly to the family economy. With sons' paths toward work and residence away from home more difficult, to get more schooling was sensible, since it could presumably aid them in a way it could not aid the girls, especially in this sexually stratified society. Service was readily available for daughters and was traditionally legitimated; it was undoubtedly more acceptable to parental and juvenile aspirations than unskilled work for the sons. Strategic decisions like these informed the family economies and constraints of illiterates and other poor, in their struggles for survival and some modicum of success. One important approach, used by those who succeeded more often, lay in the reduction of family size while attempting to place the children in the best way possible; this meant service for the girls and more lengthy home life for sons. Given the narrow opportunities available to women who had to work in these cities and the impressive early career starts of the sons, these choices do not seem to have disadvantaged the young. In the context of widespread poverty and the restrictions of parental illiteracy, class, and ethnicity,

their early experiences certainly did not further depress them, and in some ways may have proved compensatory, despite their reduced education.

We have no way to determine with any certainty what difference, if any, earlier home-leaving made in the socialization and subsequent careers of those who departed. Yet their experience of dependency and semidependency within the parental household was reduced.¹⁸ Less schooling reduced the extent of dependency as well. They were probably freer to grow up, to develop by themselves, and to gain experience while working and while on the streets—the kinds of autonomy that might translate into an education of its own, both compensation and preparation. For some, complete independence or autonomy came at relatively youthful ages, through the teenage years; others moved into early semi-autonomy outside the home or a semidependent position inside it while working. For daughters, autonomy was probably found less often, as they shifted from serving their family to serving another before marriages and husbands. But some degree of freedom, to fare and fend for themselves, came early to many children of illiterates, especially to the sons; their entries into the world of work were less dependent upon their families of origin. This was the consequence of their experiences in growing up: Early work and home-leaving may have been the best preparation that their largely impoverished families and illiterate parents could have provided them.

A decade later, in 1871, popular patterns of growing up changed radically. With modernization, increased educational provision, early industrialization, and changes in family life, childhood and adolescence were transformed. In the process, the experiences of the children of persisting illiterate families changed as well.¹⁹ The most dramatic difference was an increase in dependency and semidependency in the home, as these stages were prolonged throughout western society with the emergence of “modern” adolescence.²⁰ The children of illiterates, the 1871

¹⁸ On dependency and autonomy, see Katz, *People*; Graff, “Patterns.” See also, Gillis, *Youth*; Kett, *Rites*. John Bodnar, in “Socialization and Adaptation: Immigrant Families in Scranton, 1880–1890,” *Pennsylvania History*, 43 (1976), 147–162, presents a somewhat similar argument.

¹⁹ As in Chapter 3, the analysis of the 1871 data draws only upon those who were linked from the Census of 1861 to the Census of 1871: 29% of children in Hamilton, 26% in Kingston, and 33% in London. Overwhelmingly, we are concerned with children at home; of those who could be traced, over 90% still resided with parents. The others were now heads of household (12) or boarders (8). The mean age of illiterates’ children was 10 in 1861; in 1871, the persisting children had an average age of 17 years.

²⁰ On this “modernization,” see again, Katz, *People*, Ch. 5; Davey, “Reform,” Ch. 4; Katz and Davey, “Youth”; Kett, *Rites*.

data indicate, remained with their families longer than had those of a decade earlier (Table 4.4). To take one example, persisting illiterate-headed families in Hamilton had 18 5-year-olds at home in 1861; 10 years later, at age 15, 17 were still to be found with their families. The patterns in Kingston and London (i.e., 8 of 9 still at home) were quite similar, although slightly fewer stayed in Kingston than in the other cities. Fewer now departed before age 13 or 15; more remained beyond that time, as young persons more frequently stayed until their later teen years, to 16 or 18. The prolongation of dependency and the delay in leaving home was shared by the sexes. Girls now remained as often as their brothers, in part a consequence of the decline in service that had begun by the early 1870s as well as a result of this transformation of youth. Comparing more closely to the patterns of literates' youngsters in respect of increased time in the parental home and longer periods of familial dependency, these young persons gained prospects of lengthened security at home. In so doing, however, they lost the earlier semi-autonomy and autonomy that more precocious departures had made possible a decade before; this was the obverse of prolonged residence. Their losses and gains, no doubt ambiguous ones, were made possible directly by their parents' accomplishments, in wealth, homeownership, adaptation and stability, and better prospects for security in these cities. The adolescents' experiences were now more like those of others, and the family formation strategies that sent many of them out earlier, a response to poverty, were no longer required.

