righteous dopefiend


“A riveting narrative of the daily struggles for survival of homeless people with a physical and emotional addiction to heroin…. A must read.” —William Julius Wilson
This powerful anthropological and photographic study plunges the reader into the world of homelessness and drug addiction in the contemporary United States. For over a decade Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg followed two dozen heroin injectors and crack smokers in their scramble for survival on the streets of San Francisco. *Righteous Dopefiend* is a vivid chronicle of intimate suffering, solidarity, and betrayal and a trenchant analysis of the structural forces that shape the lives of the destitute in the world’s wealthiest nation.

"Calling this book ethnography would be like calling The Wire a cop show: what comes roaring out of these pages is almost as visceral and devastating as spending a night in 'the hole' itself." Mike Davis, author of *City of Quartz*

"This book will test your cultural relativism to destruction, but along the way you will learn a great deal about destitution, homelessness, addiction, and violence at all levels. These dopefiends are 'made in America.'" Paul Willis, author of *Learning to Labor*

"The authors insightfully integrate discussions of agency and moral responsibility on the part of homeless addicts with an analysis of the powerful structural forces that shape the addicts' lives. *Righteous Dopefiend* is a must-read." William Julius Wilson, author of *The Truly Disadvantaged*

"If Pierre Bourdieu, George Orwell, and Walker Evans had met in a homeless encampment under a San Francisco highway, they could not have produced a more penetrating portrait of America's urban outcasts than *Righteous Dopefiend*. This searing anthropology of the underbelly of the American metropolis will challenge social scientists and public health experts, stun lay readers, and shame public officials oblivious to the social dereliction their failed policies are spawning." Loïc Wacquant, author of *Urban Outcasts*

"Bourgois and Schonberg deliver luminous images and intimate portraits of unforgettable Dickensian characters whose addiction consigns them to lives of public ignominy and private pleasures transacted under the freeway overpasses of a totally indifferent San Francisco. This tough book is a must-read for all!" Nancy Scheper-Hughes, author of *Death without Weeping*
Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg
Righteous Dopefiend  2009 (May) University of California Press; Public Anthropology Series.

This powerful anthropological and photographic study plunges the reader into the world of homelessness and drug addiction in the contemporary United States. For more than a decade, Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg followed two dozen heroin injectors and crack smokers in their scramble for survival on the streets of San Francisco. Combining riveting photographs with gripping narrative, Righteous Dopefiend is a vivid chronicle of intimate suffering, solidarity and betrayal. The authors accompany the homeless on their daily rounds and sleep in their encampments to offer a vivid chronicle of harrowing survival and loss, extraordinary caring, and hope. The book develops a trenchant analysis of the structural forces that shape the lives of the destitute in the world’s wealthiest nation. The reader discovers the survival strategies of the destitute poor in the neo-liberal turn of the twenty-first century --from burglary and panhandling, to day labor and recycling. The authors record the painful details of violent childhoods and failed dreams, and track the ongoing tumultuous lover affairs, conflicts, alliances, and interpersonal hierarchies of their destitute characters who struggle for a shred of dignity and meaning in a society that has no use for them. The reader meets the parents, grandparents, children and grandchildren of the principle characters; follows the book's subjects into jail, hospital intensive care units, and drug treatment centers; and learns how social and medical services strive to ameliorate the lives of street-based drug users but often exacerbate their suffering. The book concludes with proposals for policy changes and service interventions, but most importantly, it offers a critique of how and why the U.S. has produced an intractable shelterless population condemned to lives of distress and useless suffering.

Righteous Dopefiend is a “photo-ethnography” featuring sixty-four of Schonberg’s stunning black-and-white photographs embedded in a text combining the voices of the homeless, the fieldwork notes of the authors and a critical theoretical anthropological analysis. Careful not to beatify or spectacularize the men and women they have befriended on the street, Bourgois and Schonberg expose the failures of our current models of addiction and redefine the possible terms of engagement with lives resolutely lived outside society’s bounds.

Philippe Bourgois is the author of the multiple award-winning, In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio and Ethnicity at Work: Divided Labor on a Central American Banana Plantation. He is the Richard Perry University Professor of Anthropology & Family and Community Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. Jeff Schonberg is a freelance photographer and a doctoral candidate in medical anthropology at the University of California, San Francisco and Berkeley.

Note to scholarly readers
Drawing primarily from Bourdieu, Foucault, Marx, Mauss, and Primo Levi the authors develop a theoretical understanding of “lumpen abuse under neoliberalism.” They propose that our current moment in history calls for a redefinition of the concept of social class using Foucault’s insights on subjectivity/subjectivation while at the same time engaging with Bourdieu’s challenge to render visible the ways social inequality impose misery and pain. On a
practical and a theoretical level, the text critiques the U.S. model of punitive governmentality with respect to poverty, law enforcement, public health and illegal drug use in the post-cold war era to argue that the suffering of the indigent poor at the turn of the 21st century is politically structured and "useless" in Levinas's terms—and therefore needs to be understood as being politically structured and abusive. Through the concepts of habitus and subjectivity the authors address the racialization of ethnic relations, sexuality and gender power relations, homosociality and love. They also confront and theorize the psycho-affective realms of childhood violence, trauma and family strife and document the brutal logics of economic survival strategies in the face of the disappearance of the industrial labor market and of expulsion from the entry level service sector. From an applied perspective, the book examines destructive bodily practices in relationship to medical and public health services including drug treatment. Although the chapters are organized theoretically around these themes, the text follows a chronological narrative and develops a cast of some dozen characters.

