“Lambs to the Slaughter Here”: Juvenile Criminality and Teenage Inner-City Experience in *The Wire*  
Master’s Diploma Thesis  

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2018
I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently, using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

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# Table of Contents

1 Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 1  
  1.1 At the Turn of the Millennium .................................................................................. 3  
  1.2 Bodymore, Murderland ............................................................................................. 6  
  1.3 The Boys of Summer ................................................................................................. 9  

2 An Enemy of My Enemy ................................................................................................. 13  
  2.1 Accidental Guerrillas ............................................................................................... 13  
  2.2 Community First ..................................................................................................... 16  
  2.3 Hearts and Minds ................................................................................................... 19  
  2.4 Education of the Streets .......................................................................................... 21  
  2.5 Inner-City Tyrannis ................................................................................................. 25  

3 Fighting on a Lie ............................................................................................................. 26  
  3.1 No Young’un Left Behind ........................................................................................ 27  
  3.2 Disconnected From Reality .................................................................................... 29  
  3.3 Lessons in Probability ............................................................................................ 31  
  3.4 Heart of Gold .......................................................................................................... 35  
  3.5 Child-Processing Unit ............................................................................................. 39  

4 Learning for the Wrong World ....................................................................................... 40  
  4.1 Live Short but Prosper ............................................................................................. 40  
  4.2 Rules of the Game ................................................................................................... 42  
  4.3 Father’s Footsteps .................................................................................................... 47
1 Introduction

The world is changing at an unprecedented pace. Journeys previously measured in weeks or even months can nowadays be covered in a matter of hours. Sharing of information, thanks to the Internet and advancements in telecommunications technology, became practically instantaneous. A call to the other side of the world can be made within seconds, demanding only a few buttons to be pushed. Through globalization, ushered in on the wings of technologies spawned by the sciences sprawling and scrambling in all directions, our lives can change with scary swiftness from moment to moment. There is no going back now. The world has entered a new post-modern era – the Information age.

This transition, however, is not a smooth one. Technologies are not spread evenly across the globe. Inflexible nation-state legislations are struggling to keep up with the information and communication technologies, which are leaps and bounds ahead. Today’s newest computer chip is going to be obsolete tomorrow. International corporations chase efficiency and profit, in the true spirit of capitalism, with disregard for the human workforce and someone is bound to be left behind.

Jobs are no longer secure as layoffs and outsourceings empty out production plants in the Western world and words like “post-merger downsizing” and “buyout” haunt the break rooms and cafeterias of corporate offices, the manufactories of the Information age. Every day somewhere wakes up to the stark reality of the fact that their services are no longer needed or adequately appreciated. With the demands of the labor market changing at every whim of the global economy, it is increasingly more important for workers to adapt and reorient their skill sets. However, not everyone has the ability or the opportunity to do so.
Those people, in the case of this thesis marginalized African-Americans inhabiting the inner-city ghettos, rarely get a voice. They are the unfortunate consequence of the societal change. In the first decade of the 21st century however, their plight has been heard and, most importantly, seen after all.

David Simon’s TV show *The Wire* aired on the HBO television network from 2002 to 2008. While not widely popular with the general audience at the time, it has been met with great critical acclaim and lauded for its gritty realism and harsh honesty, in which it deviated from the standard formula of a police procedural. Unlike other “cops and robbers” shows, *The Wire* disregards the traditional scheme of good vs. evil – there are amoral cops, corrupt institutions, and criminals, surprisingly, are just people too.

The show, however, is not just about cops and drug dealers duking it out in the streets of a postindustrial city. It is about the society at large, the faceless institutions and the broken people ground to bits by the gears of the new era. It is about the city, any city, and its inhabitants struggling to find their place in this strange and unforgiving world.

Through the lens of the show, this thesis seeks to identify and analyze the reasons for young men in these neighborhoods to join the criminal economy and risk their lives on the streets. Supported by the critical literature about the show, work of modern sociologists and tactical analysis of insurgent movements, this thesis will follow the fourth season of *The Wire*, which takes place at an inner-city middle school. Using the storylines of the four child protagonists of the season the aim is to link their individual stories to specific issues and discuss their importance in the context of the societal changes driven by the shifts in the global economy.
After a short introduction to the critical background, the show history and the setting of the fourth season, the thesis is divided into four chapters, of which each covers a single character, their story and the circumstances of their life. Every main chapter is further compartmentalized into five sub-chapters, each dealing with a specific issue or aspect of the respective character’s situation.

The first chapter, “An Enemy of My Enemy”, focuses on the crime lords as self-appointed rulers in their communities and how they can gain cooperation of the non-criminal actors, being aware of the importance of the local support. “Fighting on a Lie” is the name of the second chapter, which tackles the stat obsession of the institutions and their disregard for the individuals. It addresses the failed No Child Left Behind incentive and the distortion of reality through “cooked” statistics. The third chapter named “Learning for the Wrong World” deals with the societal expectations of the minorities and what the young African-Americans expect of themselves, and how these expectation mold their view of the world. Lastly, the fourth chapter of the thesis addresses the disappearance of the entry-level job opportunities for the inhabitants of the inner-cities and as such is named “Death of Labor.”

Every chapter will also feature some visual materials to better illustrate the journey of the character discussed in that chapter. They are all screen-captures of specific moments in the show, made for the purposes of education and critical commentary.

1.1 At the Turn of the Millennium

Manuel Castells, a Spanish sociologist specialized in the communication and globalization, provides quite possibly the most comprehensive and extensive collection of handbooks, or rather a three-volume book, for understanding the brave new world of
the information technology. Aptly named *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, a collection of three books *The Rise of Network Society, The Power of Identity* and *End of Millennium* offer hundreds of pages of studies, references, arguments, conclusions and even prognoses about the world at the turn of the millennium.

According to Castells’ arguments, our society is transforming into a format he calls “network society” – a society linked together by computer networks, the Internet and other modern telecommunication technologies. In this network society flows of various kinds from information to money and goods are paramount for keeping the metaphorical wheels of our world turning.

We have established a new system of exchange “created from telecommunications, computers, and fast reliable transportation systems, as well as dispatching centers, nodes and hubs” (Castells 1999, 294). In such a society, one consisting of intricate webs of communication and transportation, the information and fast exchange of thereof is unavoidably the most vital part of the entire system. Instant communication and information exchange are thus a prerequisite for exchange of other commodities including money, goods, labor and even narcotics.

Dubbed by Castells “the space of flows”, this system, fueled by the constant and intentional flows of data, commodities and people, is aspect solely of the Information Age (1999, 295), because of our ability to support such a system technologically. The first layer of this space is reliant on advanced computer technology, micro-electronics and telecommunications, in the process creating a socio-economic space not unlike the cities of the industrial era (2000a, 442).

This network of communications and computer systems is further organized into hubs and nodes, serving as points of coordination and connection (2000a, 443). Indeed, the word “network” is important as it describes the most defining aspect of our
society – the network society. The places are repurposed and integrated in the new system of social exchange (443), many of them leaving husks of their post-industrial legacy behind.

Logically, the space of flows was not always the dominant spatial configuration of our society. “Cultural identity is often built on the basis of sharing historical experience in a given territory,” argues Castells (1999, 296). Territoriality is hard-wired into many living beings in this world, humans included. We shape our identity based on the everyday experience stemming from places. Hence the concept complementing “the space of flows” is called “the space of places”.

Castells defines place as “a locale whose form, function, and meaning are self-contained within the boundaries of physical contiguity” (2000a, 453). These places, the “real” objects and locales defined by physical attributes, have been part of human experience ever since the dawn of civilization.

The state of physical contiguity implies stativity, while on the other hand the virtual contiguity of flows represents dynamism. As already stated, the space of flows could not reliably work without the technological support of places, but it does not mean that the co-existence of these two principles must be a harmonious one. One cannot replace the other entirely without the whole network of our society falling apart.

As Castells writes: “people do still live in places” (2000a, 458). However, these places, and relationships between them, are now effectively dominated by the more important processes inhabiting the space of flows. This spatial duality leads to what Castells calls “spatial schizophrenia” – the result of detaching power and knowledge from their base in everyday realities of places (2000a, 458). This abstraction is then responsible for creating cracks in our society filled with those, who are unable to cross them.
1.2 Bodymore, Murderland

Not the most flattering nickname a city could be given, but a deserved one nonetheless. Baltimore earned this moniker (any many others like Bulletmore) as one of the most dangerous cities in the United States because of the homicide rates and the prevalence of gun violence, most of which is directly tied to the drug trade and other gang activities.

To illustrate how bad the situation really is, The Baltimore Sun, city’s prominent newspaper, hosts a web-based application with continually updated map showing all registered homicides in the city going all the way back to the year 2007. And the situation is not getting better, quite the opposite in fact – homicide rates shot up from 234 in 2008, when the last season of The Wire aired, to a record of 342 in 2017 (“Baltimore Homicides”) with the clearance rate for these homicides being infamously low (Simon np). At the time of writing, there have been 261 homicides reported in Baltimore in 2018 do far (“Baltimore Homicides”).

Just a quick skim through the list of victims reveals two important details. Most homicides have been a result of a shooting and the victims are predominantly African-Americans. That information in and of itself does not necessarily have to imply anything, especially since Baltimore is officially a majority-black city, but when multiple fatalities are reported at the same time from the same address, there is only one logical explanation – gang violence.

While the theme of street violence, criminal activities and the police investigation thereof, are important aspects of The Wire, they are not the sole focus of the show. David Simon’s third foray into the dark and dangerous streets of Baltimore does not present its viewership with just a police investigation. There are no distinctly good guys and bad guys, only “confused and corrupted combination[s] of personal
motivations, most of them selfish” (Simon np). It offers an insight into the life on the streets of a drug ridden neighborhood in a city devastated by the post-industrial transformation.

It all started in 1991 with Simon’s book *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets*, which later spawned a seven-season police procedural at the hands of NBC. The book documents Simon’s year-long stay with the Homicide Unit of the Baltimore Police Department in 1985, while he was researching a drug trafficker investigated and brought down by Ed Burns (who would later become Simon’s co-author) and his partner. It was a story about the criminality of Baltimore told from the perspective of the police officers and judicial workers.

Then there was *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood*, the first brain-child of Simon’s and Burns’ collaboration. Together they mapped city’s drug market and told the story from the other side of the divide – a family living in one of Baltimore’s drug markets (Simon np). This book, offering a drastically different point of view to that of *Homicide*, also got treated to its own TV series, this time by none other than HBO. Unlike *Homicide*, however, *The Corner* ran only as a six-episode miniseries, mainly because the producers were not really convinced it would make for a good long-running procedural (Simon np).

If *Homicide* is a thesis and *The Corner* its antithesis, then *The Wire* is the synthesis of the two perspectives. Its sprawling story, told in the span of 60 episodes from 2002 to 2008, captures multitude of characters. The narrative is not exactly linear, and the individual episodes do not follow the typical one-shot pattern of other television procedurals. Simon called it “a visual novel” or “the novel for television” (Simon np). Some episodes may share common themes and links, but the smallest coherent unit is indeed a season (the book volume), of which the show has five.
After some initial reluctance on the side of the HBO executives, the show came live in 2002 (Simon np). Reviewers received not just one episode, but five, in hopes that they would better see where the show was going and what was the creative vision. It did not help, and show’s ratings were originally very low. Later in the season, however, the situation has changed for the better and the show earned its recognition with some critics redacting their reviews (Simon np).

There is no “main hero” and there is also no “main villain”. The show follows many different characters on their path through life and they offer their own perspectives on the issues presented, sometimes even contradicting each other. The Wire goes beyond the distinctions of good and evil and subverts the traditional format of police procedurals where the police represent the heroic forces of good fighting the evil bad guys, who are usually left with no character depth or development. The Wire does not offer any moral commentary. David Simon’s goal was to “humanize the underclass. To show that people don’t just die in West Baltimore, lower Park Heights, or Belair-Edison, that they often navigate extraordinary circumstances in order to live” (Alvarez np).

Simon likened the show’s perspective to that of “the proverbial fly on the wall” (Simon np). Some of the, traditionally shown as heroic, cops are drunkards, adulterers, or downright incompetent, while on the other hand the criminals are given humanizing moments, which make them something more than just vague cardboard cut-outs intended to be shot at. By setting the criminals against the backdrop of their circumstances, the viewers can get much better idea what made those characters who they are, and, in some rare cases, even sympathize with them.