Similarly, schooling increased for the children of these persisting illiterates over the decade, a phenomenon common to virtually all children in the cities and the province at large (Table 4.4). In Hamilton and Kingston, especially, attendance increased at virtually all ages, and more than one-half of those aged 9 to 16 were reported as attending: 48% in Hamilton, 61% in Kingston, 59% in London. The period of common schooling encompassed much the same years, to 13 or 14, and was nearly universal from 9 to 12. By 1871, then, the attendance of these children of illiterates compared very favorably with that of other children in the cities, the earlier gaps much reduced. Class differentials (and ethnic ones—which were somewhat lessened) were still firmly maintained, as illiterates' young participated much like others from the working class; few, consequently, could hope for secondary education.²¹ Investments for education were more frequently available in persisting families, and as in residence at home, the divergences in experience of growing up diminished with persistence, adaptation, and social change.

²¹ Davey, "Reform," esp. Ch. 4, *passim*.

Table 4.4
Children of Illiterates, 1871

Age	Hamilton						Kingston						London					
	N	%	M	F	Percent- age in school	Percentage with occupation	N	%	M	F	Percent- age in school	Percentage with occupation	N	%	M	F	Percent- age in school	Percentage with occupation
9	1	—	—	1	100.0	0.0	4	4.3	3	1	100.0	0.0	1	0.9	1	0	100.0	0.0
10	14	6.1	5	9	100.0	0.0	6	6.5	3	3	83.3	0.0	7	6.5	4	3	85.7	0.0
11	12	5.3	3	9	91.7	0.0	6	6.5	1	5	66.7	0.0	0	—	—	—	—	—
12	19	8.3	10	9	68.4	5.3	7	7.6	6	1	71.4	14.3	16	14.9	6	10	75.0	0.0
13	17	7.5	7	10	59.2	11.8	9	9.8	2	7	57.1	0.0	9	8.4	7	2	66.7	11.1
14	22	9.6	10	12	27.3	22.7	5	5.4	4	1	40.0	0.0	8	7.5	2	6	50.0	25.0
15	17	7.5	7	10	17.6	35.3	5	5.4	2	3	60.0	20.0	8	7.5	4	4	25.0	50.0
16	22	9.6	10	12	0.0	59.1	2	2.2	1	1	0.0	50.0	7	6.5	1	6	28.6	42.9
17	15	6.6	7	8	6.7	60.0	6	6.5	3	3	0.0	83.3	10	9.3	6	4	0.0	70.0
18	15	6.6	8	7	6.7	33.3	9	9.8	0	9	11.1	33.3	7	6.5	2	5	0.0	85.7
19	11	4.8	5	6	0.0	72.7	5	5.4	2	3	0.0	60.0	8	7.5	6	2	0.0	85.7
20+	63	27.6	38	25	0.0	73.0	27	29.3	15	12	0.0	81.2	26	24.3	18	8	0.0	76.9
Total	228	Mean age: 17.3	121	107	Mean 5-16: 47.9		97	Mean age: 17.3	42	49	Mean 5-16: 61.4		107	Mean age: 16.9	57	50	Mean 5-16: 58.9	

Schooling, as before, followed material gains by the family; by this point, many more were able to make that choice, and for more of their children—for girls as well as boys.

More children at home worked in 1871, a function of their older age and also of the great expansion in juvenile work effected by early industrialization.²² Increased schooling and semidependency accompanied more frequent adolescent work, as a larger proportion, over 50%, were employed in each city by age 16, a great many more after that age (Table 4.4). The extent to which juveniles worked was most dramatic in Hamilton, where industry created more places and where employment increased steadily from age 12. Industrialization absorbed these youth, and juvenile (as opposed to child) labor was undoubtedly most extensive in that city, embracing many working class adolescents. Illiterates' children now, unlike those of 10 years earlier, worked frequently, but no more often than other working class youths; family needs and insecurities continued with the onset of larger industry and its socioeconomic transformations. Work more often created a stage of semidependency at home, diluting complete dependency and replacing the forms of autonomy more common in 1861. As one result, fewer children were unoccupied, going more often to school or to work.

