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Illiterates and Literates in Urban Society: The Mid-Nineteenth Century

Social, political, and emotional commentators—today as in the past century—persistently point to a *problem* of illiteracy. Their arguments are often vague and ambiguous, sometimes contradictory, especially concerning the more concrete aspects of literacy's presumed advantages and illiteracy's alleged disadvantages. They result, nonetheless, in a dramatically unfavorable assessment of the position of the illiterate as compared with that of the literate. In fact, since the early to mid-nineteenth century, as we have seen, those without the experience of education and without its badge of literacy, have been perceived as inferior and pathetic, alien to the dominant culture, subversive to social order, unequipped to achieve or produce, and denizens of self-perpetuating cultures of poverty. As exceptions to the processes that provide the vast majority of their fellows with literacy, illiterates are seen as different in attitude and social attributes. In 1933, M. C. McLean, reviewing retrospective census tabulations, offered an unemotional summary that stands as well for 1845 as 1979: "The illiterate class is below par in every attribute for which they were tested except one—tendency to crime—and . . . they show certain attributes which may or may not be antisocial but in any case are different from those shown by literate classes." [1]

This is the stuff of which myths are made; and, as with all myths, some important evidence does exist in support of these common conclusions. This and the two following chapters, which comprise Part One,

[1] See Chs. 1, 5 and 6 herein; H. E. Freeman and G. C. Kassebaun, "The Illiterate in American Society: Some General Hypotheses," *Social Forces,* 34 (1956), 371–375; M. C. McLean, *Illiteracy in Canada* (Ottawa, 1933: King's Printer, 1931 Census Monograph), 584.

shall present nineteenth-century evidence that lends some credibility to aspects of the literacy myth. Although these data cannot be neglected, they do not form a basis for a complete understanding of the social relations grounded in literacy in mid-nineteenth-century cities. Literacy's role was neither as simple nor as direct as contemporary opinion would predict. In a variety of ways, which intersect significantly with the larger parameters of social and economic life of the men and women who lived and worked in cities such as Hamilton, London, and Kingston, Ontario, in 1861, the possession or the lack of literacy had not the determining consequences that school promoters' rhetoric and middle-class moral proselytizing declaimed so frequently. Despite some points of accuracy, which undoubtedly contributed to the acceptance of the moral bases and the development of hegemony, literacy or illiteracy only infrequently carried an independent and distinct meaning. Rather, literacy's role was more typically a reinforcing or mediating one, which can only be understood in the specific context of social structural processes. Isolated from its social relationships, literacy takes on a reified and symbolic significance unwarranted by its own, more restricted influences. Moreover, when examined in this context, the analysis of literacy advances a more sensitive interpretation of the social structure itself and the place of the school. This forms the primary theme of this part of the study.

This interpretation of literacy-in-context questions traditional formulations, while suggesting the need for further comparative examination, and the potential for revision of the myth—the limits of the case-study approach employed here. Especially important are the issues that lie in the confluence of historical understanding and modern social theory, however infrequently the former are expressed in terms of the latter or how uncomfortably they may join. Regardless, the point at issue, which much of the following addresses, relates to the normative expectations and the normative comprehension of the presumed importance of literacy, an importance based more on theoretical expectations (as the earlier analysis indicates) than on empirical inquiries. This conjuncture is itself important, though hardly surprising; nonetheless, central ideas about literacy inform nineteenth-century opinion, historical thinking, and modern social thought, forming a broad and pervasive continuity. A brief review will establish the framework for our historical investigation.