That is, however, only a side effect of what David Simon and The Wire crew wanted to achieve. In Simon’s words, they “were very much trying to pick a fight”
This challenge was meant for the “horseshit police procedurals afflicting American television” perpetuating the false myth of utopianism (Simon qtd. in Alvarez np). This challenge was meant for the institutions, “the Olympian forces” as Simon calls them (qtd. in Alvarez np), and their complete disregard for individual human beings. This challenge was meant for the forces of global capital, responsible for the slow death of labor and misplacement of values (Simon np). Thanks to these notions, which in a sense outstep the boundaries of the city of Baltimore, the show gains a universalist property, as the problems it presents and comments on are not unique to Baltimore.

1.3 The Boys of Summer

In many ways, the third season of The Wire seemed like an end. Major Colvin’s (Robert Wisdom) attempt at reducing the crime rates by designating drug trade free zones, one of them dubbed Hamsterdam by the Baltimorean dealers, got discovered and was ended swiftly and mercilessly just like Colvin’s career. The past dealings caught up to the criminal entrepreneur Russel “Stringer” Bell (Idris Elba) and his dream of becoming a legitimate businessman was ended abruptly by joint forces of the people he had crossed in the past. Finally, Avon Barksdale (Wood Harris) and most of his street soldiers were arrested and the Barksdale organization crumbled into dust.

But The Wire was not done. There was more to tell, more fights to pick. The fourth season came two years later and there was a noticeable disconnect. The ending of the third season was just a precaution, as Simon said: “we wrote a closure in case we weren’t renewed” (Simon in Alvarez 304). But they were, and the tape started rolling once more.

With the Barksdales gone, a new player will inevitably have step up to fill the ensuing power vacuum in the fourth season. As Marlo Stanfield (Jamie Hector) rises to
the prominence of “the Game” on the streets of Baltimore, he strives for the recognition he deserves, and unlike some more diplomatically inclined players such as Stringer Bell or Proposition Joe Stewart (Robert F. Chew), Marlo will not shy away from violence. He will need soldiers to take the crown and, luckily for him, life comes cheap on the streets of the inner-city Baltimore and there is no shortage of young men looking for work.

“Where do little soldiers come from?” That is one of the questions the fourth season of The Wire was asking. After a two-year hiatus, David Simon was rocking the proverbial boat again and this time he focused on the education system, or rather its inefficiency. “Not a goddamn thing up in here works like it should,” says school’s secretary in the opening episode of the season as she is on her way to manually open a door with a malfunctioning buzz-in lock system (4.01). An insightful commentary not just about the broken lock or the state of the Edward Tilghman Middle school. Not even about the educational system. Other systems are malfunctioning, failing at their very purpose.

Baltimorean school system became, as Tom Waldron points out, “home to lower-income, African-American students” (Waldron np). Public schools housed children from families, which experienced violence, crime, drugs and physical abuse. As Waldron grimly puts it: “For some of these kids, school is not the No. 1 priority. Survival is the No. 1 priority” (Waldron np). The fourth season focuses on these children and their day-to-day life in the inner-city Baltimore.

Manuel Castells calls these inner-city ghettos “the worst expression of inequality, discrimination, human misery, and social crisis precisely at the time of the rise of informationalism in America” (2000b, 141). He concludes that the poverty rate had been steadily rising across the spectrum from the 1970s to 1990s, and it has become
increasingly more difficult for more people to maintain a living standard above the poverty line (139) and to sustain healthy relationships and complete families (145). In 1993, 57 percent of black children in America were living with a single parent, many of them born out of wedlock (145).

There are only a few instances where the show focuses on the children and their living situation, outside of the prolonged exposition in the fourth season. In the first season, Wallace (Michael B. Jordan), one of the boys running the Barksdale operation in the low-rise housing project under D’Angelo Barksdale (Larry Gilliard Jr.), can be seen caring for a number of children living in a dilapidated squatter house.

He wakes them up in the mornings, packs their lunch, helps them with homework and makes sure they go to school, all the while stressing the importance of school for the children in order not to end up in foster care (1.06). These children are shown to have no parents (orphans whose parents likely died in shootings or by overdosing), and Wallace’s care is the only thing resembling parenthood they know.

Third season offers the sight of the worst example of the background the inner-city kids can grow up in – Colvin’s Hamsterdam project, the free trade zone for drugs. The den of open drug abuse, prostitution, and criminality is the embodiment of what Castells calls “the earthly hell […] build to punish the dangerous classes of the undeserving poor” (148). First witnessed by Reginald “Bubbles” Cousins (Andre Royo) and later by Sgt. Ellis Carver (Seth Gilliam), corner kids, formerly employed by the drug dealers as runners and look-outs, hang around the Hamsterdam aimlessly, cut loose by their employers, who no longer have need of them in the free zone (3.07). That spurs Sgt. Carver into action and he taxes the dealers to pay for the kids and attempts to keep the children away from the street by organizing basketball matches.
The fourth season brings together children from many different backgrounds, some more difficult than others, but none particularly pleasant. It revolves around a group of four fresh eight-graders as they navigate the difficult landscape of their social situation and try to find their place in the society (left to right in the picture below):
Duquan Weems (Jermaine Crawford), Randy Wagstaff (Maestro Harrell), Michael Lee (Tristan Wilds) and Namond Brice (Julito McCullum).

Duquan’s parents never appear in the show, but they are said to be drug addicts who always end up selling Duquan’s clothes to have more money for drugs. Eventually, they get evicted and Duquan moves in with Mike. Randy Wagstaff, son of Proposition Joe’s nephew Melvin “Cheese” Wagstaff (Method Man), lives with his foster mother Miss Anna (Denise Hart) and is the only one with disciplined and stable living situation, which is ultimately not meant to last. Mike Lee and his younger brother Bug (Keenon Brice) live with a single drug-addicted mother (with Mike’s abusive step-father coming back from prison later in the season). Namond Brice, a son of the Barksdale enforcer Roland “Wee-Bey” Brice (Hassan Johnson), also lives with a single mother, but this time the mother is addicted to the comfortable lifestyle the drug money can buy and is obsessed with the legacy of Namond’s father.
As the new teacher at Tilghman Middle, ex-cop Roland Pryzbylewski (Jim True-Frost) is assigned a class. Coincidentally, it is the class the four boys of summer – Mike, Namond, Randy and Duquan – are going to be attending that year. Their home class is in chaos with overturned tables and papers strewn all over the room and drawings on the blackboard. Prez looks around the room almost joyfully and asks: “So this is me?” (4.01). At this point in the story, he has already been established as an adept problem solver, who finds joy in both discovering and creating patterns. He welcomes the challenge and can be seen hard at work cleaning the classroom in the next episode, not knowing that deciphering his classroom will prove to be the toughest brain teaser yet.

2 An Enemy of My Enemy

This chapter will use the storyline of Michael Lee to illustrate how The Wire presents the problems of community policing and the importance of trust within the at-risk society. Individuals, like Michael Lee, might not trust the systems in place to protect them and their loved ones, especially if they have past traumatic experiences. This in turn makes them reliant on drug lords for protection, who, while dangerous and exploitative, may prove to be more reliable.

2.1 Accidental Guerrillas

In their essay titled “Insurgency, Accidental Guerrillas and Gang Culture”, Tiffany Potter and Tobias Sirzyk apply the concept of “accidental guerrillas” to the gang culture of The Wire. They discuss how various characters in the show may or may not pledge their allegiance to the authorities or the gangs based on the ability (or inability) of these factions to provide security in the least disruptive way.
Author of the term “accidental guerrillas” is David Kilcullen, an American military advisor, who came up with it in the early 2000’s while accompanying Pakistani soldiers on a patrol as a supervisor to monitor the use of the US monetary aid to the Pakistani government against prominent insurgent groups including Al-Qaeda (Kilcullen 34).

The guerrilla tactics are usually employed against an adversary with a superior production base, logistics network, or manpower. Commonly used by insurgent groups scattered across the globe, their aim is to use the opponent’s superiority against themselves and prolong the conflict, draining the counterinsurgency of funds and popular support for the engagement. Kilcullen compares Al-Qaeda’s investment of “just” hundreds of thousands of dollars into 9/11 attacks to the hundreds of billions the United States spent on their retaliatory War on Terror (26), with, arguably, not much to show for it.

Kilcullen describes the process of the creation of the accidental guerrillas as follows: the insurgent groups usually establish bases in remote or poorly governed areas. Then they use the weak presence of any opposition to strengthen their hold via coercion, strategic alliances and intermarriage. When the counterinsurgency steps in, the intervention (often a violent one) is perceived negatively among the locals, who then side with the insurgents and rally against what they believe to be a common enemy (35). This way the locals bolster the ranks of insurgent fighters and may even become committed members of the insurgency.

Accidental guerrillas are then individuals, usually culturally or religiously close to the insurgents, who get involved in the conflict with the counterinsurgency alongside the committed insurgent fighters, and any successful identification of an accidental guerrilla fighter would be precisely that, an accident (34). They align themselves with
the insurgents not because of shared ideology or monetary incentive, but because they either resent the actions taken by the counterinsurgency, or because they are too afraid to act against the insurgents themselves (36-7). Therefore, the primary motivation for the accidental guerrillas is their personal safety and that of their loved ones.

This phenomenon is in Kilcullen’s book described exclusively as employed by the Al-Qaeda and similar groups promoting militant Islam, but Potter and Sirzyk situate accidental guerrillas in the ghettos of The Wire’s Baltimore. They define the drug wars between the rival gangs as insurgency, as they “involve controlled armed conflict […] and sustained organized illegal activity” on a scale smaller than an open revolution (116). While the Stanfield or Barksdale organizations do not seek to overthrow the government or to push an ideological agenda, they openly defy and break the laws, and often clash with the police – the counterinsurgency force of The Wire.

The transition from one war to the other can be seen in the TV show through the FBI agent Terrance FitzHugh (Doug Olear), who on multiple occasions mentions the priorities of his bureau shifting from drugs to counterterrorism and political corruption. As the last favor to the Major Crimes Unit, he sets up an immediate wiretap on Russell “Stringer” Bell, who is renamed Ahmed in the official paperwork to speed up the process (3.11).

The comparison of the War on Drugs and the War on Terror is not incidental, as both are not wars in the conventional sense, that is: “an organized violence between states, in which the outcome [is] decided through the clash of armed forces on the battlefield” as Kilcullen describes it (2). Instead, the wars on drugs and terror consist of small-scale operations against paramilitary groups all over the world – hybrid wars the likes of which the modern military forces are only getting used to fighting. David Simon is known proponent of the drug legalization and his stand on the war on drugs resonates
strongly throughout the TV series. In his own words: “the American war on drugs has mutated into a brutal suppression of the underclass” (Simon in Alvarez 17).

As Nial Heffernan elaborates in his essay “Mythological Fictions and the Game Paradigm”, a war needs an enemy: “The War on Drugs creates institutional factions, a splintering of society, whereby those pushed by circumstances or pulled by the logic of capitalism into the drugs trade are marked as the ‘other’” (34). According to him, America is using the same strategy that has won the Cold War, to tackle a socio-economic issue (34). Drugs cannot be fought, but those who participate in the criminal economy tied to the drugs trade can. As a result, the police and at-risk communities lack the mutual understanding needed for quality community policing (42), and instead see each other as an enemy.

The show comments on this fact in the first episode during a brief exchange between police officers from the narcotics division. “Girl, you can’t even call this shit a war,” says Sgt. Carver to his colleague Kima Greggs (Sonja Sohn). “Why not?” inquires the third participant in the discussion, Thomas “Herc” Hauk (Domenick Lombardozzi). “Wars end,” replies Carver with a smirk (1.01). He knows they are (and have been) locked in a seemingly never-ending conflict with no clear enemy and the victory nowhere in sight.

2.2 Community First

Kilcullen recognizes that any intervention in an at-risk community should be carried on in a subtle fashion without provoking a violent response from the locals (37). He suggests building and nurturing “trusted networks” to prevent the rejection of the intervention. The counterinsurgency should break the links in the opposing network and
thus stamp out the insurgent influence. People in these communities should be
recognized not as enemies to be killed or captured but as a social resource (259).

Winning over the indifferent non-combatants can be a considerable advantage
in the fight against the insurgents. Kilcullen does not believe the traditional “hearts and
minds” approach can be an effective one on a global scale (13), but on much smaller
scale, a city or a neighborhood for example, ensuring the safety of an endangered
community has a potential to win it over.