Early occupational placement shifted, too, with the rise of industry. Fewer children of illiterates labored in unskilled positions than a decade earlier, 17 to 33%, as family adaptation, more opportunities, and more schooling paid off (Table 4.3B). Overall, a wider variety of jobs was attained, including many skilled occupations (nearly 50% now held this level compared with 37% in 1861) in the new industries: machinists (ten), cigarmakers, coopers, printers. Clerical posts opened up too, one result of the achievement of literacy for eight sons, as 10% of the working youths acquired nonmanual occupations in their early careers. One daughter of an illiterate became a school teacher. As their early occupational profile shifted upward, most gains were made by sons; daughters largely remained in the same kinds of jobs as they in the past had. Women's sphere of work expanded less rapidly and into the new factories more slowly; service (19), dressmaking (15), tailoring (6) remained the female preserve. In sum, improvement came in the early occupations of illiterates, particularly to their sons. They were less likely to start their careers unskilled, more occupations were open to them, and these occupations compared more favorably with those of others' children. The length of family settlement in the cities, with its diminution of poverty and need, further reduced the disadvantages of their origins; by 1871,

²² Davey, "Reform"; Katz and Davey, "Youth."

education was more often available to them, too. Opportunities were less restricted, and parental illiteracy proved an even weaker obstacle to their hopes of progress and gain—although it was not insurmountable in 1861. Efforts made by fathers and families for the survival and mobility of the first generation did not foreclose opportunities to the second, at least among these persisting illiterates whose children's dependency also increased. As the parents progressed, so did their children; but the lines between classes were very rarely crossed. The leveling of society was not the purpose of education or literacy; it was not often the result of mobility, for illiterates' or other working class youths.

III

A consideration of the patterns of intergenerational occupational mobility, in 1861 and 1871, concludes the discussion presented in this chapter. The relationship of the early occupations and status of sons to their fathers' rank allows us to explore further the significance of the early work attainments of illiterates' children in the context of their childhood and adolescent experiences and of parental illiteracy. The issue, of which the data permit only an incomplete resolution, involves the extent to which the low status of fathers was transmitted to the next generation, with their achievement of less education, earlier work, and perhaps greater autonomy. Lowly origins and disadvantaged families were restrictive to, at least, the early careers of these children; mobility nevertheless was possible for many sons, and parental occupational attainments were passed on. Parental illiteracy did not necessitate the inheritance and perpetuation of the lowest occupational class or the makings of a culture of poverty.

The limitations on this analysis must be made clear before we consider the data. The measurement of intergenerational mobility is in part artificial, and the conclusions can be no more than suggestive. The data restrict the examination solely to occupations and to the early job status of sons who remained at home in each year of comparison. No other measures of mobility are available, nor is information on later or final career destinations at hand. Finally, the classification of occupations, as always, blurs some distinctions in status, prestige, or rewards. With these caveats in mind, the resulting mobility patterns of sons aged 10 years or over and at work may be reviewed.

In 1861, the inheritance of occupational status from fathers to sons was clear and strong among both literates and illiterates (Table 4.5A).

Table 4.5

Intergenerational Occupational Mobility, 1861 (Sons Older Than 10)

Father's occupation	Son's occupation					Total
	Professional/ proprietor	Non- manual	Skilled	Semi- skilled	Unskilled	
A. Literates						
Professional/ proprietor						
<i>N</i>	5	19	4	1	—	29
%	17.2	65.5	13.8	3.4		11.3
Nonmanual						
<i>N</i>	2	27	20	1	3	53
%	3.8	50.1	37.7	1.9	5.7	20.6
Skilled						
<i>N</i>	—	16	90	1	7	114
%		14.0	78.9	0.9	6.1	44.4
Semiskilled						
<i>N</i>	—	—	6	8	4	18
%			33.3	44.4	22.2	7.0
Unskilled						
<i>N</i>	—	9	13	1	20	43
%		20.9	30.2	2.3	46.5	16.7
Total						
<i>N</i>	8	71	133	12	34	257
%	3.1	27.6	51.8	4.7	13.2	
B. Illiterates						
Nonmanual						
<i>N</i>	—	5	4	—	1	10
%		50.0	40.0		10.0	13.7
Skilled						
<i>N</i>	—	—	8	—	2	10
%			80.0		20.0	13.7
Semiskilled						
<i>N</i>	—	1	3	2	3	9
%		11.1	33.3	22.2	33.3	12.3
Unskilled						
<i>N</i>	—	3	10	7	24	44
%		6.8	22.7	15.9	54.5	60.3
Total						
<i>N</i>	—	9	25	9	30	73
%		12.3	34.2	12.3	41.1	