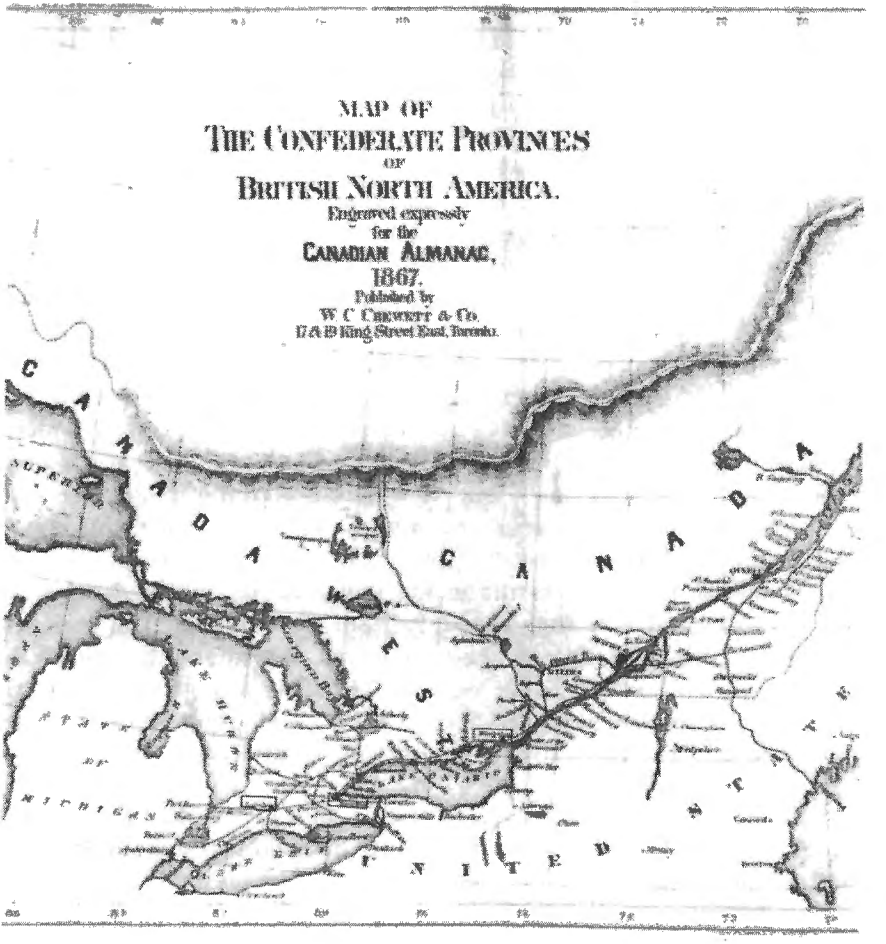
As noted above, literacy is commonly, and ambiguously, held to be critical to the processes and evolution of modern society and the place within them of modern men and women. Its role is taken as central and deterministic, a requirement, in fact, of development, both in the aggregate and in respect of individuals. A number of diverse theoretical

strands, unite to form this tenet of progressive social thought; many of them relate to this analysis. They cohere principally around notions about migration, social organization and integration, stratification and mobility, adjustment and assimilation, and social and economic progress.

Illiterates, those without the benefits of primary schooling in skills, values, and attitudes, it is held, are distinct and separate culturally and socially, perhaps even composing a "class," or "culture" (in today's jargon) such as McLean suggests. Alien to the dominant or "host" society, they are typically migrants from a different and "inferior" place of origin (with an emphasis on their ethnic or racial characteristics). Ill- or under-equipped to meet the demands made on them, their response is one of social disintegration, retreat, disorganization, or disruption. In this manner, their condition—and their lack of requisite abilities and attributes—severely restricts their own progress, as it hinders the larger social unit in which they reside. Trapped in a paralyzing poverty, they are, ironically, seen as unstable and rootless, either immobilized in pockets of penury or aimlessly moving about. Overwhelmingly, their condition is one of disorganization, an inability to adjust to demands or to assimilate the values and behavior required for normative success and advancement. Maladjusted and irrational in conduct and in the way they employ their resources, the illiterates' culture is synonymous with a "culture of poverty." In their segregation, personal and material resources, family life, cohesion, and communication, the poor illiterates are distinctive, degraded, detrimental, and self-perpetuating.[2]

Their dire position leaves the illiterates outside the dominant social processes as well, exacerbating their own disadvantages and enlarging the loss they represent to the society and the economy. Without skills, normative values, or approved patterns of conduct, their contribution is much more negative than positive (aside from the example they present to others), a drain on rather than a contribution to resources and production. Moreover, their existence threatens the function of internalized controls and the successful operation of a democratic, participatory social order. Comprising either a real or a symbolic threat, or both, to social progress, they are targets of abuse and denigration, which can

[2] See, for example, David Ward, "The Victorian Slum: An Enduring Myth?," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers,* 66 (1976), 323–336; S. L. Schlossman, "The 'Culture of Poverty' in Ante-Bellum Social Thought," *Science and Society,* 38 (1974), 150–166; Charles A. Valentine, *Culture and Poverty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Michael Anderson, *Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Eleanor Burke Leacock, ed., *The Culture of Poverty: A Critique* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), among an important revisionist literature.



"Map of the Confederate Provinces of British North America," engraved expressly for the *Canadian Almanac, 1867,* published by W. C. Chewett & Company, Toronto. [Map Collection, Archives of Ontario, Toronto]

in many cases become attacks upon their social existence—in rhetoric, in policy, or in action.

