This book is the stepchild of an academic conference, and as is often the case with stepchildren it has suffered a difficult development. It is a highly questionable tactic when seeking a readership beyond a few hundred professors and graduate students to advertise a book's indebtedness to an academic conference, but this conference was no regular conference, and this book is no run-of-the-mill youth studies book. The conference, which bore the same name as this text, was “sharply rebuked” by then-Mayor Rudolph Giuliani (to our knowledge the only conference to earn such an honor during Giuliani’s eight-year reign), the chair of the New York City Council’s Youth Service Committee, the president of the New York Police Department’s Hispanic Society, and the president of New York City’s Board of Education. Giuliani’s spokesperson opined, “John Jay should be a college for criminal justice, not for criminal practices”; and proceeded to say that the conference “sent a message of gang legitimacy to our young people.” Meanwhile, the president of the Board of Education bemoaned our “support of street thugs” rather than “positive role models.” Such were the recriminations from the city’s moral entrepreneurs, all of which were intended to indict and inflame rather than to educate. But what was the nature of the sin that drew such reproach?

We were not guilty of sponsoring a teach-in, a sit-in, or a demonstration aimed at disrupting the status quo. Rather, the aims of the conference were to assemble “researchers, educators and organizers from around the globe to share knowledge, compare characteristics, discuss causes and shed light on successful interventions regarding the growing problems” confronting street and marginalized youth. As stated in the Conference Manifesto, we wanted to address

the transnational character of the newly emerging street youth cultures. The interlocking nature of the informational, technical and production revolutions that are pushing lower class youth even further into the margins and the speed and depth of the globalizing forces of cultural production and exchange that are feeding the processes of youth empowerment, youth identity and the social control of youth.
And we succeeded to an extraordinary degree. We gathered academics, researchers, street organizers, activists, filmmakers, photographers, attorneys, and journalists from the United States, Holland, Brazil, Columbia, Ghana, Canada, England, the Dominican Republic, Italy, Great Britain, Guatemala, and Mexico to present their work via traditional academic panels, photographic exhibits, a film series, dramatic readings, and musical performances. But this was not what attracted the attention of the moral establishment. Their main objection lay in the following conference goal: “to listen to the youth (and/or their representatives) of the subcultures who have developed grass roots organizations to cope with the problems of social, educational, political, cultural and economic disenfranchisement.” When word got out that the conference would feature a play written and performed by members of the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation and lectures by former members of the Bloods and Crips and that attendance by current members of these and other “dangerous groups” would be welcomed, the line of transgression had been crossed. In response, the mayor and other right-thinking public officials issued their condemnations, made threatening phone calls to university administrators, and lined the streets outside the college with more than a dozen police squad cars.

In retrospect we were somewhat naive and had not anticipated such a panic-stricken response. We should have realized that many public officials in this globalized city would relish the opportunity to demonstrate that they were not as toothless or as cynical as many have charged, that they had not surrendered or auctioned off all their regulatory power to market forces or corporate boards. We didn’t anticipate that a group of idealistic academics and graduate students employed at the nation’s only publicly funded institution of higher education still courageous enough to insist on an open admission policy would make the ideal target. This is not to imply that we were without an agenda. All of the principal members of the organizing committee were also engaged in research projects with marginalized or disenfranchised youth (Flynn with working-class Caucasian youth, Brotherton and Barrios with the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation and the Ñetas) and deeply concerned that despite all the rhetoric about the leveling and liberation effects of globalization, the youth we were working with seemed to be operating in a far more insecure and “colder” world than most wanted to admit (Finnegan 1999). We were certain that our experiences were not singular and longed for an exchange with others engaged in youth issues and thought that sponsoring an international conference was the most logical way to accomplish these goals.