Maj. Colvin arrives at the same conclusions as Kilcullen. He realizes that the
problem of drugs and criminal activities tied to their production and distribution have
been, at least in Baltimore, mislabeled and wrongly assessed. He proves that on several
occasions over the course of the show – with his “Paper Bag Compromise” speech, his
talk with Sgt. Carver, the Hamsterdam project, and finally as a field assistant in the
special program at the Tilghman Middle. It is his monologue to Sgt. Carver in the third
season I want to mention, because it shows what David Simon meant when he labeled
the war on drugs as “a brutal suppression of the underclass”:

This drug thing, this ain't police work. No, it ain't. I mean, I can send any
fool with a badge and a gun up on them corners and jack a crew and grab
vials. But policing? I mean, you call something a war and pretty soon
everybody gonna be running around acting like warriors. They gonna be
running around on a damn crusade, storming corners, slapping on cuffs,
racking up body counts. And when you at war, you need a fucking
enemy. And pretty soon, damn near everybody on every corner is your
fucking enemy. And soon the neighborhood that you're supposed to be
policing, that's just occupied territory. (3.10)
Colvin continues to reprimand Carver for not having trusted informants or anyone who is willing to help the police investigations in the community. Carver, already showing some predispositions towards quality community policing throughout the third season, takes Colvin’s criticism to heart and fosters trusted networks in the following seasons.

Carver gets to know the neighborhood and its people, and instead of cuffing and beating everybody “the western district way”, he makes concessions and attempts at reconnection, and is, to some extent, successful. The new Carver can be seen cracking jokes and making small talk to build a rapport with the former Barksdale crew chief Preston “Bodie” Broadus (J. D. Williams) and his crew at a corner as soon as at the beginning of the first episode of the fourth season. “Bust every head, who are you gonna talk to when the shit happens?” explains Carver to his colleague as they leave the scene (4.01). Carver continually shows more and more understanding for the community he is policing during the fourth season – knowing not only where the little troublemakers from Tilghman Middle live, but also where they congregate and hang out.

*The Wire* suggests solutions similar to those offered by Kilcullen. Compassionate community policing is seen as fair and preferable over the aggressive and violent enforcement, dubbed by Carver and Herc “the western district way”, in the earlier seasons. In fact, during the community meeting in the third season, a woman speaks up in support of the police officers taking interest in the lives of the people on their foot beat: “See, we knew the police. See? We had a white police officer. Our house was on his beat. On his foot beat. And he would be sitting out talking to my mother damn near every night” (3.11). The presenting police officer attempts to deflect to a different topic, almost as if this kind of policing is out of the question and not even worth discussing further, but the woman continues and finishes with a compliment to a
new police officer in her neighborhood, who also showed kindness and interest in the community.

From this discussion it should be obvious that approaches to the enforcement of drug-prohibiting policies and battling of the criminality associated with the narcotics production and trade as depicted in *The Wire* can benefit from utilizing strategies similar to those used to combat political insurgencies all over the world. Instead of potential enemy combatants, the members of the at-risk communities (in this case the African-American majority in the inner-city Baltimore) should be seen as swing voters (and not just during the mayoral elections). Not to be vilified but to be won over.

### 2.3 Hearts and Minds

According to Kilcullen, the insurgents can quite easily turn the indifferent populace against the counterinsurgency. Their methods vary, but, as Potter and Sirzyk point out, the spectrum can be narrowed down to violent threats, money bribes, and/or promises of security (118). Street gangs of *The Wire* can be seen using violence and money in equal measure – buying off officials and murdering rivals and loose ends.

The Barksdale organization is already well established and entrenched in their territory by the beginning of the show. They are a powerful gang in control of both the high-rise projects and the hell of low-rises poetically named “the Pit”, where the “dope fiends” scour hungrily to get their little piece of heaven. What the audience sees in this case is the slow decay and eventual death of the Barksdale organization and dissolution of its criminal network.

With the crown free for the taking, Marlo Stanfield steps up and establishes his own criminal empire. With the rise of Marlo there is also a hint at how the Barksdale likely came into power before Stanfield. Following an outline suggested by Kilcullen,
Marlo secures his position in a relatively lawless region with little to no opposition, builds up his forces, bribes or intimidates potential rivals in the neighborhood, and successfully escapes many attempts at apprehension. Marlo and his people show admirable discipline and determination when they elude the police investigators, stay off-line, and wearing the detectives out by not drawing unwanted attention to their illicit operations.

Throughout the third season, Marlo is just a minor player in the game, yet he proves his competency in the war with Avon Barksdale. Unwittingly aided by the police, who raid Avon’s safe house and apprehend the Barksdale kingpin before he can start an all-out war complete with hand grenades, Marlo comes out victorious and needs to show people in the neighborhood that there is a new king on the block. And just like the kings of old, he decides to spread a little bit of wealth around to ensure that the people hear of and remember his generosity.

Mike, Namond, Randy and Duquan, happen to be some of those fortunate enough to receive Marlo’s gifts. During the second episode, Marlo’s lieutenant gives every boy two hundred dollars for new school clothes and books, courtesy of Marlo Stanfield. After a moment’s hesitation, Mike politely refuses and walks away, meeting Marlo a few steps further down the street. Marlo asks why Mike refused to take the money and after an allusion to its source, Mike sharply turns his head to stare down Marlo in a powerful moment of foreshadowing. As Potter and Sirzyk point out, Mike abhors being connected to the drug trade and while he works for Bodie to earn money for himself and his younger brother before the school starts, he stops once that need is met (123). In this way, Mike represents the accidental guerrilla fighter who can be persuaded to fight on the insurgent’s side, given the right leverage (123). Unfortunately for Marlo, money is not the one.
Other boys, however, accept the money readily and without asking too many questions (the exception being Randy, who asks whether he can keep Mike’s share). Later, they discuss the exchange and Randy correctly points out that Marlo is showing them who “callin’ the shots out here” (4.02). To his friends, Mike explains that he does not want to owe to anybody, while Namond boisterously proclaims: “I’ll take any motherfuckin’ money if he givin’ it away” (4.02). With this utterance, Namond mirrors the corrupt state senator Clay Davis (Isiah Whitlock Jr.), who says the same sentence while complaining to his friend mayor Clarence Royce (Glynn Turman) about the money laundering allegations and records subpoena from the BPD (4.02). This only shows how far-reaching the criminal economy really is and that the drug money finds its way everywhere and buys loyalty everywhere; from the inner-city ghetto to the higher echelons of the society.

The new king Marlo holds his court at a concrete courtyard, where people can approach him whenever they need to deal with him. Out in the open, but out of an earshot of possible eavesdroppers. Even though Marlo is a murderous sociopath who prefers to have rivals and threats eliminated swiftly and silently by his enforcers Chris Partlow (Gbenga Akinnagbe) and Felicia “Snoop” Pearson (Felicia Pearson), he is open to the requests of the members of the community, as shown in the case of Mike. Marlo’s favors, however, are not granted freely.

2.4 Education of the Streets

Mike approaches Marlo asking a favor after a long internal struggle. His abusive stepfather returns from jail and Mike fears for his brother’s safety. It is implied that Mike’s father sexually abused him when he was younger, and he fears the same could happen to Bug.
This domestic division leads to Mike’s underperformance in class and general sulkiness, which do not escape the attention of his teacher Roland “Prez” Pryzbylewski, who offers the assistance of school’s social worker. Mike later discusses that option with his friends but decides to reject it after hearing that the social services could place him in a group home and even split him and his brother up. Duquan suggests the local boxing coach Dennis “Cutty” Wise (Chad Coleman), but Mike does not trust Cutty, claiming that his friendliness creeps him out and questions his sexual orientation (4.09), an attitude likely caused by his own past trauma.

All legitimate options exhausted, Mike turns to Marlo with “a problem [he] can’t bring to no one else” (4.09). According to Potter and Sirzyk, this moment shows how the legal systems failed in providing the only thing they should – security (126). Social services, education system and even community (Cutty’s gym) are not trusted by Mike to help him with his problem.

Marlo’s lieutenants have had their eyes on Mike for a while now. Chris even attempts to recruit Mike earlier in the season. “We’ll be around if you need something,” says Chris while shoving a handful of money into Mike’s hands (4.05). It is likely this conversation that later resonates in Mike’s head while he is looking for solutions to his problem at home.

He finally caves in under the pressure, betrays his principles and enters the game. In exchange for taking care of Mike’s problem, Marlo requested the debt to be paid in service. Three episodes later, Mike can be seen in a training session with Chris and Snoop as a fresh member of the Stanfield crew. The drug lord uses the situation to recruit indebted Mike as a fresh soldier for Chris, or, as Hefferman puts it, an “interchangeable [cog] in the narcotics trade” (40).
Thus, Mike leaves the school to serve in the ranks of Marlo’s soldiers. Ralph Beliveau and Laura Bolf-Beliveau juxtapose the two educational systems in their essay “Posing Problems and Picking Fights: Critical Pedagogy and the Corner Boys”. Mike is now learning new skills for his future career as a soldier and enforcer. He exchanged the conventional education offered at Tilghman Middle for the lessons in street-smarts and gun handling (98). As a soldier trained to obey orders and never questions his superiors, Mike goes through a drill similar to that of the children at school, who are being taught the state-wide tests (98).

However, Mike is struggling to fill the new role. He has all the necessary predispositions, but unlike Snoop or Chris he is far from being a committed fighter. He stands with his friends even if it means defending Randy accused of snitching or attacking Namond in Cutty’s gym (and getting banned for it) after Namond harasses Duquan (4.11, 4.12). He questions Marlo’s decision to kill June Bug just because he might have said something unflattering about Marlo. “You heard? You ain’t sure?” he implores during a stake-out at June Bug’s house before Snoop puts him in his place: “and you need to stop runnin’ your own mouth, young’un” (5.02). When he is ordered to shoot anybody, who would escape through the back door of June Bug’s house, he hesitates before letting a little boy run away, shaking his head in the recognition of Marlo’s senseless violence.

Finally, when Marlo and his top lieutenants are arrested with the help of Lester Freamon’s (Clarke Peters) illegal wiretap, Mike becomes a loose end in need of tying up. Marlo sends Snoop (the only available muscle) to kill Mike. However, the young soldier learned well during his short service. He sees through Snoop’s plot and turns the tables on her. “It’s how you carry yourself […] you was never one of us. You never could be,” says Snoop at gunpoint, before Mike kills her and runs (5.09).
As Mike’s safety is once again in danger, he decides to take matters into his own hands. With having no trust in the authorities and Marlo turning on him, Mike’s only option is to set out on his own. “Michael is forced by his circumstances to reject both versions of schooling,” argues Beliveau (100), institutional education and the informal gang education. Mike is last seen robbing Marlo’s old stash with a double-barreled shotgun, Omar’s signature weapon. As Beliveau points out, Mike even shoots the dealer in a knee, just like Omar (Michael K. Williams) did to a different crew chief earlier in the series (101).

Liberated from both worlds he rejected, Mike takes Omar’s place in the microcosm of the game, so the spirit of the scar-faced stick-up boy can haunt the streets once again. He is strong and smart enough to carve his own way, without owning his loyalty to anybody, be it state authorities or a drug lord. He will most likely lead a short life that will end violently, but he will live it on his own terms.
2.5 Inner-City Tyrannis

The support of the local community is important for the insurgent groups, as already argued by Kilcullen. Sudhir Venkatesh, a sociologist specializing in the studies of criminal economy and the dark underbelly of the American cities, furthers this point by offering a first-hand testimony from the top player in the game on the streets of Chicago in his book *Off the Books: The Underground Economy*. There, he shares the claims of the Chicagoan kingpin: “Ask anybody around here […] I am a man of the community, a community man. I give money, my boys clean up the parks, we help old ladies cross the street. Anything to help people get what they need” (279). Of course, these boisterous claims were countered by the residents’ less-positive reviews of the crime lord’s rule (279). At best, they could be seen as necessary evil rather than saviors of the community.

As Venkatesh explains further, the gang boss did not hide who he was, but he also knew that he needed the support of the community if his crime empire was to thrive (293). And an empire it was. “By the early part of 2000, the gang was no longer an informal ensemble of youth; it was a more serious organization whose members would do whatever it took to make money” writes Venkatesh (280). Drug money needs fronts to make it clean and with enough legal income, the drug lords can effectively retire and never touch drugs again. Exactly what Stringer Bell tried to do in the show.

Unlike Marlo, who shows little interest in the well-being of the community and is more concerned with control, Avon Barksdale shows genuine care for the people in the neighborhood, despite his organization being the source of many societal pains. He services a grill at a community gathering, while talking casually to his guests (1.02), he holds the annual east side/west side basketball game, which comes with a temporary cease fire between the two territories (1.09), and lastly, he kickstarts the building of a
boxing gym for the boys from the neighborhood after being petitioned by his former soldier Cutty (3.11). Avon is more than glad to help and give Cutty more money than he needs to start up the gym. This gesture is probably more out of respect for the veteran enforcer and a fellow boxer, but Avon still actively helps him get more children off the street game by giving them something else they can pursue.