Finally, it is assumed illiterates do not profit from the promises of modern life and the benefits society can bestow upon them. Without the advantages of education, they are dominated by the fact of their lowly origins, unable to substitute educational achievement and its accompanying influences for ascribed characteristics and attributes. This failing—the putative result of their own weaknesses, not of the social structure—reinforces their station, prevents advancement and escape,

and challenges the premises of modern society. Attainment is prohibited inasmuch as they can not rise above their inheritance, but must persist as they are, with all the consequences for themselves and society.[3]

Rapid as this review has been, we may recognize here the main elements—but presented within an interpretation quite contrary to the more common, progressive and positive one—of much of modern thought, and of nineteenth-century commentators too. This is the context that must inform our inquiry—the focus of Part One.

A facile examination of the illiterate adults resident in Hamilton, Kingston, and London, 1861, might lead the investigator to concur in the common progressive view. Here are a body of men and women in significant if not large numbers who reveal common attributes in their social characteristics. Less than 10% of those above the age of 20 in each of the cities as counted by the census,[4] they present similarities in ethnic, demographic, and economic characteristics, in ways that the above might lead one to expect. When compared with literate adults (the literates of Hamilton, who serve as a control group), they seem to share a significant series of disadvantages. This congruence of compositional and situational features is revealing about the social structure of these places, their economies, and the immigration processes that fed them. Nevertheless, if viewed only superficially and in the aggregate, it is less revealing about the importance of literacy to social life and work. Maintaining analysis only at this level precludes an understanding of literacy's more complex role and merely reinforces the contemporary perceptions and their legacy in thought and theory.

[3] The shift from a predominant emphasis on ascriptive or inherited characteristics to achieved or acquired ones is of course a central tenet of modern social development, as well as one promise of education. See, among a large literature, Christopher Jencks *et al., Inequality* (New York: Basic Books, 1972); Raymond Boudon, *Education, Opportunity, and Social Inequality* (New York: Wiley, 1974); Barbara Jacobson and John M. Kendrick, "Education and Mobility: From Achievement to Ascription," *American Sociological Review,* 38 (1973), 439–460; Dorothy Wedderburn, ed., *Poverty, Inequality, and Class Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Gregory D. Squires, "Education, Jobs, and Inequality," *Social Problems* 24 (1977), 436–450; Ivan Berg, *Education and Jobs* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971); Michael Olneck and James Crouse, "Myths of the Meritocracy: Cognitive Skill and Adult Success in the United States," Institute for Research in Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Discussion Paper, 485-78 (1978). On Canada, see Lorne Tepperman, *Social Mobility in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1975); Carl Cuneo and James Curtis, "Social Ascription in the Educational and Occupational Attainment of Urban Canadians," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology,* 12 (1975), 6–24; Allan Smith, "The Myth of the Self-made Man in English Canada, 1850–1914," *Canadian Historical Review,* 59 (1978), 189–219.

[4] On the use of the census as a source for the study of literacy, see Appendix B.

Despite the confluence of opinion on literacy's fundamental contributions, its influences are far less direct and linear. Much more contradictory and complex, they require reexamination with new approaches. Therefore, in confronting those diverse elements of thought about literacy, this chapter examines five aspects: the social origins of illiterates; the process of immigration; work, wealth, and reward; homeownership, property, and residence; and family formation. As we will observe, the facts of mid-nineteenth-century life challenge many common views. The facts of immigration, for example, do not support contemporary reformers' perceptions nor do those of social-structural inequality. Migrants were selected individuals with important resources on which to draw. Immigrants represented no distinct class in themselves, but were socially ordered in ways that strikingly paralleled those of the larger population. Hardly an independent or dominating factor, literacy interacted with ethnicity, age, occupation, wealth, adjustment, and family organization, reinforcing and mediating the primary social processes that ordered the population, rather than determining their influences.

Furthermore, despite the widespread diffusion of literacy, social ascription—not achievement—remained dominant among the factors contributing to structural inequality. The illiterates themselves, finally, were neither all trapped in cultures of poverty nor all unable to attain some measure of success in wealth and work. They reveal themselves to be resourceful in the use of assets, personal and material, adapting to their new environments and surviving despite the circumstances militating against them. In sum, the facts of social reality contrast strikingly and significantly with social perceptions and social theories.

I. The Origins of Illiteracy: Ethnicity, Race, Sex, and Age

An analysis of the place of literacy in these Upper Canadian cities requires first the identification of those with and those without literacy. Who are these presumably disadvantaged persons, these exceptions to the social process that allotted some education to a majority of their fellows? What is their social composition? Exceptional men and women in ways that observers failed to note, illiterates were not randomly distributed among the adult population, nor did they numerically dominate any of its segments. Their characteristic identities are more regular and patterned—in ethnicity, race, age, and sex—indicating the critical connections tying literacy to the social structure and to processes of social inequality. These were the factors that contributed most significantly to

the numbers of the illiterate, and to their composition across the cities.