(continued)

Table 4.5 (continued)

<i>Mobility summary</i>					
	Stable	Rose	Number of levels	Fell	Number of levels
Literates					
<i>N</i>	150	47		60	
%	58.4	18.3	78	23.4	72
Illiterates					
<i>N</i>	39	24		10	
%	53.4	32.8	37	13.7	14
Hamilton illiterates					
<i>N</i>	18	5		3	
%	69.3	19.2	9	11.5	4
Kingston illiterates					
<i>N</i>	11	16		3	
%	36.7	53.3	23	10.0	3
London illiterates					
<i>N</i>	10	3		4	
%	58.8	17.7	5	23.5	7

While there was less transmission of ranks than in Hamilton in 1851, as Katz has reported (a result largely of technological innovation's impact on skills and the expansion of clerical work), occupational inheritance remained distinct.²³ Thus, the sons of literate men shared parental work status at a rate of nearly 60%. The major exceptions came only at the highest level where $\frac{2}{3}$ of the sons held nonmanual clerical or small proprietary jobs, due more to their youth than to a clear loss of status. The sons of unskilled fathers inherited that status less than one-half of the time, having a 50% chance of rising; the semiskilled suffered a 25% chance of falling and a slightly greater opportunity of surpassing parental position. It was at the skilled level that occupational inheritance was greatest; nearly 80% of sons received their fathers' place, and more of them gained than fell. In the face of so much intergenerational transmission, a great deal of movement also occurred: while 58% of these sons at home took on parental levels, 18% improved rank and 23% declined, in early job status.

Among the illiterates, occupational inheritance was also strong, but, at a 53% rate of transmission, was slightly less powerful (Table 4.5B).

²³ Katz, *People*, Ch. 2; Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians*, Ch. 5; Lipset and Bendix, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), Ch. VII; Blau and Duncan, *Structure*.

At the bottom, in unskilled work, illiterates' sons had a greater likelihood of starting in that rank than those of literate fathers (55 to 47%), but considering the facts of their origins the difference is not very large. Thirty percent of these sons, moreover, attained skilled or higher-ranking work early in their careers, as 45% of them improved upon fathers' places. Parental circumstances and their restricted educations did not predetermine an "underfoot" position for these sons, as Ryerson had warned. Sons of semiskilled men quite often moved up the hierarchy (44%), and sons of the skilled overwhelmingly became skilled as well (80%)—as often as those of literate fathers. Family poverty, differential educational opportunities, and early work did not combine to severely disadvantage the second generation; nonmanual work, as well, was inherited frequently. Some of them did slip, from nonmanual and skilled origins, but given their ages we should not exaggerate the significance of starts. For at no one of the occupational levels was mobility blocked for the majority of illiterates' sons. And not surprisingly, the sons of those who persisted to 1871 fared even better. The same proportion inherited their fathers' rank, but 42% (14 of 33) rose, only one falling, as they led in the progress of all these sons. As with the sons of transient fathers, though, half of these sons whose fathers were unskilled also inherited that level. Working-class membership was intergenerationally transmitted, as would be expected in an unequal society, but within that class, lowly status was by no means a certain inheritance. Skills could be transmitted in artisanal or nonmanual jobs.

Lack of schooling, familial strategies, and parental choices did not combine to curtail opportunities for the sons of illiterate men. If we count each move between occupational classes as an advance or fall, these sons improved upon the status of their fathers much more often than they fell and more often than the sons of literate men had done: 33 to 18% moving upward. Their origins were no more restrictive if the fathers were unskilled and Irish Catholic, as ethnicity proved less important to their mobility than to the sons of literates. Among illiterates, only 37% of unskilled Irish Catholics' sons worked at that rank, and 23% rose to skilled or nonmanual positions. Of the literates' sons, who attended school no more often, 65% inherited unskilled positions. Sons of Irish Catholic illiterates attained, overall, much more upward mobility in early work than those of literates: 47 to 24%. Even the most invidious of ascriptive social characteristics did not prevent improvements and did not result in intergenerational perpetuation of disadvantaged lives at the base of the social structure.