Mike’s storyline shows how a bright young man can get himself recruited into the ranks of the drug lord’s enforcers through personal debt. It shows how crime lords like Marlo use their influence and ability to affect the community to lure more people into their operations. Lastly, it also exemplifies why people seek out the help of the gang leaders instead of the authorities in the first place. As the old proverb goes: “Better the devil you know.” Maybe they do not like the man in charge, but they know if they give something in return, their plea will most likely be answered, because, unlike the authorities, the self-appointed kings of crime prove to be more efficient, not burdened by laws and bureaucratic restrictions.

3 Fighting on a Lie

Was there no other way for Mike but to make a deal with a devil and sell his soul? Randy’s story might offer some insight into what might have happened to Mike. Randy, while also skeptical about the system, chose a different path. He trusted the system, the school and the police, to help him and protect him but was ultimately let down. This part of the thesis will discuss how the children of The Wire, left behind by the system interested only in hard numbers and statistics, lose faith in the authorities in the first place.
3.1 No Young’un Left Behind

After Stringer’s death, Avon’s people are preparing to go to war with Marlo, Stringer’s supposed murderer. Avon, knowing perfectly well that Marlo had nothing to do with Stringer’s death, is reluctant to spill blood. “If it’s a lie, then we fight on that lie,” insists his top muscle Slim Charles (Anwan Glover). “But we gotta fight” (3.12). At the time, this statement was aimed at the war in Iraq and the American intervention there, but it can also perfectly summarize the approach of many individuals and institutions portrayed in the show.

One of the promotional banners for the fourth season of *The Wire* features a slogan “No Corner Left Behind” – an obvious mockery of the failing Bush-era No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy.

NCLB was an attempt to increase the quality and effectiveness of the public education signed into effect by the president George W. Bush in 2002. Schools were to meet given standards in annual tests and thus establish a basic competency of their students to receive federal funding. No child would be left behind and all, no matter their situation or abilities, would become proficient in the basic skills – reading and mathematics. The act eventually attracted so much criticism that it was repealed in 2015.

Even those who originally supported the act, Diane Ravitch among them, saw that the education system was not improving. In fact, it had arguably gotten worse as many schools were forced to close due to their inability to meet the test scores, as Ravitch points out in her article (27). The tests became the absolute obsession of the education system and for many schools the annual tests were the proverbial sword of Damocles hanging over their heads.
The main issue with the NCLB was, according to Ravitch, its “simpleminded and singular focus on test scores”, which served as a measure of good education (29). Many subjects gave way to reading and math as the test preparation became the mantra of the public schools. The schools were no longer educating. They were conducting drills (29). Statistics and numbers were the only deciding factor. It was not a way to improve the level of student competence across the board, but a way to publicly shame and punish bad schools filled with lazy teachers, which were assumed to be the reason behind the low scores (29).

This fetishization of data and stats can be seen in other sectors of public service in The Wire, namely the police department and the city hall. The very survival of the commanding bodies in these structures, as Heffernan points out, often relies on the “good stats”, which not necessarily have to be truthful (33). The practice of modifying or “juoking” the stats to gain approval of the higher-ups and fill an imagined quota distorts the facts and the perception of the real situation.

The Wire shows a clear connection when the teachers at Tilghman Middle undergo their yearly introductory session into “teaching the tests” – a practice the principal Claudell Withers (Richard Hidlebird) calls with a hint of sarcasm “Curriculum Alignment” in a vain attempt to hide the true nature of it and make it sound more official (4.09). For the novice teacher Roland Pryzbylewski this is the first “teaching-the-test session”, but the base principle seems familiar. His initial confusion is quickly superseded by a grim realization as a more experienced colleague Grace Sampson (Dravon James) explains the situation to him:

PREZ: I don’t get it. All this so we score higher on the state tests? If we’re teaching the kids the test questions, what is it assessing in them?
GRACE: Nothing. It assesses us. The test scores go up, they can say the schools are improving. The scores stay down, they can’t.

PREZ: Juking the stats.

GRACE: Excuse me?

PREZ: Making robberies into larcenies, making rapes disappear – you juke the stats and majors become colonels. I’ve been here before.

GRACE: Wherever you go, there you are. (4.09)

Grace shakes her head in defeat before looking back at the test materials, while Prez considers her words for a second longer before the scene cut. It seems that there is no escape from the alternation of statistics in the new data-obsessed society.

NCLB is but one example of the continuous disconnectedness of power, and those who wield it, from the everyday experience. Information, so vital for our society to function, is perverted during its flows through networks connecting the individuals and the institutions. The data becomes a virtual entity, relevant only in the world of the space of flows. “We show you charts and statistics like they mean something,” admits Maj. Colvin, sick and tired of playing pretend, in his speech at a neighborhood meeting, “[but when the police and the citizens leave the meeting] them boys still gonna be out there on them corners…deep in the game” (3.04). Police stats claim that the crime rate is dropping, even though the people living in the streets of Baltimore would beg to differ. Results of forced standardized tests are no different.

3.2 Disconnected From Reality

First episode of the fourth season contrasts the police department and the school system in a series of scenes featuring training sessions and lectures. Both teachers and policemen seem disinterested in an irrelevant training in the first couple of scenes and
then finally voice their concerns over usefulness of the presented approaches. Teachers ask for solutions for class violence and disruptive behavior instead of lessons in positive thinking, while policemen mock the very idea of a terrorist attack happening in Baltimore (4.01). Both lectures are swiftly overtaken for a moment by loud and annoyed audiences.

It is clear from those two scenarios that teachers and policemen are not being prepared for the kind of situations they are more likely to encounter. Instead, they are attending a part of an overreaching federal program, which is not relevant to their experiences. Policemen would do well with training in handling gang violence and community policing, a point Maj. Colvin makes in the third season, and teachers would profit the most from knowledge on how to approach troubled minority youth attending their schools.

Prez, who can be seen attending the teachers’ lecture, learns soon enough that the conventional methods will not work. When the school starts, and the children flow into the homeroom, most of them blatantly ignore Prez’s seating chart, which makes his distributing bus passes even more difficult. He loses even the sliver of control he had during the class change but is saved by Grace, who puts the unruly children in line.

Over the course of the next few teaching scenes, Prez is struggling to keep children interested in the problems he presents. The only time they show interest in the math problem is when it relates to something they know – the topography of the city of Baltimore:

PREZ: All right, like I was saying, uh, my friend Andre is leaving Baltimore. He’s going 60 miles an hour-

KARIM: Hey, what side of Baltimore, east or west?

PREZ: It doesn’t make any difference.
STUDENT OFF-SCREEN: That’s what you think. (4.03)

Despite his best efforts, all Prez’s scenes end in a conflict, which Prez is unable to handle properly and needs to be saved by Ms. Sampson, who luckily happens to appear just in time to take control of the situation. In the final escalation, when one girl cuts another girl’s face with a razorblade for laughing at her, Prez has a look of utter horror on his face. None of the seminars he attended prepared him to deal with situations like this. So, he goes back to what he knows best, policing.

He introduces a harsh set of rules, utilizing the old carrot and stick policy. Stickers for prizes, detention for disruptions. But the effect of this policy is the opposite of what Prez intended. It sows even more enmity between him and his pupils and troublemakers throw more fits in response to more detention time. This culminates in a violent exchange with Namond, the most troubling student, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Prez genuinely cares for the children and wants to break through the invisible barrier separating them. He makes that clear enough in conversations with his wife. He even shares his lunch with Duquan, gets him clean clothes and offers to wash them for him whenever he needs. Prez’s morally good outlook and care for the well-being of his pupils eventually lead him in the right direction.

3.3 Lessons in Probability

The situation in Prez’s classroom was not all that bad prior to Colvin’s program. Some children show sincere interest in the curriculum with one girl urging rest of the class to keep quiet. Randy correctly, although rather unsurely, answers Prez’s question, and when Prez is tidying up the classroom he finds a paper with a correct answer to a problem presented to the class that day. While he also finds words FUCK PREZBO
etched into the surface of the school desk, his relationship with the children seems to be improving.

In various scenes and vignettes, Prez builds rapport with his pupils and gains additional insight into their individual situations and experiences. He learns about Mike’s responsibility for Bug or Duquan’s parents’ addiction. When Prez shuts his car keys in the car, Randy calls his friend Donut (Nathan Corbett), a juvenile carjacker and joy-rider, who unlocks the car using a slim jim lockpick hidden in his shoe. Prez, like Sgt. Carver, begins to understand that more subtle and sensible approach will be far more beneficial than “busting heads”. Although in his situation, the interest in the community eventually grows into a sort of messianic complex, as Prez makes it his mission to turn children from statistics into real people.

Finally, Prez finds what he was looking for – a way to approach the children and get them interested in the curriculum. During a break period, he notices Karim and Mike playing cards using pistachio shells as casino chips. He reluctantly lets them finish the game and then points out to losing Karim that he should have calculated the odds before betting. That instantly sparks boys’ interest. Mike is especially eager to learn more about calculating the odds:

MICHAEL: What about dice? Does dice have odds too? ‘Cause mostly that’s what we play.

PREZ: Dice? Yeah, sure.

MICHAEL: So, can you show us the odds of dice?

STUDENTS OFF-SCREEN: Yeah, man. Teach us dice! That’d be hard, man. For real. (4.07)
Corner of Prez’s mouth twitches momentarily in a joyful smile. “The boys are briefly able to see the relationship of math to their world” (Beliveau 92) and school’s curriculum becomes suddenly relevant to them.

Prez and Duquan head to the school’s storage room to collect as many dice from the board games as they can. However, Prez also finds a box of brand-new handbooks for mathematics and, more importantly, a new computer, just lying there, collecting dust. Symbolism of this scene is important to the discussion in the final chapter which focuses on Duquan, so it will be addressed there.

With the computer set up, new textbooks distributed, and all the dice collected, Prez starts his own little experiment deviating from the conventional guidelines. Prez’s classes transform into a casino where children count the odds and bet Monopoly money on dice rolls, all the while Duquan is practicing his IT skills with the computer. This does not escape the attention of Prez’s guardian angel Ms. Sampson, who approaches him curiously during one of these sessions without saying a word. “Trick them into thinking they aren’t learning, and they do,” he says proudly while observing the classroom (4.07), glad that he finally reached out to the children and earned their trust.

Prez’s lessons change completely from the uninteresting lecturing in the first episodes of the season. In the ninth episode, prior to the introduction of the test materials, Prez clearly encourages cooperation and nurtures communal feeling by putting school desks close together in rectangular shapes. Duquan is left practicing with the computer, while others can be seen learning by doing – comparing their height and arm span (4.09).

This new approach is met with a mixed reception among Prez’s colleagues. Even though most of his children are not ready to take the state-wide test, he is encouraged to teach it. Other teachers agree that their children are also lagging behind,
but the test takes priority. “The test in April is the difference between the state taking over the school or not,” explains Prez’s colleague. “Maybe the state should,” answers Prez angrily (4.08). The consensus is to find a middle ground and do a little bit of both, but that is not good enough for Prez.

The test preparation immediately appears as a loss of time as the children cannot relate to the text used for reading comprehension exercises – an ancient Greek legend about Damon and Pythias. Problems beyond their immediate surroundings and experience prove to be an insurmountable obstacle. When the children become drowsy due to the intentionally turned up heat during the 90-minute long classes, they become even less responsive to Prez’s inquiries. However, once the superintendent observing the test preparations leaves the classroom, Prez, almost relieved, tells the children to put the textbooks away and gives them a choice – movie or lessons in probability. Children suddenly spring to life, already putting the desks together and getting the dice.

Towards the end of the season, as the shadow of the tests grows darker, the relationship of Prez and the children changes dramatically. Children pay attention to him and even those who have been struggling are seen to be improving. Prez discusses relationships and non-sexual intimacy with the children – concepts understandably obscure to them – and secretly laughs at their jokes. Duquan brings Prez shiny new pens as a thank you gift.

When the tests are over, and the results are in, Prez looks surprised as there seems to be an improvement in both math and language arts, despite his neglect of the test preparation. “You believe the numbers?” asks Grace condescendingly before revealing to Prez that not only are the stats of the school juked by specifically teaching the tests, but students are also graded differently. Even those with the highest grades are struggling at their respective grade levels.
The school does not lie just to the federal authorities, but they also lie to themselves. Most importantly, they lie to the children, who, in relationship with Prez, have shown, that they can and do appreciate fairness and honesty. System has left behind all of them, no one just told them yet.

3.4 Heart of Gold

From the start, Randy shows the most promise of all the other boys and his hopes and dreams make him a sympathetic character. Much like Cutty, Bubbles or even Stringer Bell, Randy strives to reinvent himself and leave the criminal economy of his neighborhood behind. All that build up makes his failure, brought on him by failing social system, that more tragic.