Finally, Righteous Dopefiend also makes a methodological argument for collaborative ethnographic work to propose a vitalized mode for collecting, analyzing and presenting anthropological material in photo-ethnographic form. Wrapping analytical narrative, dialogue and fieldwork notes around ethnographic photographs the authors propose the utility of a new representational medium for contemporary ethnography that presents multiple voices and operates on distinct intellectual, aesthetic, emotional and political levels to explore—and to push—the complex politics of representation of the urgent, taboo quandries of our era.

**Published Reviews:**

**Advanced Praise for the book:**

From Publisher’s Weekly
http://www.publishersweekly.com/article/CA6650583.html?q=Bourgois

**Nonfiction**

⭐**Righteous Dopefiend** Phillipe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg. Univ. of California, $24.95 (392p) ISBN 978-0-520-25498-5

In this gritty ethnography exploring the world of San Francisco's homeless heroin addicts, Bourgois, anthropology and community medicine professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and Schonberg, a photographer and graduate student in medical anthropology, draw on a decade immersed in this subculture to eloquently elaborate on the survival techniques and intimate lives of black and white addicts who live in self-made communities and work the economic fringes for survival. The authors explore racial boundaries and crossings, love stories, family relations, parenting, histories of childhood abuse, as well as the constant work of navigating hostile police enforcement, exploitative and helpful business owners, overburdened medical services and social service bureaucracies. The book details the gruesome material toll of addiction, infection and homelessness and the risks of ongoing personal and institutional violence. Bourgois and Schonberg create a deeply nuanced picture of a population that cannot escape social reprobation, but deserves social inclusion.
'Righteous Dopefiend'

By philippe bourgois and jeff schonberg

(University of california press; 359 pages; $24.95)

Nothing touches more fully on the despair of American life than homelessness, and nothing in San Francisco more fully encapsulates the frustration - and irritation - of its well-meaning populace than the everyday presence of its homeless people.

That's why it's a tragedy that you can count on both hands the comprehensive studies on street poverty that actually make it to the public eye, and that actually offer carefully considered solutions. The public rarely pays close attention to such things, even when such excellent studies as "Journey to Nowhere" by Dale Maharidge capture temporary spotlights.

But now comes one that leaders and readers alike should pay attention to - and heed its warnings and advice.

The book is "Righteous Dopefiend," and through its 12-year-long examination of several dozen homeless heroin addicts at an encampment around a freeway exchange dubbed Edgewater Boulevard in southern San Francisco, we get as complete and disturbing a view as can be had of just how awful and intractable street life can get. This book doesn't just skip in and out of the junkies' lives - it immerses you right there in the dirt, death, dope and despair alongside them, and never lets you go until the final page.

There's plenty here that could be sensational - dopers overdosing and dying in the mud, others injecting drugs into biceps or wherever else they find an unscarred spot, homeless people as thieves and sorrow-racked parents, addicts failing horribly at rehab. But that's not what University of Pennsylvania anthropology Professor Philippe Bourgois and his partner, UCSF anthropology student and photographer Jeff Schonberg, are aiming for here.

In unflinching and objective language, they hold up a clinically honest mirror to what they witness as they follow their homeless subjects in and out of jail and hospitals, as they are evicted from their camps and set up new ones, as their relationships blossom and collapse and as they struggle over race and gender.

These are not just episodically homeless people who spend a short while on the street in between personal crises. These are the most chronically homeless we have, the ones you see sleeping in filth and scratching out survival year and year as they struggle with mental illness, substance abuse, acute disabilities or all three.
There is no sugarcoating here. For the faint of heart, there will be stiff reading moments about people vomiting and defecating, jamming needles into oozing abscesses and selling sex for dope hits. Equally hard to read are the accounts of broken people crying about abandoning their families, childhood abuse they suffered, shivering at night in the rain, and all the other human miseries that attend most lives lived outside.

But this sort of thing must be read - and seen, as they are through Schonberg's stark, up-close photos. And though the writing here sometimes gets a bit too clinical when the writers offer scientific reasoning - "insights into the power/knowledge nexus alerts us to the fact that policy debates and interventions often mystify large-scale structural power vectors" - reads a typical passage, it's worth plowing through for the wisdom.

Bourgois and Schonberg humanize their tale by focusing tightly on a few main characters, such as Carter, who gets clean and finishes job training only to come back and overdose to death at the camp, or Tina, a street hooker who careens from man to man and rehab to rehab in a search for stability. The writers don't just illustrate their struggles at the encampment; they go back to their childhoods, interview their families and follow them into their forays to normalcy. We get a 360-degree view of their lives, and by this we can understand what works. And what doesn't.

What becomes most clear here is: Getting clean and kicking homelessness for good just can't happen unless you have a real place to live, and counseling.