Furthermore, we were not among those who thought that the 20th century had ended on a positive note. It was clear to us that increasing numbers of working-class, poor, and minority youth were being placed in an increasingly untenable situation. Therefore, we wanted the conference to address, and begin the process of abrogating, the legacy left by the last century’s punitive criminal justice policies and practices and its penchant for continuous moral panics (pick your folk devil: suburban school shooters, single mothers, skinheads, gangbangers, homeless youth, drug dealers, superpredators) to cement the rule of neoliberalism (Harvey 2006). Thus we did not want to be guilty of sponsoring yet another “youth troubles, troubled youth” conference where well-intentioned, “right-minded” experts expounded on the psychological, cultural,
and moral deficiencies of contemporary youth. Certainly we knew that our celebration of the critical, radical, and disobedient spirit of “organic intellectuals” and community and street activists would irritate, even unnerve, some of our colleagues and administrators (to their credit, the John Jay Administration strongly supported our efforts, even in the face of the barrage of criticism).

In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, James Scott contends,

> The safest and most public form of political discourse is that which takes as its basis the flattering self-image of the elites. Owing to the rhetorical concessions that this self-image contains, it offers a surprisingly large arena for political conflict that appeals to these concessions and makes use of the room for interpretation within any ideology. For example, even the ideology of white slave owners in the antebellum U.S. South incorporated certain paternalistic flourishes about the care, feeding, housing, and clothing of slaves and their religious instruction. Practices, of course, were something else. (1992:37)

We recognized that for many the ascendancy of the “transnational and hypermobile nature of capital” (Sassen 1999:42) had an almost mystical power to neutralize resistance and revolt by the marginalized and oppressed, but we also believed that the public university was an ideal site for a forum for speakers intent on revealing the practices responsible for the “human consequences” of globalization (Bauman 2000) and insistent on the necessity of establishing an alternative basis (one in which any form of flattery was apprehended) for future discourse.

New York seemed the ideal city to hold such a conference. The city's cockiness, fueled largely by a mainstream narrative that flattered the political leadership’s “broken windows” approach to public order, was beyond precedent. According to this story violent crime and murder rates were at the lowest levels in decades, the tough-on-crime stance had delivered the subways and midtown avenues from the homeless, pickpockets, panhandlers, squeegiemens, and other wretches, allowing the vaunted “creative class” to hustle back into the city and occupy not only Tribeca and the Upper East Side but Washington Heights, Harlem, and Alphabet City. This invasion elevated real estate prices to a level that allowed only the select of this class to dream of setting up house. Public officials and property developers conceded that this globalized rebirth involved some social pain, that some of the indigenous population would suffer displacement. This misfortune, however, was corrected, not simply balanced, by the influx of new capital. We wanted to challenge this understanding of symbolic and spatial order. In *Globalization and Its Discontents*, Saskia Sassen argues that the large Western city of today concentrates diversity. Its spaces are inscribed within the dominant corporate culture but also within the multiplicity of other cultures and identities. The slippage is evident: the dominant culture can encompass only part of the city. And while corporate power inscribes these cultures and identifies them with “otherness” thereby devaluing them, they are present everywhere. (1999:54)
We wanted to counteract this inscription, which intended not only to devalue but also to socially exclude and to humiliate, and holding a conference at a college situated one avenue west of CBS’s worldwide headquarters, five streets south of the Lincoln Center and ABC’s headquarters, two avenues west of Columbus Circle (the Time/Warner complex was then in its embryonic stage), and opposite one of Manhattan’s major medical centers and teaching hospitals was quite fitting.

So the conference itself was an act of resistance, but because we had no intention of sponsoring an academic vanity project, we invited many who would not regularly feel at home in an institution of higher education. And as interested as we were in indicting corporate and political power, we were equally concerned with countering the absence of agency narrative so prevalent in much of the globalization discourse. Some of this discourse has been aimed at establishing the lack of ontological fitness of contemporary youth and the vacuity of youth culture. But it is not all the product of bad faith. The streets have not been full of acts of moral protest, and only a small minority of youth are active in the pursuit of social and economic justice. But as Touraine argues,

Although globalization is supposedly beyond our control there is a will to act, even in the most unfavorable circumstances. It exists even when there is a very high level of unemployment, even though we have always been told that people who find themselves in that situation are condemned to impotence or being manipulated by authoritarian demagogues. (2001:26)

Through our research we found a great deal of evidence to support Touraine’s argument. The resilience and resourcefulness we noted were not that surprising, but we were continually impressed by the intellectual, erotic, political, and spiritual yearnings and projects we witnessed. The majority of these young men and women were not apathetic, hedonistic, predatory casualties of the winner-take-all societal sweepstakes (Frank 1996). (This is not to deny that some of the young men and women we encountered perpetrated criminal, sometimes violent acts or to minimize the social consequences of these actions; however, this territory has received no shortage of hand-wringing coverage.) Most of these youth were actively engaged in the struggle to be subjects, not objects, in the historical process. Those fortunate enough to have joined politicized street organizations or community-based organizations had developed a critical consciousness that allowed them to name, and resist, some of the power structures and forms of discourse responsible for their disenfranchisement and the general destruction of the democratic social compact (Piven and Cloward 1998); many others were not so fortunate.