Gains over their fathers' positions, in one-third of the cases, marked substantial progress for these sons, especially in the light of their origins

but also in comparison to the literates. Despite the limitations of these data (solely the early career and occupation as indicators), the patterns are highly suggestive. Parental poverty, life's insecurities for the working class, pervasive transiency; a childhood with less chance for schooling and earlier commencement of work; and the demands placed on the young from familial survival and adaptive strategies neither doomed the children's futures, relegating them to inherited places among society's castoffs and lowest ranking, nor precluded their upward occupational movement. Neither did they prohibit the transmission of parental occupational success, when it occurred, to the succeeding generation. Fewer sons began in their fathers' ranks, a clear sign of success. In their circumstances, small steps represented achievement even among the unskilled, and some of their sons made larger ones. The fuller dimensions of the effects of origins and parental status on sons' occupations are found among the children of female illiterate heads of household. Of 56 working sons in the three cities, 22 held skilled positions (40%) and only 13 (25%) were unskilled. The poverty and burdens of these women did not prevent early job achievements; the way their sons grew up may have been the best possible preparation.

A decade later, the sons of persisting illiterates, as expected, fared better than they had in 1861 (Table 4.6). Overall, the inheritance of occupational rank, at 51%, was the same, but the transmission of unskilled status declined from 55 to 43%, with most of these sons moving upward; 20% attained nonmanual work and 30% skilled labor in the early careers. Skilled and higher-ranking positions were now inherited even more frequently: 74 and 67%, respectively. Fathers' places at all levels were more often surpassed, as almost 40% of all working sons residing at home improved upon parental occupational levels. The sons of female heads of household also worked more often at skilled jobs than those of a decade earlier had. When compared with the 1861 patterns, in which over one-half of the sons labored at semi- or unskilled ranks, by the latter date, we find a majority, over 60%, in skilled or nonmanual occupations. Irish Catholics' sons, finally, shared fully in these gains; 50% rose from fathers' levels, including 60% of the sons of the unskilled.²⁴

The occupational positions of the McCowell children in 1871 illustrate these kinds of improvements in standing—one a teacher, another a clerk, a third a dressmaker—as did the son of Wynn the laborer, who

²⁴ In unpublished work, Katz has found great stability in the patterns of intergenerational occupational mobility in Hamilton, 1861–1871, with the influence of ethnicity declining and that of class increasing. Chances of modest gains were good, but as with illiterates, the structure of inequality was not fundamentally altered; it was reproduced through the transmission of position between fathers and sons.

Table 4.6*Intergenerational Occupational Mobility: Sons of Illiterates, 1871 (Older Than 10)*

Father's occupation	Son's occupation				Total
	Nonmanual	Skilled	Semiskilled	Unskilled	
Nonmanual					
<i>N</i>	4	2	—	—	6
%	66.7	33.3			7.2
Skilled					
<i>N</i>	3	17	—	3	23
%	13.0	73.9		13.0	27.7
Semiskilled					
<i>N</i>	2	3	4	3	12
%	16.7	25.0	33.3	25.0	14.5
Unskilled					
<i>N</i>	7	13	4	18	42
%	16.7	30.9	9.5	42.9	50.6
Total					
<i>N</i>	16	35	8	24	83
%	19.3	42.2	9.6	28.9	

Mobility summary

	Stable	Rose	Number of levels	Fell	Number of levels
Total					
<i>N</i>	43	32		8	
%	51.8	38.6	65	9.6	11
Hamilton					
<i>N</i>	26	13		3	
%	61.9	30.9	32	7.2	6
Kingston					
<i>N</i>	6	15		1	
%	27.3	68.2	23	4.6	1
London					
<i>N</i>	11	4		4	
%	57.8	21.1	10	21.1	4

also became a clerk. The Irish Catholic laborer, Lawrence Kelly, had a son who became a tailor, in 1871. J. Halloran's sons (Halloran was a fellow countryman and laborer) worked as a baker and a tobacconist; both fathers were illiterate and continued to be wage laborers through the decade.