The only hopeful tales here involve a combination of those two elements. Hank and Petey, two of the addicts, manage to get clean after many tries, and settle inside with regular therapeutic help. Jailing the homeless at $35,000 a year, or forcing them into psychological wards at $100,000 a year, almost always results in the people being released right back to whatever outdoor hell hole they were squatting in to begin with, the writers show. Only housing with a sense of independence, coupled with counseling, works.

Conclusions such as this, and the anthropological perspectives Bourgois and Schonberg offer, are as valuable as the narrative. They authoritatively trace how homelessness as we know it began with the dismantling of governmental housing assistance programs to low-income people over the past four decades, and then they note how the concurrent whittling of social programs for the poor such as job training, legal services and public transit exacerbated the situation, as did aggressive gentrification in cities such as San Francisco.

Mayor Gavin Newsom's push to create thousands of supportive housing units - housing with counseling for the homeless - in the past five years gets kudos, but the writers caution that even the best intentions anywhere are made infinitely more difficult by America's class structure and societal dedication to a dog-eat-dog system that skews tighter toward pure capitalism than the more socialized democracy of our European cousins. It's no mystery, they say, why the United States has a larger proportion of its population in destitution and in prison than any other industrialized nation while at the same time it is the wealthiest and most militarily powerful country on earth.

Dedicated local efforts can help, they say, but ultimately if this country is to sweep the homeless off its
streets, it must approach the problem as a crisis of health and equality. That means funding housing, counseling, job and drug-abuse programs more than ever, and turning away from an approach that criminalizes homeless people with inadequate solutions to offer them once they emerge from their jail cells.

"Tina, Carter, Sonny ... Hank and Petey are as all-American as the California dream," Bourgois and Schonberg write, and nothing could be more true. Or tragic. Or, as these two researchers show, fixable.

Kevin Fagan, with Chronicle photographer Brant Ward, covered homelessness full time from 2003 through 2006, the only newspaper team in the nation to do so. E-mail him at books@sfchronicle.com.
An Anthropologist Bridges Two Worlds

With his insights into the culture of street addicts, Philippe Bourgois helps doctors make a difference

By CHRISTOPHER SHEA

Philadelphia

Philippe Bourgois, who has spent his career studying some of America's roughest neighborhoods and subcultures, got an unusually harsh welcome to his new hometown: Last May, during a trip to North Philly to make contact with some drug dealers, he got caught up in a police raid.

It was a rainy Friday night, and the air was already charged with adrenaline. The previous week, a dozen or more cops had been caught by a TV-news helicopter beating on three black suspects in a shooting. This time the cops, who seemed to come out of nowhere, shouted for everyone to drop. The dealers kissed the sidewalk and put their hands behind their backs, but Bourgois was slower to react.

"I didn't know what I was supposed to do," he says now. "It happened so fast." Evidently thinking he was a wiseass as well as a buyer, a cop threw him down. "They kicked me like a football," Bourgois says.

As the scene calmed down, he tried to explain that he was a professor doing research on the drug trade, but that met with eye-rolling. The anthropologist spent the night in a Philadelphia jail, with a vomiting cellmate. Charges against Bourgois were dropped, and he did not file a complaint about his treatment. But only now is he getting back in touch with dealers. These days he carries a letter signed by the police commissioner explaining who he is.

The arrest was Bourgois's first, though hardly his first brush with risk. In his 1995 book, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* (Cambridge University Press), he recounts how one drug kingpin reacted after a newspaper article drew attention to Bourgois's fieldwork with dealers. The man pulled him aside to warn, "People who get people busted, even if it's by mistake, sometimes get found in the garbage with their heart ripped out and their bodies chopped into little pieces." Not the sort of stuff English professors have to deal with.

The University of California Press has just published *Righteous Dopefiend*, Bourgois's long-awaited follow-up to his first book. It's an ethnographic work based on more than a decade of studying homeless heroin addicts in San Francisco. Some of his findings, which have trickled out in journal articles and lectures, have already helped change how some doctors in the Bay City treat the most-destitute addicts.

Bourgois arrived at the University of Pennsylvania two years ago from the University of California at San Francisco, hired into a special program devised by Penn's president, Amy Gutmann, to expand the university's interdisciplinary offerings. His appointment bridges the anthropology department and the medical school, and
part of his mandate is to make sure that medical professors and students don't get so wrapped up in the biochemistry of disease and addiction that they forget about its social context. He also advises M.D./Ph.D. candidates with an interest in social science.

Having an interdisciplinary perspective, in a sense, means you serve different masters, and that is unusually evident in Bourgois's case. On the one hand, he is a cultural anthropologist in the humanistic, participant-observer tradition. He can emit at will great clouds of jargon that draw on the writings of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. But he also produces concrete recommendations about treating drug abuse and limiting the spread of blood-borne diseases, which is why the National Institutes of Health has long financed his work.

"Philippe, I just have to say, is one of the few anthropologists you can really dive in and get up to your elbows with," says Kimberly Page, an associate professor of epidemiology at San Francisco who studies injected-drug users from a more numbers-driven perspective.

"He's very authentic, very true to himself — he doesn't really change his shtick based on the audience," says Michelle Schneiderman, an assistant clinical professor of medicine at UCSF who treated "Hank," one of the down-and-out subjects of Righteous Dopefiend. "For a lot of overworked medical residents, things go in one ear and out the other. I found him incredibly engaging and his insights profound."