The conference was a resounding success, and this book is our way of continuing and expanding on the project. Like all stepchildren it bears a motley pedigree. Early in the editorial process we decided to remain true to the conference’s insistence on interdisciplinarity and solicited articles from sociologists, psychologists, criminologists, educators, social workers, and anthropologists (less than half of the authors presented
at the conference). Despite the frequent calls for border-crossing and hybridity, most academics choose to remain within their disciplinary boundaries and professional and class prerogatives. We assumed that our inclusiveness would provide the reader with a comprehensive understanding, not to mention a far more interesting reading experience. The book, we believe, proves our assumption valid, but our eager promiscuity caused us many headaches; plurality is always wonderful and worthy in principle, but university press editors and marketing personnel insist, rightly, on a certain degree of cohesion and coherence, and we often regretted our ambition and appetites.

Our opting for catholicity should not be taken for a lack of discrimination. We were quite strict on questions of method and attitude. Wanting to avoid the overly theoretical abstraction or thin empiricism characterizing much of the work on globalization, we sought authors capable of providing a grounded appreciation of the lifeworlds and intentional meanings of young women and men. This resulted in seeking out researchers engaged in interview-based or ethnographic research studies. We coupled this preference for a "soft," depth-oriented qualitative orientation over the hard quantitative approach with an insistence that the authors operate from a critical tradition. Here we required far more than an unwillingness to essentialize the "other," a particularly common practice when "other" belongs to late modernity’s ever-expanding ranks of “difficult people and dangerous classes” (Young 1999:59). Given the nature of the project, we knew that some of the protagonists in these articles would be afflicted with addiction, depression, and other psychological maladies and that others would be guilty of engaging in violent and other antisocial acts, and although we had no interest in presenting youth as the powerless victims or conscripts in some brutal globalization war game, we could not abide “presenting the pathology of persons [and groups] as if it were something removed from history and society” (Martin-Baro 1996:67) or social oppression. Therefore, it was important that the authors accomplish their contextualizing of these youth’s actions and consciousness in light of the political and cultural contradictions inundating their multiple lifeworlds. We also wanted researchers dedicated to making visible the invisible structures of domination and symbolic and indirect violence that oppress, exclude, and humiliate (see Bourdieu 2003; Salmi 1993). It was equally important that articles seeking to demonstrate the intentionality of youth engaged in acts of cultural, political, and economic resistance also present the transformative as well as the adaptive and subversive meanings of these acts (Brotherton in press).

We open the book with two-hard-hitting chapters documenting a widespread and disturbing pattern of the betrayal of trust by public authorities and law enforcement personnel experienced by urban youth on three continents. In both chapters the authors argue that the widespread and systematic failure of public officials and law enforcement officers to engage youth, especially “youth of color,” as citizens worthy of respectful consideration and treatment results in a climate of mistrust, vulnerability, and hostility.

In demonstrating that homeless and street youth regularly engage in resistant and transformative practices, the chapters in part II depart from the usual social science tradition of focusing solely on adaptive and coping strategies. Documenting the appearance of Moscow’s “displaced” street youth, a post-Soviet social problem, Svetlana Stephenson addresses the factors that lead some displaced street youth to join criminal
communities that have sprung up in the wake of the disintegration of Russia’s formal institutions and structures. In a chapter examining the unrecognized and understudied phenomenon of homeless youth travelers, Marni Finkelstein, Richard Curtis, and Barry Spunt argue that for many Caucasian youth living on the streets can be a rational act, a form of cultural resistance performed in the service of constructing an alternative social identity, not simply the result of individual pathology or an abusive family environment. In his comparative analysis of homeless youth in São Paulo, Brazil, and New York, Benedito Rodrigues dos Santos argues that despite superficial differences, street children of the so-called third world and homeless youth of the first world are forms of one worldwide phenomenon.