Unlike the other boys of summer, Randy does not come into contact with drugs at all, he lives in a disciplined household with his foster mother Ms. Anna and shows genuine interest in education thanks to Prez’s engaging classes. He is also the only boy with a clear ambition. “I’m gonna own my own store,” answers Randy proudly when Prez asks what he wants to be when he grows up (4.05), and he is actively working towards that goal.

Where other boys rely on temporary work for corner crew chiefs like Bodie, Randy makes money reselling candy during break periods to his younger schoolmates. When him and Duquan discover a webpage selling candy for wholesale prices on the school computer, Randy shows his entrepreneurial spirit with a correct assessment of the potential profits if he purchases the candy in big volumes online instead of small quantities from a Korean grocer (4.09). However, the site requires a credit card to order. Prez agrees to pay for the candy if Randy can come up with the cash.
Randy decides to put Prez’s lessons in probability to a good use and makes enough money for the candy by betting on a backstreet craps game. “Six beats four or five and most times eight is better than ten, right? You schooled me good,” he says proudly as he hands over the money (4.09). Although the use of the knowledge is questionable, Randy learned something from Prez and was able to use it in his world, in a context where that information mattered. For a moment, Prez is not sure whether he should scold the boy or congratulate him.

Randy’s situation starts spiraling out of control once he gets into trouble for being involved in an alleged rape. His two classmates paid him to be a lookout while they had sex with a girl in a bathroom. It is suggested that they paid her, but she decided to change her story when they disregard and insult her in a hallway later. To stop the assistant principal Ms. Donnelly from calling his foster mother, Randy starts grasping at straws to keep himself out of trouble and spills the beans on all sorts of mischief that has happened around the school. In a last-ditch effort, when Ms. Donnelly seems unmoved by his confessions, Randy says he knows about a murder – Marlo’s killing of Lex from the beginning of the season, where Randy was a middle man delivering a message and unknowingly sent Lex to his death (4.06).

The gambit pays off and Ms. Donnelly puts down the phone. However, unbeknownst to him, Randy got himself into even deeper trouble now. Ms. Donnelly talks to Prez about this and Randy’s teacher urges her to not call the police. Instead, he insists on calling someone he can trust, because he does not want to “see [Randy] get chewed up by the system” (4.06). He goes to Cedric Daniels, who delegates the task of looking after Randy to Ellis Carver.

Carver entrusts Randy to his friend Herc and Bunk Moreland (Wendell Pierce), who are investigating Lex’s murder, in a good faith that Randy will provide some useful
evidence for the case. Randy refuses to lie on his testimony as increasingly irritated Herc attempts to manipulate him into a position of an eye-witness, but he still gives the detective a clue in the name of Little Kevin, drug dealer who told Randy to send Lex to the ambush site.

Herc, stressed out over several problems including lost surveillance camera, slips up during the interrogation of Little Kevin and makes the young dealer aware of who told them about his involvement (4.09). Through Little Kevin, Randy’s name reaches Marlo’s ears and at his order Randy becomes known as a snitch (4.10). This triggers a series of events that starts with verbal harassment and ostracization, leads to a serious beatdown of Randy by his schoolmates (4.11) and finally culminates when a pair of young hoppers torch Randy’s home with makeshift firebombs (4.12).

Prez is furious after the first attack on Randy and berates Carver for his negligence. When detectives Moreland and Freamon come asking about Randy, Prez refuses to let them talk to the kid in a desperate attempt to protect him. Carver tries to do his own share to remedy the situation and places a plainclothes patrol car down the block from Randy’s home.

None of it, however, stops the last attack, which puts Ms. Anna in a hospital and takes away any trust in the system that remained in Randy. When Carver visits Randy in the hospital to make amends, regretful and heartbroken, Randy gives him the cold shoulder. “You gonna look out for me, sergeant Carver? Do you mean it?” shouts Randy angrily as Carver walks down an empty hallway (4.12).

In the last attempt to redeem himself in Randy’s eyes, Carver tries his best to keep system from swallowing Randy and sending him back into a group home. He is even willing to adopt Randy as a foster parent himself, although that is not possible. “It’s okay,” says Randy resignedly when they arrive at the group home. “You tried. You
don’t need to feel bad” (4.13). Mad at his own failure, Carver repeatedly beats steering wheel of his car afterwards. Randy’s last appearance is in the fourth season finale, where he is once again labeled a snitch and surrounded by boys ready to beat Randy senseless. This time however, Randy throws the first punch.

Resolution to Randy’s storyline comes in the fifth season, where he shares a brief scene with detective Moreland, who is still pursuing Lex’s murder in hopes of taking down Chris and Snoop and with them Marlo. Randy, hardened by the life in a group home, offers no cooperation and storms out of the room after talking detective Moreland off: “That’s what y’all do, ain’t it? Lie to dumbass niggers?” (5.06). As he is making his way away from the detective, he pushes over a younger boy on the stairs, clearly lacking any empathy and kindheartedness he showed in the fourth season.

Just like Mike, Randy also fills a now-empty space in the game. With his trust in the system gone, he will most likely be doomed to enter the game as another soldier, forever lost in the system. Being roughly the same age as Bodie when the young Barksdale soldier according to his own admission first took to the streets (4.13), Randy takes his place after Bodie’s death in the fourth season’s finale.
3.5 Child-Processing Unit

Prez’s frustrations stem from the realization that whatever they are doing at Tilghman Middle it is not educating. His attempts, despite boasting a moderate amount of success, are ultimately curbed by the necessity to score high on the state-wide tests. Results of those are more important than anything else – they are the ticket to grant money and self-governance.

More than educating the children, they are processing them. They are being pushed through the system via social promotion (sometimes against their own will), with little concern for what will happen after they are done. “You do your piece with them and you let them go,” says Ms. Donnelly to Prez once she notices he practically adopted Duquan (4.12). In that moment, it is a cold statement, but it summarizes what Castells means when he talks about education.

What is happening in The Wire is what Castells describes as a “warehousing of children and students” (2000b, 373). They are shepherded into the schools, kept there for half a day (or more if they earn themselves a detention) and then let out back into the streets. Many children do not go to school at all, choosing to remain on the corners or loiter in the streets instead. To support the argument that the institutions disinterestedly see children as a warehoused goods instead of potential workforce, The Wire shows “truancy officers”, Cutty being one of them for a while, collecting the truants for their September and October days (4.04), a practice that meets with no understanding from Cutty. Two days per term is all it takes to receive government funding.

The problem is not the competence of the teachers or the lack of resources, argues Beliveau, but the fact that the formal education is not situated within the context of other social forces that also add to the education of the children, arguably in more meaningful way (102). “The best day is Wednesday,” says Grace to Colvin as they walk
through a corridor of Tilghman Middle. “That’s the farthest they get from home, from whatever’s going on in the streets. You see smiles then” (4.04).

Despite their best efforts, Prez, Colvin, Grace, Ms. Donnelly and even Carver are just individuals, dependent on the systems around them and institutions they serve. Randy is failed by both the police department and social services, when Carver, after handing Randy over to well-meaning but ultimately tactless Herc, unsuccessfully looks for a way to keep Randy out of a group home. He even risks angering his lieutenant by keeping Randy at the precinct, but there is only so much a person can do.

4 Learning for the Wrong World
This chapter will analyze the story of Namond Brice against the backdrop of his situation. As a son of a famous enforcer (now in prison), he is expected to fill his shoes, but becomes increasing aware of his own inability to do so. Pushed to constantly reinforce his social status, he hides his insecurities behind violent tantrums. In the broader context, this chapter will compare expectations, both of Namond’s peers and the system, and their influence on the path of the young drug dealer.

4.1 Live Short but Prosper
Gang activities were not always about money. As Venkatesh explains, gang culture started out as a way for young adults and teens to gain peer support, where monetary gain was not the primary incentive (281). The boys of summer from the show call themselves “Fayette Mafia Crew” – a name that can be seen in several episodes spray-painted on a wall together with their names at their backstreet hangout place. What is seen in *The Wire*, a phenomenon Venkatesh describes as a “‘corporate’ gang” (282), is a product of only fairly recent times.
Venkatesh places the rise of the commercial gangs at around late seventies (282). This was also the time when the gangs stopped being about brotherhood and belonging and put their economic interests above all else. *The Wire* hints at this shift with a scene where two young dealers, Bodie and Malik “Poot” Carr (Tray Chaney), shoot their friend Wallace on Stringer Bell’s orders, to stop him from potentially turning into a snitch and endangering their entire operation. “Y’all my niggers, yo. […] We boys! […] Why it gotta be like this? […] That’s us, man” cries Wallace while Bodie hesitates to shoot him (1.12). Even Poot shows a little regret but ultimately goads Bodie into pulling the trigger and then finishes the job.

Stephen Lucasi provides an interesting observation in his article “Networks of Affiliation: Familialism and Anticorporatism in Black and White”. The killing of Wallace is “a telling example of the ways that capital corrupts the most fraternal connections” (138). Familial bonds, says Lucasi, have a very low chance of surviving the game and the only viable connections are affectionless contracts (138). “Game done changed,” says Cutty after being in prison for fourteen years and still remembering the good old days. “Game’s the same,” answers Slim Charles, “just got more fierce” (3.04).

Even though material gain was not the primary motivation for Mike to join Marlo’s operation, he still enjoyed all the advantages such a lifestyle offers – money to spend, comfortable accommodations not only for himself but also for Bug and Duquan, and relative leisure. The drug dealer is, as specified by the co-creator of the show Ed Burns, “the man in the neighborhood that has what nobody else in the neighborhood has, which is standing, which is money, which is power. Kids naturally want to go in that direction” (qtd. in Alvarez np). Within a part of society that has been left mostly to its own devices, that is a powerful image.
Sudhir Venkatesh concurs: “[adolescent gangsters] dreamed of someday living in glamour like these older men, some of whom were barely of legal drinking age, who boasted high illegal incomes and manifested their power in flashy clothing, jewelry, and sports cars” (283). In the article “Corner-Boy Masculinity: Intersections of Inner-City Manhood”, James Braxton Peterson draws similar connections between the distinct lack of “structural and civic resources necessary to transcend abject poverty” and the exposure of the inner-city youth to “many of the most desirable outposts of capitalist society” (107). However, not everybody can reach the top, because in the game, the soldiers are the first to fall.

4.2 Rules of the Game

Maj. Colvin knew the risks when he set out on the path of a renegade police officer. His pet project proved to be a statistic success as the average crime rate of his entire district decreased by more than ten percent, at the price of a sharp increase in a few selected areas. But it was not meant to last. Hamsterdam free zone was, after all, an unofficial legalization of drug trade and as such highly illegal. The end of Hamsterdam brought along the end of Colvin’s career. Disappointed with an unfulfilling job as a head of security at a hotel, he finds himself in a job interview with a University of Maryland professor David Parenti (Dan Deluca) set up by Colvin’s friend Deacon (Melvin Williams).

Professor Parenti has received a grant money for a research into crime prevention. In his words they are “looking for a specific target group to inoculate” (4.05). Colvin is offered a post of a field researcher and his job would be to find African-American youth at risk of joining the game. As a white American, Parenti admits he cannot exactly go out on his own, and thus needs someone who will better
connect with the black communities. The target group they are looking for is 18 to 21 years old. Colvin laughs at how out of touch Parenti is: “18 to 21? By that age, they’re deep in the game. He’s fucked on that,” he says to Deacon (4.05), but ultimately agrees to help, if only to show Parenti how wrong he is.

When Colvin calls in some favors and shows Parenti a sample of his target group, Parenti leaves the meeting with a violent individual deeply emotionally disturbed and acknowledges that his estimate was off by a long shot. On Colvin’s advice, they go even lower than 15. They go to Tilghman Middle.

Based on Colvin’s distinction, they aim to separate so called corner kids – the youth at risk, troublemakers and potential actors in the criminal economy, and stoop kids – those who can sit through lessons calmly. This however, as Parenti points out, comes dangerously close to student tracking – separating students based on different academic expectations of them – a practice, while not illegal, certainly not endorsed.

Once again, Colvin finds himself at the helm of a controversial project. “So, you pretend to teach all these kids,” he says, smiling, “and the truth is, you ain’t teaching any of them” (4.05). The school is wasting time and resources treating symptoms, instead of the cause. Colvin and Parenti seek to change that and principal Withers gives them the go-ahead. “But just so you hear it, thank you. It’ll be the only time anyone in this system will think to say it,” he says to Colvin and Parenti before leaving the room (4.05).

In the school hallway Colvin and Parenti meet Namond, who (still riled up from a recent argument with Prez) verbally assaults Dr. David Parenti on sight. “One of the corner kids, huh?” asks Parenti when Namond leaves and Colvin knowingly nods in agreement (4.05). They have found their target group and identified one of the potential subjects.
Initial confusion on the side of the kids, who think they are in trouble again, is quickly replaced by an understanding, as they draw parallels to what they already know from their environment:

GRACE: But this is a new program that, if you work it, will make you ready [for a regular classroom].