*Righteous Dopefiend* has both concrete and abstract aspects, too: At one moment it will relate a harrowing tale, often written in the first person (by either Bourgois or Jeff Schonberg, a graduate student at UCSF who took field notes, shot photographs that supplement the text, and gets a co-author credit). That story will be followed by an extended riff on theory. Delete the theory and you've got several seasons of *The Wire* — consumption side — only grimmer.

On a recent Monday night, Bourgois makes another foray into the predominantly Latino and black Philadelphia Badlands, as they are sometimes called, with an undergraduate student and a reporter. (Bourgois asked that the specific addresses they visited be omitted here, to preserve the privacy of his subjects.) As we cross over by car from an adjacent white, working-class neighborhood, the change is sudden and striking: Trash is everywhere, like the remnants of snow in early spring; whole blocks have been leveled and are covered in detritus; and many row houses stand orphaned, no longer part of any row.

We walk by men loitering on street corners, who seem curiously inactive until the student, a senior named George Karandinos, makes a suggestion: Put away the notebook. I do, and things spring to life. A green Pontiac rolls to the curb across the street from us, driven by a heavy-lidded white man in his late 30s or early 40s. His unseen passenger calls to the men on the corner: "Got any dope?"

"No, only powder." (On the street "dope" always means heroin.)

The car drives on. A young man raises his arm, beckoning to us. "Y'all all right?" he asks.

"We're fine," Bourgois says, and we keep walking. The drug market is hopping after all.

Some social scientists say Bourgois deserves credit for breaking a stalemate that long stymied the study of the American urban poor. In the 1960s, the anthropologist Oscar Lewis, who also wrote about East Harlem, helped to popularize the idea of a "culture of poverty": Poor, urban parents passed along to children dysfunctional ways of thinking and acting. In the 1970s, leftist anthropologists pushed back, saying the poor should not be judged by the standards of the middle class, with the nuclear family, for example, held up as the ideal.

Fearful of being caught in the crossfire, many sociologists and anthropologists simply stopped looking, except via statistics, at poverty in the United States. Bourgois broke the deadlock in two ways, according to Sudhir Venkatesh, a sociologist at Columbia University and author of *Gang Leader for a Day: A Rogue Sociologist*
Takes to the Streets (Penguin, 2008). He reframed drug dealers as people driven by essentially American aspirations: They wanted money, they wanted a career path that would offer new challenges over time, and they wanted the approval of their peers.

That subtle reframing points policy makers away from prison as a response and toward removing people from toxic networks or otherwise changing their incentives. Bourgois's evident empathy also gave him the cover to explore some of the seeder aspects of urban life. (In Search of Respect includes descriptions of gang leaders boasting of rape.) "He said, 'We have a duty to show these difficult scenes,'" says Venkatesh. "'We are culpable if we don't shine a light on them.' Single-handedly he just shook up the water."

To be sure, Bourgois's leftist credentials are never in doubt. He makes nods toward holding people responsible for their actions, but he doesn't miss a chance to condemn the depredations of "neoliberalism" or America's "punitive," "Puritanical" culture. (An in-house New York Times reviewer of In Search of Respect complained that the professor's account of dealers neglected "the possibility that these young men might simply be bad.")

The ailing, destitute subjects of Righteous Dopefiend live in an encampment Bourgois calls Edgewater, in the shadows of highway ramps that carry some of the wealthiest, best-educated people in the world to their high-tech jobs. ("Righteous dopefiend" is a phrase embraced by the addicts themselves, reflecting a rebellious, individualist interpretation of their drug abuse — an attitude that Bourgois says is distinctly American.) American drug policies, he says, "turn the filthiest nooks and crannies into the only objectively safe places for the indigent who are physically addicted to heroin to inject."

Dozens of addicts passed through Edgewater while he was doing fieldwork, but his book focuses on a smaller cast of characters, most of whom started using heroin in the late 60s or early 70s. At a talk Bourgois recently gave at Penn, he introduced some of the characters of the book with the help of images projected onto a screen behind him. First came Hank — scrawny, shirtless, white — viewed from behind, preparing to plant an American flag in the ground at Edgewater.

Hank showed up at the camp complaining about a stab wound under his arm. He was lying, if that's the right word: It was a scar from surgery to remove an abscess, a deep skin infection caused by unsanitary injection procedures. But lying is a form of hustling, and life at Edgewater is a constant hustle: for money, for drugs, and for sympathy — which gets you the first two.

Like everyone else in Edgewater, Hank was chained to the rhythms of heroin: He had to cadge enough money to buy a dose. Then, as his high diminished, and if he didn't have enough money for a follow-up, horrific withdrawal symptoms, called dopesickness, followed: vomiting and loss of sphincter control, among other physical torments, accompanied by agitated paranoia. One reason these people avoid hospitals is that if they have to wait in an emergency room they lose crucial hustling time, setting themselves up to be dopesick.