It is difficult to find a more consistently demonized social group than the youth gang. In the post–Cold War period gangs were identified as the primary threat to urban civic order, and in the so-called War on Terror the specter of Islamist Jihadists and American gang members joining forces to commit an act of catastrophic terrorism has been raised by politicians and social scientists. The chapters in part III all depart from this tradition. Drawing from his ethnographic work with Almighty Latin King and Queens Nation, David Brotherton offers a strong critique of mainstream criminological and sociological gang research and demonstrates that the youth in street organizations often engage in intentionally transformative practices, including helping members with recovery from drug and alcohol addiction, illiteracy, and reentry into civil society. This theme of transformative resistance is also present in Ana Daza and co-authors’ chapter detailing the efforts of Los Muchachos, a Colombian street gang, to serve as a stabilizing and constructive force in a impoverished community. Dana Nurje and Michael Shively contend that gangs can serve as a refuge for female victims of sexual and physical abuse. These groups provide emotional and material support that that is restorative, even life saving; paradoxically, the members are exposed to situations in which violence is necessary and the means to achieving status and self-esteem. Drawing from more than a quarter-century of ethnographic work, James Diego Vigil’s chapter provides a provocative look at identity formation in youth belonging to street gangs.

The chapters in part IV demonstrate that globalization’s deleterious effects are not limited to “developing nations” or “people of color.” In sensitive and probing chapter Randy Blazak addresses the growing racialized anxiety among white youth, caused by the rapid changes in economic structure and opportunity; he also argues that the continued failure of educators and other public authorities to address racial concerns and prejudice could lead many Caucasian youth to seek answers from white supremacists, racist Odinists, and pan-European neo-Nazis. Drawing from their ethnographic work with Southern California racist skinhead subcultures, Pete Simi and Barbara Brents provide a history of the development of this movement and emergence of a globalized “Aryan identity.” Ralph Larkin’s treatment of the infamous 1999 Columbine High School shootings dispenses with the easy demonization of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold by contextualizing the murderous acts in a socially oppressive environment of a “perfect” suburban town. Michael Flynn’s chapter explores young men’s accounts of their own violent behavior.

We conclude the book on a hopeful note. In her chapter describing nonformal peace education programs in New York City, Leonisa Ardizzone argues for the necessity
of addressing structural forms of violence and oppression and encouraging youth to engage in social activism. Ardizzone’s chapter nicely complements Barry Checkoway, Lisa Figueroa, and Katie Richards-Schuster’s analysis of the mobilizing efforts of Youth Force, a remarkable community-based organization in New York’s South Bronx. In a chapter providing an analysis of the effects of the globalized political economy on youth homelessness in a midsized American city and a case study of Denver’s Urban Peak, an institution providing comprehensive services to homeless youth, Jean Scandlyn and her co-authors also make a call for true participatory action research that works with clients not only within the system but also against the system. Donna DeCesare’s remarkable photo essay, the appendix to this volume, captures the humanity and resilience of socially excluded youth in their struggle to maintain a sense of dignity and self-respect.

As we edited this book, our concern about the condition of youth deepened. We began soliciting articles and editing our contributors’ first drafts not long after the tragedy of September 11, 2001, and as the editing process continued we watched and protested the making of the quagmires now terrorizing both Afghanistan and Iraq. A full reckoning is still years away, and with more than five hundred thousand civilian casualties in Iraq alone, the young women and men serving in the armed services and the insurgency certainly are not the only ones ruined by these campaigns of militarized chaos. The cages, prison cells, and torture chambers in Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, and other “shadow prisons” are stocked not only with adult Muslim men and youth, but it will be the youth who will seek to redress or avenge the humiliation.