NAMOND: Ready for gen pop. This is prison, yo, and we in solitary an’ shit.

ZENOBIJA: Word.

COLVIN: Solitary. That’s good, son. This is solitary. This is the hole up in here. (4.06)

Seeing the school as a rehearsal for prison and the life on the corner is not that far off. Students are required to wear uniforms, similarly to prison jumpsuits and teachers are the prison guards. The presence of an armed police officer at the school, who can be seen opening the main door in the third episode, hammers in the oppressive feeling even more. It is also why Prez’s initiative with stickers and detention did not work out very well.

When one of the girls in the program is sent out of class for acting out, Namond looks after her and says: “Damn. It’s bye-bye time for my girl Chandra.” “Yeah, you think?” answers Colvin, perched on top of one of the desks like a bird of prey (4.07). Getting out is not going to be that easy and Namond finds out soon enough for himself. When Ms. Duquette (Stacie Davis), doctoral student and assistant to Dr. Parenti, gives him a choice of either stopping acting out or being removed from the class, Namond stands up triumphantly, longing for suspension. When he is told that he is not going to be suspended, he overthrows his chair in hopes that it will be enough for a suspension. It is not. “Man, fuck y’all. I know the rules. You’ve got to suspend me.
School’s got to have rules,” he yells before getting escorted away (4.07). Instead of a suspension it is a break room for Namond with Colvin and Ms. Mason, social worker assisting with the program. Once there he does not offer any other response besides defiant “Fuck you” to everything Colvin says to him. “Mr. Colvin, sir?” he says as Colvin is about to leave the room, “Fuck you” (4.07).

Namond’s protests prior to his leaving the class are awfully similar to an exclamation of Fruit (Brandon Fobbs), one of the Stanfield crew chiefs, during a police shakedown, where he is also informed about the free zone Colvin set up in the third season: “Look, we grind, and y’all try to stop it. That’s how we do. Why you gotta go and fuck with the program? … All due respect.” (3.04) Despite their perceived unruliness and disregard for law, “the players” still adhere to and play by certain rules. It is likely that this encounter with Namond gave Colvin an idea for the future activities.

“No tantrums today?” asks Ms. Duquette in the following episode. “What’s the point? They’re not even gonna suspend us, right?” answers Zenobia (Taylor King) defeatedly (4.08). Now, that there is no getting out of the class, the children are willing to cooperate. They identify themselves as players, but they see their place in the game. “[being a kingpin] comes later. Right now, we just corner boys,” explains Namond (4.08).

Ms. Duquette asks them to write down where they see themselves in ten years – some NBA players, one wants to be a pediatric neurosurgeon “like that one nigga”, but some, including Namond, see themselves ending up dead (4.08). They know their world and what to expect of it. “You know where you are going, and we can’t teach you anything you don’t know about that, right?” “That’s what we’ve been saying,” is an exchange between Ms. Duquette and Namond (4.08). It becomes clear why these kids
do not fit in regular classrooms. Colvin finally understands and breaks it to both the children and the program staff:

COLVIN: You know, we are giving them a fine education. “It ain’t even mine. It was just laying here when I came in” [quoting Namond’s response to being asked to stop reading a magazine]. You know, this right here, the whole damn school, the way they carry themselves, it’s training for the street. The building’s the system, we the cops.

ZENOBIA: Yeah, you are for sure.

COLVIN: I mean, you’ll come in here every day and practice getting over, try running all different kinds of games. You know, it’s practice for the corner, right? Ain’t no real cops, ain’t no real danger. But you’re all getting something out of this. Bet you didn’t even know that. (4.08)

It is at this point that Colvin takes over and asks the kids “What makes a good corner boy?”. A lively discussion ensues with children yelling over each other various qualities necessary for corner boys and young gangsters. In the following scenes, children discuss the street game with interest and surprising insight. Namond lays out the rules clearly: “Yeah, like y’all say, don’t lie, don’t bunk, don’t cheat, don’t steal, or whatever. But what about y’all, huh? What, the government?” (4.08). He continues to point out the double standards of the system and the war on drugs mentioning the legality of alcohol and cigarettes. “We do the same thing as y’all, except when we do it it’s like, ‘Oh my God, these kids is animals,’” continues Namond while others nod in agreement. Colvin then proceeds to give them another task – write down the rules of “the game” as a group. And they do.
4.3 Father’s Footsteps

Of the four boys of summer, Namond is shown to be the most problematic in school. His frequent outbursts disrupt the classes, and he often taunts authorities, including teachers and police officers. He lives with his mother De’Londa (Sandi McCree) and enjoys relatively comfortable life thanks to Barksdale drug money given to them as a reward for Roland “Wee-Bey” Brice’s loyalty. Wee-Bey took a life sentence on behalf of the Barksdale organization for murders he committed (as well as some he did not) to protect the rest of the gang in the first season. He is considered a legend and is well respected among of what is left of the Barksdale people.

De’Londa uses that to their advantage and forces Bodie to let Namond work for him. “Young’uns don’t got a scrap of work ethic nowadays, man. If it wasn’t for his pops, I wouldn’t even bother,” says Bodie after Namond leaves the corner early, choosing to hunt pigeons with Mike and Randy over working with Bodie’s crew (4.01).

Namond’s lackluster commitment to his responsibilities as a corner boy and the reluctance to lose his ponytail, a feature making him easily recognizable among the short-haired or braided gangsters on the corners, make Wee-Bey question Namond’s attitude and preparedness for the demands of the game: “Either you real out there, or you ain’t, Nay” (4.02). Possibly, Wee-Bey can already see what Namond only suspects – that Namond is not ready for the game.

For the most part of the season, Namond is not willing to admit his weaknesses to himself or others. He hides his weaknesses behind angry tantrums, a behavior shared among other kids like him as the show later implies. When Prez introduces a harsh set of rules in an attempt to foster discipline and order in his class, Namond goes off. Prez loses his temper and expels Namond after a loud argument. “Get your police stick out your desk and beat me. You know you fucking want to,” responds Namond, before
storming out of the classroom (4.05). This is especially powerful, because Prez has a history of racial violence and pistol-whipped a young black drug dealer in the first season, who later went blind in one eye as a result.

Later in the same episode, Namond comes back to apologize for his behavior, and him and Prez bury the hatchet. “It’s just the evil in me and before I know it I go off,” says Namond apologetically (4.05). He is confused because his “sense of being exists in the tension between the expectation of the role he should play and the possibility that he may not fit that role (Beliveau 94).

Despite his tough talk and angry outbursts, Namond is shown as weak-hearted when it comes to street violence. During a skirmish with the terrace boys, Namond runs and hides instead of taking a beating along with the rest of his friends (4.01). He refuses to beat up his lieutenant Kenard (Thuliso Dingwall), who stole a drug package from him, and runs away when Mike does it in his stead (4.12). Namond constantly shows weakness when dealing on the streets and makes basic mistakes such as bringing the drugs to his own home, for which he is scolded by his mother (4.08). He is more interested in playing videogames and hanging out with friends than running his drug business.

Circle of people who understand that Namond is only playing tough is slowly widening throughout the season. Wee-Bey subtly warns him that the game is not how it used to be (4.05), De’Londa in her own way wants to toughen her son up and prepare him for the life of crime by specifically telling the police to send him to a juvenile detention facility so that he “learns something” (4.12), Cutty admits that Namond and Wee-Bey share the “same blood, but not the same heart” (4.09), and Sgt. Carver is reluctant to send Namond to the “baby booking” straight away, when he arrests him for
selling drugs. Instead, he looks for alternatives, just like with Randy, to spare the boy an unpleasant experience.

Namond, pressured by the environment to walk in his father’s footsteps, does not give up easily, but finally breaks when Mike beats Kenard bloody in front of him. At that moment, as he stares at the grisly scene terrified, he realizes that he cannot exist in such a society. He runs to the only safe harbor in the neighborhood – Cutty’s gym. There he opens up about his issues to the boxing coach and Sgt. Carver: “I can’t go home. She [De’Londa] expect me to be my father, but I ain’t him. I mean, the way he is and shit. It just ain’t in me” (4.12). Possibly, he saw in Mike the change he himself would need to undergo and knew that he could not.

After spending some time with Namond both in and outside of the special program, Colvin decides to take matters into his own hands, and asks Namond’s father for a permission to become his guardian:

COLVIN: I mean, you send Namond out on the corner now, I’m giving him maybe one, two years before he down at the morgue. And maybe, if you’re lucky, up here with you.

WEE-BEY: Maybe, maybe not. That’s the game.

COLVIN: I’m talking about Namond here, Mr. Brice. He’s a lot of things, a lot of good things. I mean, before you know, he might surprise all of us given half a chance, but he ain’t made for them corners, man. (4.13)

Wee-Bey's hesitance to accept Colvin’s offer and no outright refusal show that he is aware of Namond’s shortcomings and Colvin only confirms his suspicions. Colvin offers to take his son away from the street culture of the inner city so that he does not have to live the same life Wee-Bey had to. It is a hard decision, but ultimately Wee-Bey
sees reason and tells De’Londa to let the boy go, admitting that there is nothing glamorous about the life of a street soldier:

WEE-BEY: Man come down here to say my son can be anything he damn please.

DE’LONDA: Except a soldier.

WEE-BEY: Yeah, well, look at me up in here. Who the fuck would want to be that if they could be anything else, De’Londa? (4.13)

In the season finale, Wee-Bey can be seen saying his goodbyes to Namond assuring him that he is still his father (4.13), before Namond leaves as Colvin’s ward. The season ends with Namond doing homework on the porch of Colvin’s house in a calm neighborhood with clean corners far away from drugs (Beliveau 117). Show’s closure to Namond’s storyline also takes place in the fifth season where he is seen briefly giving a speech on HIV and AIDS in Africa (5.09). Colvin’s successful intervention redeemed at least one child from the cold embrace of the game and ensured that he may reach his full potential.
4.4 Not So Great Expectations

Discussions in Colvin’s class become lively once they get children to talk about their lives on the street. What makes good corner boys, how should people carry themselves on the streets, what is the sign of weakness – the corner kids argue these topics with great interest and enthusiasm.

Through the discussion it becomes apparent that the education offered by the official institutions will be useless to them. They are preparing for the life on the corners and in the streets, where status and respect weigh more than good grades.

Some see themselves dead in a couple of years, including Namond. It is a reality of their life and they have accepted it. Manuel Castells recounts this fatalistic view of their world as described by Garcia Marquez in his book: “They compress life into a few instants, to live it fully, and then disappear. For those brief moments of existence, the breaking of the rules, and the feeling of empowerment, compensates for the monotone display of a longer, but more miserable life” (2000b, 211).

Such fast and aggressive lifestyle requires those who live it to be tough and uncompromising. In one of the discussions, corner kids argue that going easy on someone is a sign of weakness – mistakes as well as intentional wrongdoings must be punished swiftly for everyone to see. “There always people watching,” says Darnell (Davone Cooper). “Watching … you,” adds his classmate (4.08). It needs to be done because other people are watching and looking for any sign of weakness which can be exploited. Ironically enough, Namond, who is one of the loudest commenters, constantly fails to live by this code.

Albert (Jason Wharton), the one child who wants to be a neurosurgeon, is also struggling to remain strong. While visibly the youngest child in class, he uses profane language with the same proficiency as his older peers and despite his good progress,
throws an unexpected tantrum. In a later discussion with Colvin, he reveals that his mother died the day before (possibly from drug overdose), and his grandmother insisted he should go to school (4.11). Peterson concludes that these children have to endure through “neglect, abuse, violence and their resultant psycho-social trauma” (109).

Colvin possibly suspects that their tough talk and violent behavior might be just a façade they keep up to not appear weak in the eyes of their peers.

In one of the following sessions, Colvin has prepared a competition for the kids: The first team to assemble a metal model of a famous landmark without the instructions will be rewarded with a dinner at a downtown restaurant of their choice. Namond, Zenobia, Darnell and their Eiffel Tower win the competition, even though they had a few extra pieces remaining, which Namond scoops off the table and hides in his pocket, seeing that the model looks fine and remains stable without them. During the competition, Namond shows an aptitude for leadership as he takes control of the project and has his friends assemble different parts of the model, which ultimately assures their victory over the other teams.

However, what was supposed to be a nice treat at Ruth Chris steak house turns out to have the exact opposite effect. The three corner kids, completely out of their element, soon realize that they don’t belong. Despite them putting each other on the spot about choice of meals, nomenclature and restaurant etiquette, they make one blunder after another once they arrive at the restaurant.