Another Edgewater regular was Tina, an African-American and a rare woman at the encampment. Before smoking crack with her partner, Carter, they "gently clink their glass pipes together in a formal toast," Bourgois and Schonberg write. Carter gives Schonberg a hands-on tutorial on how to "hit a lick," raiding supplies stored by a construction crew, to make money.

The most gruesome picture Bourgois displays is of Sonny, who has a great chunk of flesh missing from his upper arm: He looks like a zombie. He had just come back from an abscess operation at San Francisco General Hospital, where, Bourgois says, the staff neither bandaged him nor gave him follow-up pain medication.

"The majority of people got treated in a respectful way," says Daniel H. Ciccarone, an associate professor of clinical family and community medicine at UCSF who taught a course on addiction with Bourgois and sometimes went to Edgewater. "But maybe 15 or 20 people didn't. And the thing about street culture is that it
is very oral, so people became afraid."

In 2001, after Bourgois, Ciccarone, and others complained to the hospital about how it was treating patients with abscesses, surgeons opened a specialty outpatient clinic for the homeless. Now, Ciccarone confirms, the treatment is much more consistently humane.

Despite appearances, a "moral economy" of sharing prevails at Edgewater. Most users can't afford a bag of dope on their own, so they work with a running partner and divvy up their wares. Invariably, as they melt the heroin, soak it into a cotton wad, and pull the results into a syringe, they bicker — a "theatrical display of concern about cheating and generosity," the authors write. The sharing doesn't stop even when heroin prices drop; it is the glue of social life.

Sharing sometimes crossed racial lines, but brutally frank racism was more typical. White addicts spoke of black addicts in the vilest epithets and accused their black peers, absurdly, of being secret welfare kings and queens. Given that these people were peers in misery, the virulence of racism "was the thing that most surprised me," says Schonberg.

More interesting on a medical level, Bourgois and Schonberg detected racial differences in how blacks and whites injected heroin. Whites with long-abused veins tended to "muscle" the drug, injecting it directly into flesh — an open invitation to abscesses. Blacks would look painstakingly for viable veins, even if it took an hour. That made them more susceptible to blood-borne diseases. As an example of how differently doctors and anthropologists view the same data, Bourgois mentions a doctor who heard him describe that difference, and then mused aloud about searching for "the gene" underpinning it.

During his Penn talk, Bourgois — slim, a boyish 52, dressed in a dark sports jacket and pants and a tieless white shirt — was visibly energized. If the enthusiasm weren't so clearly intellectual, it might seem inappropriate, given the topic. Again, he spoke to two audiences: He would read a few paragraphs about Marx's idea of the "lumpen," a class left behind by modernization, and invoke Foucault to argue that the public-health system is often wielded by the state to control deviants.

But then he would shift gears and tell the future doctors in the room to ignore his "theoretical babble." Given their skills, he said, "you can do amazing things" to ease the suffering of these people.

His project does raise provocative ethical issues, of the sort that interest institutional review boards charged with protecting human subjects. For example, can a person high on heroin offer informed consent to be part of a research project? "They operate their lives on the drug," responds Bourgois. "They refer to getting high as 'getting well.'" Except during abnormal binges, it's when they lack heroin and are dopesick that they would be uniquely vulnerable.

It was the photos that caught the attention of one young anthropologist in the Penn crowd. It made no sense, he said during a question-and-answer period, to give the subjects pseudonyms but publish pictures of their faces. In response, Bourgois related what one addict had told him: "If you can't see the face," she said, "you can't see the misery."

Bourgois's main ethical concern was to avoid drawing police attention to the people he was studying. But the police displayed little interest in his activities. His subjects, however, did file in and out of jail, picked up on low-level charges and then spat out of the system so as not to clog it up. City and state work crews, too, regularly cleared the campsite, destroying everyone's possessions (including things like clean syringes).

UCSF's institutional review board did, of course, approve the project, and Penn's board has approved his trips into North Philadelphia, although the arrangements can be vexing. Consent forms, for example, unnerve dealers, making them think Bourgois is up to something more nefarious than just hanging around and asking
Robert Borofsky, a professor of anthropology at Hawaii Pacific University who oversees the California Series in Public Anthropology, which includes *Righteous Dopefiend*, offers a sweeping defense of the ethics of the project. "Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg are doing a wonderful job of giving life and voice to these homeless drug addicts," he says. "It brings them more fully into the human community and lets us understand more fully their understanding of the world." Such an agenda, he suggests, transcends picayune questions about pseudonyms and photographic angles.

Bourgois and Schonberg were not purely objective observers. They drove subjects to clinics and tried to get them into subsidized housing. They doled out small amounts of cash sometimes, and rebuffed other requests. The ethics were fluid and "human," Bourgois says: "The stakes are very much life-and-death. And at the same time, we are like fleas in terms of our ability to influence the outcomes. The thing was, we don't even know how to help them. That was part of the whole project: to find out their own logic for what their priorities were."

Intense fieldwork of the sort he engages in has costs. "It destroyed my relationship with my ex-wife," he says at one point, before backtracking. ("Who knows?")

His current partner, Laurie Hart, a professor of anthropology at Haverford College, confirms that his work "is a 24-hours-a-day proposition."

"It's a good thing I'm interested in this stuff," she says, "because we spend a lot of time talking about it, and working on it."