During this time, the U.S. and British governments have been busy outlining their global agenda, insisting early on that militarism was the unequivocal method of future foreign policy and that the global diplomacy of the Clinton era, with its preference for greater U.S. power through the spread of corporate trading blocs (i.e., free trade agreements) and treaties of mutual concern, was over. Before this, of course, everything wasn’t conducive to the establishment of individual dignity and a decent society; the world was fully immersed in its highly unstable postmodern moment, with politics and culture changing at breakneck speed and with consumer capitalism creating myths and realities that made the unified self another fiction. As Burawoy (2005:22) argues,

The world has become more reactionary (and more insidious and astute in normalizing its appalling deeds). To put it crudely, market tyrannies and state despotism have deepened inequalities and abrogated freedom both within and among nations—both tendencies unleashed by the fall of communism and consolidated in the aftermath of September 11. If there are fortifications for holding up the advance of these two forces, they lie broadly within civil society, the breeding ground for the defense of human rights, environmental justice, labor conditions, etc.
For those offended by Burawoy’s ideological commitments and his call for a public, engaged practice, the muted, professionalized policy tone of a recent United Nations report on the “fate of youth” may be easier on the ear:

Young people, more than any other age group have been adversely affected by developments related to globalization, the ageing of society, rapid advances in information and communication technology, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and armed conflict. . . . Some 209 million young people, or 18 percent of all youth, live on less than US $1 per day and 515 million live on less than US $2 per day. . . . The current generation of youth is the best educated so far. However, 113 million children are not in school and 130 million young people are illiterate. . . . In spite of the progress achieved in education, global youth unemployment has increased to a record high of 88 million. . . . HIV/AIDS (with ten million infected) is the primary cause of mortality among youth, followed by violence and injuries. (United Nations 2005:iii)

For our purposes the report’s emphasis on globalization is extremely important. In the opening substantive chapter, “Youth in the Global Economy,” the authors contend,

Some have clearly benefited from the increased interdependence [brought on by the economic processes of globalization]; in East Asia, for example significant economic growth has lifted over 200 million out of poverty in a single decade. However, there are many who remain outside the realm of global economic activity and are being left behind; within and between countries, the income gap is widening. About 2 billion people are not benefiting from globalization. . . . Young people have an ambiguous economic and cultural relationship with the globalizing world. They are relatively adaptable and therefore perhaps best able to make use of the new opportunities presented. . . . There are . . . still many young people, however, especially in developing countries, who lack the economic power to benefit from the opportunities globalization offers. They have been left out of the modernization process and remain on the other side of the digital divide, but are simultaneously finding their cultural identity and local traditions threatened. (United Nations 2005:iii)

The report rightly highlights the plight of those in the developing world, but the disenfranchisement, social exclusion, and immiseration of youth are also present and growing in the “developed” world. In a recent book on the state of U.S. education we read, “Nationally, only about two-thirds of all students—and only half of all blacks, Latinos and Native Americans—who enter ninth grade graduate with regular diplomas four years later” (Orfield et al. 2004:67). Economic insecurity, inadequate housing, family instability, lack of mentorship, criminal peer cultures, commodity fetishism, and educational alienation all are linked. And how could it be otherwise? In the last two decades political elites across the globe, through pure self-interest, have managed to sell the notion that public investment in civil society is misguided and that the free market is a cure-all. The result has been disastrous for all but a tiny percentage of “haves,” whereas for the majority of the “have-nots” we see more impoverishment, a dramatic increase in youth homicide rates in most third world nations, faltering health
standards for hundreds of millions of adults and youth, and the globalization of drugs, arms, and street gangs.

One would think that a youthful revolution would be in the air after such rampant indignities, and youth certainly have made their feelings known. On the streets of Argentina in the wake of the country’s near bankruptcy, the Piqueteros formed road blocks and demanded work, dignity, and social change; in London, New York, Madrid, and Rome millions of students and youth protested the participation of their respective governments in the imperial senselessness of the Iraqi occupation; in Venezuela, the masses demanded and won the return of their elected president (much to the chagrin of the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency); in Nairobi, Kenyan students have demonstrated repeatedly outside World Bank headquarters as their university system is held to ransom in exchange for its unpayable national debt; and in New York tens of thousands took to the streets to protest the murder by the police of an unarmed young African American man and demanded the cessation of racist police state practices. In all these disparate parts of the world young people have militantly marched and fought for a future. But it is not the sixties. The elites with their media empires, their pseudoheroes of the poor, their prisons, their surveillance cameras, their antisocial ordinances, their zero-tolerance webs, their mind-numbing messages of accumulation, competition, and individualism, and their abilities to have us measured, made statistically irrelevant and lost in a soundbite, have been remarkably successful at suppressing, distorting, and corrupting youth voices, spreading the psychosocial disease of fatalism, and producing scapegoats.