They get a taste of the kind of society they do not belong in and presumably never will. They feel “out of place in the face of the rigid hierarchical structures” (Beliveau 97) and soon lose any confidence and self-esteem they had earlier. The kids have their classy dinner but leave disheartened and return to their comfort zone. They
begin to lash out, insult each other and Namond plays loud rap music in Colvin’s car on the way back.

This scene is reminiscent of a similar scene in the first season when D’Angelo Barksdale takes his girlfriend to a fancy restaurant. Even though he has the money to pay for the meal, it does not feel right to him. His concerns are not related to race, as he and his girlfriend are not the only black people at the restaurant, but to his class, background and social expectations. “We get all dressed up, right? Come all the way across town. Fancy place like this. After we finished, we gonna go down to the harbor, walk around a little bit, you know? Acting like we belong down here,” he says self-consciously (1.05). He knows it is all just playing pretend and were the other patrons to know who he is, he would not be welcome.

Colvin is aware of the insecurities of the kids and shares his observations with Parenti. The kids already know that the system will not care about them. As Colvin points out: “They’re not fools. They know exactly what we expect them to be” (4.09). They know that the system has already given up on them. Earlier in the season, when Colvin walks around the school alone, one of the teachers is berating his students for low grades:

“What do you think this 20 stands for? No, it’s not the number of days you’ve been suspended. It’s not the number of years you’ll spend in prison if you don’t shape up. It’s 50 percent below average. It’s 30 percent below failure even. But really, it stands for the amount of interest you are taking in your own future.” (4.04)

The teacher is using the threats of prison as if he already knew half of his kids will end up in the central booking the day they leave school. Most of the children already know
their future, where the prison might be the better alternative and it could also be argued that the number also indicates the amount of interest the system takes in them.

After Colvin’s truthful admission of inability of the police to make a meaningful changes during the community meeting back in the third season, one of the attendees demands to know what the answer to the societal pains is. “I’m not sure. But whatever it is, it can’t be a lie,” answers Colvin “tired of bullshit” (3.04). He can see that the people at the meeting are not fooled by the statistics presented to them and neither are the children at Tilghman Middle.

In a conversation with the superintendent Shepherdson (Sheila Cutchlow), who is not convinced of the program’s effectiveness, both Colvin and Parenti try to save their project from sinking. They believe the corner kids are doing tremendous progress, but Ms. Shepherdson is focused only on their ability to participate in the statewide testing. Colvin, not known for holding back and telling lies, attempts to explain to her how the things really are:

COLVIN: I mean, you put a textbook in front of these kids, put a problem on a blackboard, or teach them every problem on some statewide test, it won’t matter, none of it, because they’re not learning for our world, they’re learning for theirs. And they know exactly what it is they’re training for and what it is everyone expects them to be.

SHEPHERDSON: I expect them to be students.

COLVIN: But it’s not about you or us, or the tests or the system. It’s what they expect of themselves. I mean every single one of them know they headed back to the corners. Their brothers and sisters – shit, their parents – they came through these same classrooms, didn’t
they? We pretended to teach them, they pretended to learn, and where, where’d they end up? Same damn corners. (4.10)

Parenti insists that the children need to be socialized first, before they can be meaningfully educated. Ms. Shepherdson remains skeptical about the project but does not pull the plug just yet. The city hall however, refuses to support the project, possibly because of the budget difficulties the mayor office is facing and project’s association with Colvin’s name. “Now is not the time to rock any boats,” says Ms. Shepherdson sternly while looking at Colvin, implying his connection to the Hamsterdam scandal.

Michael Steintorf (Neal Huff), mayor’s chief of staff, gives them even colder welcome unable (or unwilling) to see the bigger picture. “But you wouldn’t be teaching test curriculum here? These would be the children left behind, so to speak,” he says after skimming over project’s materials. “Yeah, but as it is, I mean, we’re leaving them all behind anyway. We just don’t want to admit it,” replies Colvin while laughing (4.13). After that, the session is ended abruptly by Steintorf in a tone that does not inspire much confidence, marking the end of Colvin’s and Parenti’s project.

### 4.5 Benefactor Ex Machina

Colvin succeeded where Carver had failed. He managed save a child from a harsh and unforgiving environment and give him a second chance in a more stable living situation. In Colvin’s case, the success is partially due to the fact that Namond had parents who could grant Colvin permission for the legal guardianship. Randy had no such luck.

Amanda Ann Klein recognizes Carver’s and Colvin’s struggles as a melodramatic trope of the benefactor intervening on behalf of the “destitute youth” (184). Colvin becomes the convict to Namond’s Pip and saves him against the all odds, while Carver fails in his attempts to help Randy.
The role of the benefactor, Klein argues, upholds the status quo as these intervening individuals make changes only to singular lives and not the society, which might be the reason for the intervention in the first place. The existence of the benefactor “relieves society of the burden of widespread reform […] as long as a few wealthy individuals intervene in the nick of time” (183).

Similarly, Venkatesh, having spent years in the position of the popular mediator of disputes among the participants in criminal economy, attributes the existence of the informal economy and the world of “hustling” to the “neglect of outside actors […] who refuse to allocate enough resources to black inner cities to create true economic security there” (XVII). Castells describes this phenomenon in similar words. He calls it an “abandonment of inner cities” through “social and physical disinvestment” and refusal to “face unpleasant realities” (2000b, 431). The scene at the city hall, where the alternative education project dies, show the unwillingness of the authorities to solve these issues, or rather their inability.

Colvin furiously storms out of the office. “ Seems every time I open my mouth in this town, I’m telling people something they don’t want to know,” he says as him and Dr. Parenti head for an elevator (4.13). “What we publish on this is gonna get a lot of attention,” says Parenti to calm Colvin down, but to no avail. “What? They gonna study your study?” asks Colvin while laughing in Parenti’s face (4.13). The research will be done, they will be congratulated for it, but ultimately, nothing will change, and Colvin knows it. “When do this shit change?” he asks before the elevator doors close (4.13).

Later in the episode, Colvin is seen leaving Parenti’s conference while shaking his head. Namond is “saved” by Colvin from the tough life on the corners just in time. A couple of year later and Namond would have been either dead or beyond the point of no return. Perhaps it would be him Colvin would show to Parenti to persuade him that the
need for intervention is at far younger age than eighteen years. The show suggests that the change of lifestyle and especially the household and related influences change Namond significantly (Peterson 117). With the changing expectations from him, more suitable to his own expectations of himself, he manages to find his place in the world with the help of a kindly stranger. But this was still an achievement of an outside individual acting on his conscience. For the situation to get better, many more people would need to step up and follow that example.

5 Death of Labor

The last chapter of this thesis will follow the journey of the last boy from the quartet, Duquan. It will look at the transformation of the inner-city neighborhoods, disappearance of job opportunities for young African-American males, exploitative nature of the drug trade and how the inescapability of this situation can (and often does) lead to drug addiction.

5.1 Demands of the Network Society

In the scene where Prez and Duquan go and look for dice at the school’s storage, they find a box of new mathematics handbooks and a brand-new computer. The fact that new equipment that could be utilized in classes is sitting in a storage room collecting dust points to school’s gross mismanagement of resources. The implications of that scene, however, concern a situation beyond the school walls.

Up-to-date handbooks and a computer also represent the advances in the world. They are left in the dark, unused, denying the children the skills that are so important in the modern world. While BPD detectives still write on typing machines, the school is equipped with a computer it is not even using for education purposes.
Castells points out that modern “knowledge-based economy” requires its workforce to possess analytical skills, to adapt and improve (2000b, 136). This can only be achieved by “upgraded educational institutions”, to which minorities, low-income groups and immigrants have only a limited access, especially the higher they go (2000b, 136). With the production being more information focused and more menial tasks being either automated or outsourced to different countries, the demands on education rise and with them the potential for increased inequality as the people from these social groups will find it harder to attain higher education and will be forced to seek employment elsewhere.

In this regard, David Simon argues, the school system is failing with its less than 30 percent graduation rate and more and more children deciding to participate in the informal economy and narcotics trade (Simon np). With no job opportunities, prevalent racism and prejudice, and indifferent system, there is not much else they can do.

5.2 No Work for the Willing

Both Venkatesh and Castells place the beginnings of the inner-city job market crisis after the end of the Second World War. Due to the increasingly mechanized nature of agricultural production in the South and more heavy industry focused production in the wartime era in the North, big number of black laborers migrated into the urban areas and inner-cities of production and transportation hubs (Castells 2000b, 141) – such as Baltimore with its harbor and steel production mills. Venkatesh mentions even hundreds of thousands of African-American youth joining in the gangs in Chicago in the post-war era (282), who were seeking employment in neighborhoods with no jobs. That time also
gave rise to the corporate gangs, as they eventually became an alternate source of income (283).

However, the effects of the global economy soon left these masses of migrated workers jobless. “U.S.-based transnational corporations’ interests in eliminating blue- and white-collar occupations” (Lucasi 136) are partially responsible, but Castells also puts a blame on the effects of the globalization of the production processes, which “greatly contributes to the elimination of those jobs that are costlier to perform in America, but not skilled enough to require location in a highly industrialized area environment” (2000b, 142). This resulted in the decline of the jobs that provided employment to the low-skilled workers of the inner-cities.

There are other job opportunities, as Castells points out, but their availability is slowly diminishing, especially for black men (2000b, 143). Services move away from the city centers to the suburbs, which results in bad accessibility of these positions, and of those that remain, African-Americans have to face prejudices and racism (2000b, 143). With the viable job opportunities disappearing and many people finding themselves unable to keep up with the constantly shifting demands of the labor market “the borderline between social exclusion and daily survival is increasingly blurred for a growing number of people in all societies” (2000b, 376). This leaves many people no other chance that to turn to the more illicit ways to earn livelihood.

These economies, which do not have to be necessarily tied to drug trade, often include whole neighborhoods with everybody participating in a different way from seemingly harmless activities such as producing cheap goods and services (Venkatesh 281) all the way to the most damaging element of the criminal economy of the inner-cities – narcotics.
5.3 Criminal Economy

To participate in the criminal economy becomes for many people the last resort when everything else has failed. Many have no other option than to participate as Niall Heffernan points out (41). In the first episode of the show, *The Wire* makes this point immediately known. D’Angelo Barksdale is tried for killing in self-defense and one of the witnesses, a janitor named William Gant, correctly identifies D’Angelo as the shooter, while other witness changes her story. This janitor, an African-American working in one of the few positions still widely available, is at the end of the episode found dead in a parking lot. He has been executed as a warning to all others who would dare to testify against the Barksdale organization. Even though Gant was not involved with the drug trade and detectives mention several times that he was a citizen, a working man, he still got involved against his will and paid the price.

The leaders of the gang operations, the lieutenants and drug bosses, are well aware that people in their neighborhoods have a very limited selection of job opportunities. From a young age, children are employed as lookouts, and runners for carrying vials. This serves two purposes, according to Peterson – they form a buffer zone between the police and the dealers (as the children are too young to be legally prosecuted) and they are also introduced and exposed to the gang culture further lowering the chances of their defection to legitimate means of earning livelihood (108).

Formal education is mocked by Bodie in the fourth season when he is trying to persuade Mike to stay on his crew and not return to school: “Come on, man, what the fuck do you want to go to school for? What do you wanna be? An astronaut? A dentist? A pay lawyer, nigga?” (4.03). Bodie cannot understand how anybody could pass up on a chance to have a paying job in a neighborhood like theirs and Mike’s personal code and discipline catch him off guard.
After Omar robs the stash house in the Pit on D’Angelo’s watch, Avon and Stringer suspect that he might have a snitch in his crew tipping off the stick-up boys. Stringer advises D’Angelo to not pay his people for a week and watch for anybody who seems to get by without any issues (suggestion in and of itself implying that being a low-level drug dealer is not that lucrative in the first place). The idea sounds strange to D’Angelo at first:

D’ANGELO: Yeah, but String, you don’t pay a nigger, he ain’t gonna work for you.

STRINGER: What, you think a nigger’s gonna get a job? You think these niggers gonna be like, “Fuck it, lemme quit this game here and go to college?” (1.05)

Coming from Stringer, who is attending classes on macroeconomics at the community college, it sounds rather hypocritical. After all he is not some run-of-the-mill street soldier. He is a top lieutenant in a criminal organization living a life of privilege. But that only accentuates the capitalistic or even exploitative nature of the gang culture, where the lowest-ranking members are just chess pawns destined to be used and then discarded. It is no coincidence that the empty heroin vials lying broken on the streets of Baltimore are also called soldiers – dead soldiers.

5.4 No Way Out

Duquan’s life is probably the hardest of the four protagonists. He lives in a toxic household with both of his parents being serious drug addicts. They sell his things for drugs and their neglect leads to the services being cut-off and an their eventual eviction. Because of the poor parenting, Duquan has no access to the bare necessities such as enough food or proper hygiene, earning him the unflattering nickname “Dukie”. He is
often ridiculed, harassed and shunned by his schoolmates and even adults, namely De’Londa Brice.