His son, Emiliano Bourgeois-Chacón, shows signs of interest, too. A junior at Harvard, he's taken a year off to work with an anthropologist at San Francisco State University, interviewing teenagers about behavior that may put them at risk for AIDS. He was a toddler when his father moved to East Harlem in the 1980s. (In *In Search of Respect*, Bourgeois recounts how Emiliano, who has cerebral palsy and used a walker as a child, charmed even the toughest street types.) Later he joined his father on trips to Edgewater, until a bodega that the homeless frequented removed the arcade games he liked to play. Emiliano says he never felt in danger, because the homeless "still lived by certain codes."

"One is to treat young kids well, to baby them."

Philippe Bourgois has reached an age when he'd be forgiven if he curtailed his fieldwork a little bit, especially the dicier stuff. "Maybe I lack that common sense, to tell you the truth," he says. "I was thinking of that when I was walking around North Philly. It's terrifying when you don't know the neighborhood, and you're wandering around on the street trying to find people willing to talk to you." But two things keep him going: first, the urgency of coming to grips with the intertwined issues of inequality, the war on drugs, and what he calls inner-city apartheid. And second, a confidence that counterbalances fear ("I can do this").

"It's always surprising to me, but when one treats with respect people who have been treated as pariahs, they become real human beings," he says. "You can become friends with them. That's part of what the magic of ethnography is: to bring out the humanness of the quote-unquote Other. And that's what *Righteous Dopefiend* was about: rendering human the absolutely inhuman person."

One challenge of the project was recognizing that, whatever reforms may emerge from his work, they won't come soon enough to save some of his subjects. Several characters in the book, including Carter, are dead by its end. Tina, on the other hand, seems to have cleaned herself up. Another subject, Petey, who nearly died from a cirrhotic liver, now has a job at the Department of Veterans Affairs. He bought Bourgois lunch last time they saw each other. "He pulled out his new credit card. It was quite moving."
On the policy front, some of Bourgois's proposals are fairly mainstream: more mobile health, psychology, and methadone clinics; better case management for frequent emergency-room visitors (or separate clinics for them); expanded access to single-room-occupancy hotels with in-house medical staffs. (Without such staffs, SRO hotels can be deadly, because unlike at Edgewater, there's no one to revive you if you OD.)

Other proposals are more forward-looking. Bourgois has come to believe that the culture of shared needles and drug paraphernalia is so ingrained among addicts that you have to assume people will share when they are desperate. "I think the most important piece of information to get out is to rinse needles thoroughly," he says — even if that means just with water. On the West Coast, he has written in a paper with Ciccarone, people tend to rinse thoroughly out of necessity, because the black-tar heroin that is common there clogs syringes.

For the hard-core cases who have tried methadone as a substitute for heroin and failed, he wants the United States to allow prescription heroin, an approach the Swiss have adopted and Canada is experimenting with. That's in part an admission of defeat, but it would release addicts from the socially destructive gerbil-wheel of hustling, thieving, and brutal withdrawal.

Even Ciccarone, though, considers that a step too far in today's political climate. He puts two other things ahead of prescription heroin on his own policy wish list: easier access to methadone and a quicker rollout of Buprenorphine, a drug similar to methadone but somewhat less addictive and more convenient. "We have two good tools — let's get more money for those," Ciccarone says. A step further, but still less politically toxic than heroin scripts, are supervised injection sites, where users can shoot up their own drugs but also be counseled about health matters.

(Bourgois says that he endorses all of those measures, but that they won't reach everyone: "Addicts will travel anywhere for heroin. They won't travel for a safe injection.")

And the recommendation about rinsing needles with water strikes Kim Page, the UCSF epidemiology professor, as dubious. "Over the years we have seen very low and stable rates of HIV that we associate with prevention messages," she says — messages that have included the advice not to share paraphernalia. She would hate to see that message weakened.

In the dark landscape he surveys, Bourgois sees signs of hope. Hip-hop culture, for example, disdains injection-drug use as well as crack, even as it glorifies dealing. Perhaps as a result, the heroin-abusing population is aging (and disproportionately white). Doctors, too, are less likely these days to dismiss addicts as drug-seeking ER frequent flyers and are more willing to look for ways to manage their illnesses, even if the addicts have no interest in Narcotics Anonymous.

Bourgois's current project is to explore the differences in the "risk environments" of Philadelphia and San Francisco. Sounding a bit out of character, he says he wants to be sure his earlier findings hold true in "real America": a deindustrialized, East Coast city. One difference so far: More than San Francisco, Philadelphia appears to have a growing population of youngish, downwardly mobile blue-collar heroin users.

More important, he wants to move his righteous dopefiends permanently out of the shadows. People like Hank, Tina, and Carter, he writes in the conclusion of his new book, may strike readers as marginal characters. But they are "as all-American as the California dream."

Christopher Shea last wrote for The Chronicle Review about genetic sociology.
On the streets

For his book "Righteous Dopefiend," Philippe Bourgois took to the streets of San Francisco, hanging out with homeless heroin and crack users, and even sleeping outside in homeless encampments to gain a true sense of what life is like for the addicts. In return, the addicts let down their guard, and shared their stories of survival and addiction, of violence and hope. Read more ...