In the last couple of years Brotherton has visited young people organized in their street collectives (gangs and street organizations) in a variety of global settings, including London, Glasgow, New York City, Barcelona, and Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic). Flynn has worked with New York City high school and college youth involved in the antinuclear and peace and justice movements. After conducting numerous interviews and conversations with youth in these areas and observing their daily lives, we find it laughable that so many adults expect young people to make sense of it all and still come out ahead of the game. Moreover, the pathetic levels of compensation given to teachers, youth workers, caregivers, and community organizers who are supposed to make social, intellectual, and spiritual contact with these youth and guide them into purposive lives are equally absurd. Through these experiences it has become clear to us that the closer one comes to the most marginalized young people, the less one is paid and the less status one is accorded. In New York in 2006 the largest teachers’ union in the country recently reached a labor contract after almost three years of unnecessarily drawn-out negotiation. The mayor, a “self-made” billionaire elected on a pledge to revitalize public education, complained that the teachers’ demands were excessive (their current starting salaries are $39,000). Meanwhile, in the Dominican Republic, public school teachers are paid $180 per month, there are often no books and no chalk in the classroom, and many children lack shoes. In Britain, where there is a big emphasis on recruiting local youth workers to assist in what is called “community integration” in “troubled areas,” such key players are paid minimum wages, receive little or no training, and are accorded a notch in status above babysitters and just behind elementary school teachers.
This disdain for education and hence for youth is reflected in both societies’ embrace of testing and rote learning as the pedagogical counter to flagging educational standards. Root causes of young people’s negative or problematic reactions to schooling are rarely addressed because nothing can be mentioned about the magnitude of the class, gender, and race divide within and across society unless it is framed in a first-world-saves-third-world narrative. This is precisely the kind of global scenario that Galeano (2001) describes as an upside-down world, a world where young people must struggle for the right to exist, compete for a modicum of self-respect, search deep for reasons to be optimistic, and yet get blamed for the little joy and excitement they can savor from their personal relationships. This is the same world that idealizes youth as a concept, a look to own and flaunt, a subject to be exoticized, studied, and pathologized. Yes, it is in this world, this shocking, amoral, completely mixed-up, imploding world that youth are commercially targeted almost from the womb, used as disposable jockeys from the age of four (in Dubai), and sold into slavery by the tens of thousands (see Bales 2004). Be it the West or the East, the North or the South, why should youth be expected to say anything positive and hopeful about an adult society that continues to treat them as pliable consumers, defenseless workers, chattel, pitiable cases, and empty vessels, all while regarding them with suspicion, fear, disdain, and contempt?

Yet despite these odds, youth do make sense of the everyday, and they do not all end up in a literal or figurative dead end. Some may adapt to their sociocultural environments by joining antisocial subcultures that shorten their lives; it is the sociopolitical and historical contexts in which this occurs that are crucially important to document, examine, and analyze. However, most youth vacillate between different cultures, with one foot in the world of “deviance” and the other in the so-called mainstream. However, with so many of our institutional resources being placed in the hands of the interlocking social control industries, such youth often are labeled and pushed down the road to diminished life chances, just as the humanist social scientists of yesteryear repeatedly warned us.

And now, emerging from the intergenerational dystopias created by men and women of privileged systems, many of whom are products of elite universities, youth in so-called deviant lifeworlds are coming to understand the politics of their marginalization and the transformative possibilities of their actions both for themselves and for their communities. All of these youth, across the racial and ethnic spectrum and the gender divide and increasingly across the barriers of social class, are somehow involved in processes, performances, and experiences of resistance. It is our sincere hope that the following chapters will provide some insight into this expanding phenomenon and will aid your contributions to this most critical of contemporary issues. For in the future of youth lies the future of society, and if our present treatment of them is any indication, we are in for a highly contested epoch.

References