Persistence, adaptation, increased wealth, and stability; somewhat greater exposure to education; and the transformation of adolescence all contributed directly to this pattern of progress in intergenerational mobility in which so many of the sons of illiterate parents participated. In acknowledging these significant movements up from disadvantaged origins, we also need to stress that, as class lines were rarely crossed, over 50% of the sons in 1861 and almost 40% in 1871 started work at the semi- and unskilled, low levels of the occupational hierarchy.

Virtually all of the sons continued within the working class. Neither the achievement of additional education by 1871 nor their own attainment of literacy and some schooling (usually limited) could influence this result; interclass mobility, although more frequent *intergenerationally* than *intragenerationally*, was then quite exceptional, and probably is still not common.²⁵ Literacy and education did not have *that* kind of impact on the social structure, even as they became more pervasive, more frequently needed, and more freely available. Differentials were maintained between social classes; origins within classes were perpetuated from fathers to children; and, in a broadly based and quite subtle manner, the social structure with its inherent inequalities was reproduced in the next generation. To repeat these points is not to deny the realities of social mobility, for which so much empirical evidence exists; rather, it is to comprehend their context and social function. When compared with some aspects of education's ideological promotion of equal opportunities and its contribution to mobility, success has been undeniably limited. But the fact of mobility, not only within classes but across ranks or strata, such as that of the illiterates' sons, legitimates the ideology of public schooling and serves to assure its hegemony. The illiterates who sent more of their children to school for longer periods, as they were able, were only representative of much larger numbers of people in their behavior. The ideology of mobility gained acceptance from the amount of mobility, however small, that took place.²⁶ The school fit squarely into this conjuncture that linked the contradictions between ideology and social reality, as its promulgated place in the

²⁵ See Katz, *People*, Chs. 2-3, "The Origins of Public Education;" Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians*, esp. Chs. 5, 9, *Poverty and Progress*; Lipset and Bendix, *Social Mobility*; Boudon, *Education, Opportunity, and Social Inequality* (New York: Wiley, 1974); Bowles and Gintis, *Schooling*, esp. Chs. 3-4; Jencks *et al.*, *Inequality*; Robert Dreeben, *On What is Learned in School* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1968).

²⁶ On the importance of even small-scale success in legitimating social ideology, see John Foster, "Nineteenth Century Towns—A Class Dimension," in *The Study of Urban History*, ed. H. J. Dyos (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), 281-299; Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress*; Katz, *People*, Ch. 2.

processes of equality and mobility derived assent and social support. Education and literacy therefore became intimately connected with life and achievement, as the school mediated aspirations for advancement (and also promoted them) with continuing social inequality.

The function of the ideology of success and achievement and of institutions such as the schools, which were presumed to facilitate greatly the attainment of success, was to provide the public with ways of understanding and assimilating themselves to the social and economic order—in the nineteenth century, the new orders of commercial and industrial capitalism. In these complex processes of societal transformation, literacy and schooling were central; that much is certain. Yet we have increasing reason to doubt that they were in fact essential in the manner traditionally accepted and which derived from eighteenth and nineteenth century social thinking and educational promotion. One small but telling sign of the contradictions involved is the ironic fact that the education of the sons of the illiterates contributed little to the small-scale but common gains they made, much as their parents' small successes had nothing whatsoever to do with their lack of education.

Upward mobility in wealth, property, and adjustment were not made at the expense or the sacrifice of the children's futures among the illiterates in the three mid-nineteenth-century cities we are considering. Certainly these gains aided their sons' chances in early work levels and in additional schooling; but even with less schooling, these children did not begin life without opportunities for improvement and progress within their class. Like sons of illiterate parents elsewhere in the nineteenth century, mobility came to those with some preparation in their early socialization.²⁷ Literacy and schooling varied according to the social