Study reveals African genetic diversity

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A Powelton oasis

The 7th Chinese Internet Research Conference takes place from May 27 to 29 at the Annenberg School for Communication.
On the streets

By Heather A. Davis

In order to get at the heart of taboo subjects—drugs, homelessness, HIV risk and crime—Philippe Bourgois does more than simply study them from afar.

For his 1995 book on street-level crack dealers in East Harlem, “In Search of Respect,” he moved into a house in the thick of that community’s drug trade, befriending sellers and managers to understand what he calls the “extraordinarily appealing and dynamic economy that’s an economy of destruction through dealing.”

For his newest book, “Righteous Dopefiend,” Bourgois took to the streets again, this time to look at the clients of the dealers at the heart of “Respect.”

With funding from a National Institutes of Health pilot grant, Bourgois hung out with homeless heroin and crack users a mere six blocks away from his San Francisco home, even sleeping outside in homeless encampments to gain a true sense of what life is like for the addicts. In return, the addicts let down their guard, and shared their stories of survival and addiction, of violence and hope.

Bourgois, the Richard Perry University Professor of Anthropology and Family and Community Medicine, and a Penn Integrates Knowledge Professor, says this participant observation fieldwork gave him
valuable insights into a largely ignored segment of the population.

“I realized we don’t know who these people are, we don’t know how they survive and some of us are giving dollars and quarters and all of us are wondering should we or should we not. We project whatever biases we have about the goodness or badness or neediness of people,” says Bourgois. “I really wanted to figure out who these people are and take them seriously as human beings, and learn how they live. That’s what participant observation field work in anthropology allows you to do—you suspend your moral judgment and you dive into the universe of the people you want to study to try to see the world through their eyes and walk in their shoes as much as you can.”

The resulting book is interspersed with first-hand accounts from addicts in the streets, field notes from Bourgois and beautifully brutal black and white images by photographer Jeffrey Schonberg. It also offers solutions to the multilayered problems of homelessness, disease and addiction.

“Nothing is a complete magic bullet, because these are really deep historic problems of the human condition, of social inequality, of historical transformations, of how historical transformations affect the socially vulnerable,” says Bourgois. “But you can certainly, often quite easily, lower the sort of brutal levels of suffering that we have in the United States that are just extreme by any country’s measure.”

**Q. How did you approach the homeless population you wanted to study? Did you tell them who you were?**

**A.** I went up to them with a student of mine who was a needle exchange volunteer and had initiated a relationship with them. I asked him if I could come along with him on one of the days that he went along there. He introduced me as this professor who was interested in where they live. I told them about the book I had just finished on crack dealers ["In Search of Respect"] and wanted to start a new project and they were absolutely, totally, into it from day one.

One goes in completely nervous. At first, you’re just not prepared for the smells, for how dirty it is, for the mud, for the sort of desperation of the scene and you go, ‘I’m not going to be able to survive this, maybe I’ll turn around and run away.’ You’re also embarrassed, bizarrely, because the same forces that make the urban destitute into pariahs sort of start reflecting on you. You’re standing there on the corner, you’re walking through this thicket of bushes that anyone who’s from the neighborhood knows is where the drugs addicts go. All of a sudden, you’re another one of the drug addicts going into where the drug addicts shoot up.

During the intense years, when I’d be hanging out on the corner, people in the neighborhood just took for granted that I was either a drug addict or someone about to fall into drug addiction. I remember being embarrassed in front of my son’s friends, because my son at this time was about seven years old when I started the project, and so all of his friends lived in the neighborhood and would say, ‘I saw your father hanging out on the corner where all the drug addicts are.’ I was worried about my son’s friends’ parents, because they were seeing me. You see how those forces of opprobrium affect you and as soon as you let go of all that, you’re there, you’re in the scene. As soon as you treat people with dignity and respect and interest, I’ve always found they reflect that back on you unless of course, they’re just completely crazy. The scene that I was in was actually very friendly. They actually represent the plurality of the homeless today in the United States. ... These are the people we see who are basically disheveled, with ripped clothes, flying a sign asking for spare change.

**Q. Did it surprise you how close the homeless community was to where you lived?**

**A.** You know what was more mind-boggling is I literally had to walk maybe six meters through this little thicket. You can hear all these people, I mean, literally, hundreds of people at rush hour, walking to the bus stop, and you’re in this separate universe, and the two don’t touch. You can spend several hours in this separate universe listening to people go by and they don’t look through the bushes and notice these people. You almost feel falsely protected in this cocoon.
People don’t want to see it, either, and the point of my book is to make it visible. That’s why we’re showing such challenging pictures, because we realize that there’s a dangerous politics of representation to showing pictures of addiction and vulnerable people, but I think what’s more dangerous is not seeing them and their suffering and just treating it as normal that we have so many tens of thousands of people, if not hundreds of thousands of people, as indigents with no long-term survivable shelter.

Q. What was it like to sleep outside in the encampment?
A. The first time it happened without me realizing that it happened. Basically, I had been staying out longer and longer and all of a sudden I found myself at 3 o’clock in the morning and I hadn’t gone home and I was sort of comfortable and it was a warm night and then I realized, ‘Oh I slept out here.’ The first time I actually did, I did it with one of my collaborators. We brought down sleeping bags and we made a date with them in advance to make sure it was okay.