Despite these difficulties, Duquan manages to maintain a positive outlook. He never vilifies others and shows moments of care and tenderness. Such as when he hands repaired hand-held fan to the aggressive girl after the attack in Prez’ class and sits near her on the ground, when no one else does, to comfort her.

Duquan’s innocence, combined with the pity for his living situation, rallies many people to his aid. Randy gives him his lunch on the first day of school, Ms. Donnelly sends him a box of clothes, and Prez practically adopts him – giving him food, washing his clothes and letting him into the school’s shower room. Ms. Donnelly advises him against such practice and urges him to let go of Duquan. “The kids in this school aren’t yours,” she says after suggesting Prez and his wife have children of their own (4.12).

This discussion is most likely a result of Prez’s concerns about Duquan’s readiness for a high school. Due to the practice of social promotion, Duquan and a few other children are old enough (but likely not competent enough) to attend high school. This way they are forced into an unknown and intimidating territory. Duquan is not happy about the promotion, because he will not be able to see his friends in school now. Prez is also concerned, because he believes that Duquan is not ready for the next level of education, but there is nothing he can do.

The problem is not that Duquan is not smart enough. He is possibly the most consistent with his show of competence – he finds a broken hand-held fan and repairs it, he correctly understands the assignments given to him in class, and he quickly learns how to operate the computer and becomes the IT specialist of the class. He even teaches Prez how to use the computer before he leaves for high school. Duquan is smart and
handy, but too self-conscious for his own good. He quickly loses interest in the continuation of his education and leaves the high school premises disheartened.

This is where Duquan’s story starts its downward spiral. Prez sees Duquan in the finale, as the boy stands on the corner, now Mike’s morning crew chief, selling drugs. The pain and regret in Prez’s face are too obvious. The rest of Duquan’s story arc takes place in the final season of the series, where he finds his place in the world.

Just like Namond, Duquan proves to be too soft for the game. The rest of Mike’s crew ignore him at best. “I ain’t you Mike,” says Duquan, when Mike arrives to check up on the operation, aware of his own inadequacy. Mike offers to pay him for taking care of his little brother Bug, but the idea of being a glorified nanny does not sit well with Duquan: “What am I gonna do before Bug get home from school, clean the stove and bake some cookies?” (5.01).

Duquan once again becomes the target of ridicule and receives a severe beating from Mike’s crew after slapping Kenard for taunting him. In effect he fails to adhere to the social expectations of the street – he shows weakness and is not strong enough to command respect among his peers. Resolved to be the punching bag no longer, Duquan seeks out Cutty in his gym, where the veteran of the game tries to talk some sense into him and argues that learning how to fight will not dissuade his bullies:

    CUTTY: Not everything come down to how you carry it in the street. I mean, it do come down to that if you gonna be in the street. But that ain’t the only way to be.

    DUQUAN: Round here it is.

    CUTTY: Yeah. Round here it is. (5.05)

They both sadly conclude on the fact that an honest boy unsuitable for the work on the corner like Duquan will be at a serious disadvantage when looking for a way to live
other than to participate in the narcotics trade. Following the exchange with Cutty, who is unable to help him, Duquan wants Mike to teach him how to shoot a gun. He quickly finds out that he is no sharpshooter and Mike, like Cutty, tries to dissuade Duquan from pursuing the street life: “You got other skills, man. You smart like that” (5.05).

Encouraged this time, Duquan starts looking for an employment, but newspaper ads list only management or office positions with higher education requirements, the only exception being a position of a dancer in a club. Even Duquan struggles with some of the words the job descriptions include, and Mike does not even understand half of it. The education, however, is not the only roadblock Duquan encounters.

He wants to apply for a position at a shoe shop, but Poot, who has decided to leave the game after Bodie’s death and now works as a clerk at that store, is quick to dismiss Duquan. He sees through his thinly veiled lie about his age and “the manager, he ain’t gonna hire no on under 17” anyway (5.08). The only advice he has for fifteen-year-old Duquan is to stay in the game for now and try again when he gets older. With no way to seek a legitimate employment, Duquan accepts a job offer from a junk-collecting arabber and helps him with collecting and stealing scrap metal.

When Mike kills Snoop and needs to disappear until the things calm down, he drops off Bug at their aunt and Duquan asks to be left at the arabber stables. Mike is uncomfortable with that idea because he knows they do drugs, but has no other choice as staying with him would be too dangerous for Duquan.

With the stability of the life gone with Mike, Duquan must rely on arabbers for money and accommodations. Their acceptance is not cheap however. In the final episode he persuades Prez, claiming to be homeless, to lend him some money for a new flat and clean clothes. Prez, still wanting to help Duquan, gives him the money, but after
seeing Duquan approaching arabber, he disappointedly leaves. The money will not buy clothes. Duquan walks the same path his parents did and is last seen shooting up heroin in the stables.

5.5 Little Piece of Heaven

Unlike Namond, Duquan is not saved by an outsider intervening on his behalf. He is doomed to blindly wander around the neighborhood searching for who he is. His fall is tragic not only because both his parents were using, and he ultimately ends up like them, but also because until the last moment, Duquan was not willing to give up. He was willing to get tougher for the street, and when that did not work out, he was willing to earn an honest living. Namond had at least the reputation of his father to his name, but Duquan was nobody.

The fall into the drug addiction, surely hastened by the using arabbers, is only a result of his difficult life situation. Before Duquan, Wallace and D’Angelo also seek solace in drugs. The drug addiction stems from the “psychological injuries inflicted on people by everyday life in our societies” writes Castells (2000b, 177). According to his
prediction, there will always be a drug addiction and it will only get worse as the living situation worsens for more people (2000b, 177). This is the market the global criminal organizations dealing in narcotic trade seek to exploit. It is a market that can be divvied up and dominated by ruthless drug lords.

Ed Burns ascribes the rise in drug use to the loss of job opportunities. He believes that there will always be people who are not productive in the legitimate economy and these can be either educated in the hopes that they will become productive, or they can be left chasing the temporary high until they drop dead. It is a way, he believes, for the society to discard no longer needed workforce and wash their hands over the subsequent misery. “It’s your fault because you got addicted, not society’s fault” (qtd. in Alvarez np).

Duquan, who eventually finds his place in the informal economy as a junk collector (the same “profession” Bubbles practices for a while), reaches for the drugs likely because of the peer pressure from his new colleagues, predispositions from his family and lastly to cope with the realization that he does not belong – not on the corners and not in the regular society, which evidently has no need for him. He also becomes part of the game, joins the ranks of the dope fiends and then slowly fades away without anybody noticing. As one addict, Bubbles, comes clean and leaves the streets, another one takes his place.
6 Conclusion

Racial minorities of the inner-city are but one group severely affected by the changing world order. Working-class whites struggling to make a living off a dying industry on the waterfront are in the spotlight of the second season of the show and the situation of homeless people is addressed predominantly in the last season. Even though their communities are plagued by issues similar to those discussed in this thesis, they have enough unique predicaments to warrant a separate research to complete the picture of the Baltimorean underclass.

It is not the purpose of The Wire to deeply analyze many problems that plague modern society, neither is its aim to find solutions to those problems. Something like that is well beyond its scope. At the end of the day, The Wire is just a work of fiction made to provide entertainment with some food for thought on the side. Its creators’ political opinions manifest themselves through various characters and their actions, but the show does not provide an answer. It merely asks the right questions. Through these questions the show reveals that there is no universal solution, no immediate band-aid to simply fix everything.

Mike’s story is a story of a victim who has lost all hope in the system and good in people. He brings the matter of his abusive step-father to Marlo, because he is afraid that the social services would do more harm. The simplest solution is to get rid of the step-father permanently and Mike believes only Marlo can do that. He indebts himself to the drug lord in a good faith that he and his brother will have protection. This faith is betrayed by Marlo, who in the end stabs Mike in the back and drives him onto a lonesome road of an independent stick-up artist. Not constricted by law, Marlo proves to be more effective in dealing with Mike’s problem, but his unlawfulness is also a
double-edged sword that eventually threatens to cut Mike down, when he becomes a liability.

The ineffectiveness of the institutions is also criticized through Randy’s storyline. Young and promising student becomes a witness in a murder case and he is willing to cooperate with the law enforcement. However, correlated with the issue of the authorities not providing sufficient protection to witnesses, the police fail to protect Randy’s anonymity, which leads to a firebomb attack on his home and his return to a group home after his critically injured foster mother ends up in a hospital. Despite the best efforts of few invested individuals, Randy returns to the group home, where he grows hard and cynical as a result of his fight for survival.

As a son of a seasoned enforcer, Naymond is perfectly aware of what lies ahead of him. He has no illusions about the society at large. What is important is the corner game and how respected one is in the eyes of their peers. He has some big shoes to fill and he becomes increasingly aware of the fact that he might not be able to do so. Caught between the expectations of his family and criminal associates, and the larger society, Naymond becomes torn and masks his powerlessness with tantrums and rages. Luckily, Colvin, who makes an effort to get to know Naymond and see the boy for who he really is, shows him a way out and gives him a chance to leave the life of crime behind.

Many of the problems depicted in The Wire are at least amplified, if not caused, by the shifts in the labor market and the lack of employment opportunities for young men in at-risk communities. With the changes in the global economy, low-level job positions with minimal education requirements disappear from the big cities, leaving a considerable part of their populations with a limited access to legitimate sources of income – a weakness the criminal economy thriving on misery is ready to
Duquan walks that path of futility and realizes that the world has no need for him. Being too young to work and not ready to continue with his education, Duquan turns to the informal economy of the street and seeks solace in the embrace of drugs.

These issues are intertwined to such an extent that there cannot be a universal solution to them all. A meaningful change would require a considerable effort and alterations made to the current structures and processes. In the same way that an art critic does not have to be a brilliant artist themselves to offer a critique, *The Wire* challenges the status quo by pointing out system’s faults and shortcomings without delivering any satisfaction of resolution. Individual character’s stories are concluded in the end, but overall, nothing has changed. In the show’s finale, police are still hounding gangsters, drugs are still in circulation, and there are still thousands of people left to live in that vicious cycle of violence and despair.
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Summary

David Simon’s show *The Wire* offers a unique perspective on the postmodern society at the turn of the millennium. It is widely recognized as a great success of serialized storytelling and its attention to detail and unprecedented levels of realism garnered much attention and critical acclaim from critics, academia and wider audience alike. It pays special attention to the marginalized inhabitants of the inner-cities and their everyday struggle to navigate the difficult situation of their circumstances. With a problematic access to higher-quality education and entry-level job opportunities, the members of the underclass are often left to their own devices finding employment in the criminal economy of the urban underground ruled by drug lords and organized crime. This thesis uses critical commentaries by Manuel Castells and Sudhir Venkatesh to analyze how *The Wire* mediates these issues to its viewership. To that end the thesis follows the storylines of four pivotal characters; each exemplifying a different set of challenges that form the base of the everyday experience in a neighborhood overtaken by drugs and violence.

**Keywords:** David Simon, The Wire, Manuel Castells, Sudhir Venkatesh, juvenile criminality, inner-city experience, post-modernism, post-industrialism, criminal economy
**Resumé**

Televizní série z pera Davida Simona *The Wire – Špína Baltimoru* nabízí unikátní pohled na postmoderní společnost na přelomu tisíciletí. Série je obecně považována za velice úspěšný seriálový počin a pro její pozornost pro detail a nebyvalou úroveň realismu se dočkala uznání z řad kritiků, akademiků i širšího publika. Série se obzvláště zaměřuje na marginalizované obyvatele amerických nízkopříjmových čtvrtí a jejich každodenním zápas s jejich nejednoduchou životní situací. S problematickým přístupem k vyšší kvalitě vzdělávání a vstupním pracovním příležitostem musejí obyvatelé těchto městských částí hledat uplatnění v kriminální ekonomice městského podsvětí ovládané narkobarony a organizovaným zločinem. Tato práce staví na komentářích Manuela Castellse a Sudhira Venkateshe s cílem analyzovat, jak tyto problémy svým divákům přibližuje *The Wire*. Za tímto účelem práce sleduje příběhové linie čtyř klíčových postav seriálu, z nichž každá slouží jako ilustrace rozdílného souboru problémů, jež jsou součástí každodenního života ve čtvrti ovládané drogami a násilím.

**Klíčová slova:** David Simon, *The Wire – Špína Baltimoru*, Manuel Castells, Sudhir Venkatesh, kriminalita mladistvých, nízkopříjmové čtvrti, postmoderní společnost, postindustriální společnost, kriminální ekonomika