²⁷ In an important study, William H. Sewell, Jr. shows that sons of peasants who migrated to Marseilles and who were less often literate than native-born working class sons ("clearly less qualified . . . for non-manual occupations") had a rate of mobility into nonmanual occupations "substantially higher than that of workers' sons," besting "all categories of workers' sons by margins ranging from 30% for skilled workers' sons to over 250% for unskilled workers' sons," "Social Mobility in a Nineteenth-Century European City," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 7 (1976), 222-223, 217-233. Sewell concludes that this "remarkable" success can not be explained by competitive labor market advantages, and argues that it derives from a difference in culture and values. This is analogous, I believe, to the illiterates' sons in the Ontario cities, and provides important comparative support for my interpretation. We cannot be certain how many of the urban fathers were of peasant background, although some no doubt were; nevertheless, we may point to migratory selection and the implications for personal motivation, patterns of adaptation and adjustment (including homeownership), the socialization of the children, and the relative successes of parents without education

and economic contexts, of course, but comparative research supports our fundamental conclusion that their attainment, while enabling some children to surmount the lowest of origins, did not significantly alter class stratification or structural inequality. Illiteracy could prove a great disadvantage to many, but not an insurmountable barrier to survival, adjustment, or progress; conversely, literacy and education did remarkably little in themselves to aid the greatest numbers in erasing ascriptive burdens, in cancelling the disadvantages of their origins, or in gaining upward mobility.²⁸ The results of these comparative nineteenth-century urban case studies provide strong support for further detailed historical investiga-

and sons with limited schooling. The results are highly suggestive; this marks one vital path which future researchers should follow.

In a very different context, Michael Sanderson ("Literacy and Social Mobility in the Industrial Revolution in England," *Past and Present*, 56 [1972], 75-104) presents evidence that literate parents were, conversely, unable to pass along advantages and provide opportunities for occupational mobility for their sons: "With rising literacy, the mere possession of literacy would be unlikely to secure good job prospects," 95, 95-102. See below, and Ch. 5, below. See also, T. W. Laqueur's comment and Sanderson's response, *ibid.*, 64 (1974), 96-112.

²⁸ See also, Lee Soltow and Edward Stevens, "Economic Aspects of School Participation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century United States," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 8 (1977), 221-243; Sanderson, "Literacy"; the studies cited in note 25, above. Soltow and Stevens discover, for the U.S. in 1860, clear educational differentials by wealth of parents, especially for attendance after the ages of 10 and 15, respectively, and the effect of ethnicity on both education and wealth. After raising critical questions about the relationship between enrollment and literacy, the economic rewards of schooling and literacy, and the purposes of training in literacy (which we consider in Ch. 5), they conclude that "it appears unlikely that the common school served as a vehicle for occupational mobility," in spite of the "expectations of common school reformers," and the "impact of the common school expansion was differential, with the wealth of parents being a critical factor . . . the implication is that the common school institution did not alter patterns of economic inequality, but, rather, tended to perpetuate them," 242-243. See also Soltow, *Men and Wealth in the United States, 1850-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 22, 79. Sanderson, continuing his argument cited in note 27, asserts, "In an eighteenth-century commercial society unaffected by the development of the cotton factory industry, the possibility of social mobility for the educated son of a laborer was vastly greater than in the 1830s in a society considerably affected by such industrialization, even when both societies were within the same county. . . . This is simply not consistent with an interpretation of the industrial revolution that sees it as demanding more literacy, creating more literate jobs and drawing an increasingly educated labour force up the social scale into them," 101-102. Ch. 5, below, considers both the British and North American cases. The results of studies by Lipset and Bendix, Jencks, Boudon, Bowles and Gintis, Collins, and Squires (cited in Chs. 2-3, above) argue for broad continuities rather than dramatic change over time, as does Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians*, Ch. 5.

tions of literacy and illiteracy, but more importantly for serious and sustained reevaluation and reconsideration of the "literacy myth", the social theories and ideologies that surround it, and its contemporary extensions as well.²⁹

²⁹ For a different interpretation of the response of immigrant groups to education, see Timothy L. Smith, "Immigrant Social Aspirations and American Education, 1880-1930," *American Quarterly*, 21 (1969), 523-543, "Native Blacks and Foreign Whites: Varying Responses to Educational Opportunity in America, 1880-1950," *Perspectives in American History*, 6 (1972), 623-643. For a very different approach to working class educational strategies, see the interesting book by T. W. Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976). I do not find these arguments convincing. For more recent perspectives, see Blau and Duncan, *Structure*; Sewell and Hauser, *Education*, among a mammoth body of literature.