You feel nervous and they feel nervous about the potential for violence and that’s why they sleep together in groups. In the smallest encampment, there were three other people; they’re not sleeping side by side, but they’re sleeping within a couple meters of each other. You get a feeling of safety in numbers. This scene that I was in was not violent like the young crack scenes that I studied in East Harlem. These guys don’t have a lot of money because they’re indigent, and most crime is about struggling for money or control of territory. They’re not fighting with people to control territory. They’re too old for that. There was a lot of that violence going on 20 meters away among the crack dealers, but we weren’t studying the crack dealers. The crack dealers would call us ‘stanky dopefiends’ and when we tried to reach out to them, they said, ‘Get away from me, dopefiend,’ because we were associated with the addicts. It’s sort of a realization I was low on the totem pole in the street hierarchy.

Q. Were people open with you and willing to talk? Did their trust come easily?
A. Yeah, I mean, the relationships change over time and they change over how long you stay in your visits. So we did learn different kinds of things. When one stayed over 24 hours and went through a cycle of a night, you just see things that unfold in their natural environment in a much more natural way. Once they trust you and see that you’re serious, they want to tell you the truth. They get more intimate. You’re not manipulating people in a negative way, you’re getting close to them. Then they’re getting excited about the project and deciding that they are important and that their stories should be told.

Q. Did you find any common threads in people’s stories?
A. Everyone’s different, obviously, on an individual [level], but what is terrifying is seeing—and this is in a sense what the book is about—how structural forces beyond our control, historical forces, shifts in the economy, shifts in the political organization of public policy, come crashing down on vulnerable sectors of the population and basically shove them around in very unpleasant ways. These are the people who weren’t able to recover from the downsizing of the industrial sector in the United States. A bunch of other types of industries arose in place of that, but those people who aren’t able to make that adjustment, those people who don’t have the education to shift from being a factory worker to being an information technology processor, are people who fall into indigent poverty. The guys that we studied—their parents were the people who lost their jobs working on the docks of San Francisco, working in the steel mills, working in the warehouses that were serving the active factory sector of San Francisco as a port industrial city.

These are forces that are much larger than the will of any individual or the moral ability of any individual to act in a way that’s going to make them a productive member of society. The book is trying to show those dynamics and when you dig deeper you then see these other patterns, that whites are affected by this very differently than African Americans.

Q. What about men and women?
Completely different experiences. A life is much, much harder for women on the streets. It’s much more violent and there’s the ever-present danger of rape. There are not that many women on the street. In the generation that we were dealing with, which was people around 40 years of age, which is the plurality of people who are visibly homeless on the street, no one has real good figures on this, but I would say, about 15, 20 percent are women.

I don’t want everything to be negative. You also see tremendous amounts of solidarity and love and that’s the magic of human beings. The homeless, we discovered very fast, cannot survive on their own. They’re not operating solo. They’re nervous and distrusting of other people, but they’re operating in communities where they have mutual obligations towards each other and they’re specifically developing alliances and it’s very hard for outsiders to understand it.

You see tremendous acts of solidarity, where this homeless person who has nothing, who’s literally got a blanket that he or she is sleeping in and the next supply of heroin that he or she is going to inject and the clothes on their back, will share half of that heroin and part of that blanket with another homeless person. Then, at the same time, in the same act of sharing, the same person will steal something from the other person when they’re not looking. You see this tightrope of solidarity and betrayal going on that’s very hard to understand as an outsider and we had to delve very hard into figuring that out.

Q. Did you find it difficult as an empathetic person not to intervene in these people’s lives?
A. Oh, absolutely. We completely engaged in ways of helping whenever we could. We were worried about creating a false sense of relationships by being patrons. We wanted to avoid just being sort of sugar daddies.

What was incredible about that was that it turned out that there was so much less that we could do for them than we thought we could. We would work really hard to get them into services, to get them into treatment, to get them into emergency housing, even simple things like when they would get an old car—because they would often live in old, abandoned cars—to offer to pay for the smog test on their car so that their car wouldn’t get towed when their registration was overdue. We would then take field work notes on how complicated that was and why it often, usually, most of the time, didn’t work out. Part of our project was an ethical imperative to help—[we would] drive them to the emergency room, accompany them into the emergency room to try to advocate for them when they were being thrown out, and then getting thrown out with them, and seeing how bureaucratically hostile that process is. That becomes part of the subject of the book.

Q. What are some solutions?
A. We end the book specifically with solutions because we don’t want to be just another academic book that throws stones at an impossible set of problems. We list a dozen of them—very concrete ones that we saw in place—and discuss in the conclusion the kinds of programs that have worked around the world.

One of the programs is [something] that Philadelphia has, which is a housing-first program, where you tolerate certain levels of non-disruptive substance abuse in order not to have people living under the bushes and becoming more disruptive and more destructive.

Q. Do you have plans to go back and show the subjects your book?
A. Tragically, over half have passed away during the study and in the two years since the end of the actual field work. There are only two who have actual telephones that function, but we’re eager to go back and see who’s on those corners still, and who’s still alive.

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