Ethnic origins form the first fact about the illiterates. Their composition is remarkably consistent in each of the cities: in their share of the total population and among the illiterate themselves (Table 2.1).[5] Ethnicity, a function of the joint influences of place of birth and religion, was predominant among the factors contributing to the conforma-

Table 2.1
Ethnicity of Adults, 1861

	Hamilton literates	Percentage illiterate	Hamilton illiterates	Kingston illiterates	London illiterates	Total illiterates
Irish Catholic						
N	1,292		547	334	140	1,021
%	15.0	29.7	60.6	66.1	37.8	57.4
Irish Protestant						
N	1,188		83	71	44	198
%	13.8	6.5	9.2	14.1	11.9	11.1
Scottish Presbyterian						
N	1,417		23	10	21	54
%	16.4	1.6	2.5	2.0	5.7	3.0
English Protestant						
N	2,045		64	16	42	122
%	23.7	2.9	7.1	3.2	11.4	6.9
Canadian Protestant						
N	1,153		29	15	17	61
%	13.4	2.5	3.2	3.0	4.6	3.4
Canadian Catholic						
N	181		7	22	4	33
%	2.1	3.7	0.8	4.4	1.1	1.9
Nonwhite/black						
N	94		86	4	29	119
%	1.1	48.0	9.5	0.8	7.8	6.9
Others						
N	1,246		64	33	73	170
%	14.5	4.9	7.1	6.5	19.7	9.6
Total						
N	8,616		903	505	370	1,778
%	100.0					
Population (total)	19,096			13,743	11,555	

[5] Those desiring more detailed numerical discussions, tables, and references may consult my "Literacy and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-Century City," unpub. PhD. Diss., University of Toronto, 1975.

tion of the illiterate, much as it was among the larger population of these places. The result of similar processes of settlement and social placement in each city, ethnic origins stratified the educational attainments of adult populations. Not surprisingly, given usual expectations, in each city, those of Irish Catholic origin were most often unable to read and write. Members of one of the largest immigrant groups, they were overrepresented among the illiterate, compared to their share of the total. Their religion, moreover, importantly influenced their disadvantaged status, as the contrast with Protestants of Irish birth shows. These Protestants were slightly underrepresented among the illiterate, but nonetheless also added a large number of illiterates. Irish births, first, contributed most significantly to illiterate numbers, as over 70% of those who were illiterate shared this origin; religion, however, differentiated their numbers inasmuch as Protestantism provided a greater impetus to literacy than Catholicism—a link that historians should well expect. In the ethnic factor lay the confluence of these culturally inseparable influences.

No other ethnic group played the role of the Irish and the Irish Catholic in determining the origins and social structure of illiteracy, yet ethnicity and race served to distinguish the experiences and social position of other groups too. The United States-born were also disproportionately present among illiterates; in Hamilton and London, they were the second largest numerical group among them. For these individuals, race was the determining factor. A great many of the U.S.-born migrants were black, a group whose 48% rate of illiteracy was by far the highest, almost twice that of the Irish.[6] Black adults, in fact, accounted for 10% of Hamilton's illiterates and 8% of London's, while constituting less than 2% of the cities' populations. Blacks, and U.S.-born whites too, belonged predominantly to Methodist and Baptist churches, overrepresented denominations. The whites alone, however, were neither disproportionately present nor exceptional in frequency of illiteracy. In this way, race joined with Irish birth and Catholicism to form the primary factors contributing to illiteracy in these mid-century cities.

The Scottish-born added few to the illiterate. Significantly, birth and religion again coupled as Presbyterian and Church of Scotland communicants held the lowest rates of illiteracy; rates were higher in London, for example, where other Scots resided. Those from an area with a long tradition of primary schooling, a state church, and a religious impulse that manifested itself partly through a favorable attitude

[6] As elsewhere, there is a high probability of underenumeration of blacks in the Canadian censuses; see Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 484–496.

toward universal literacy could not be expected to be often illiterate, reinforcing the crucial role of religion in the spread of literacy.[7] The English and Welsh, by comparison, were larger groups in each city. As one result of their numbers, they supplied the third-largest group of illiterates, but they were not disproportionately present among them nor among their share in the population.

In this largely immigrant society, native-born Canadians added few illiterates. A plurality of the cities' total population, many native-born persons were under the age of twenty; the adults among them nonetheless were underrepresented among the illiterates. As with the Irish, a Protestant–Catholic religious differential was important, as Canadian Catholics (including many of French origin) had higher levels of illiteracy than Canadian Protestants, although the degree of difference was much less. Among the Quebec-born, higher rates of illiteracy are found in Kingston, much nearer the provincial boundary, than in London, which suggests the possibility that migratory distances may relate to literacy.

In ethnic origins we find the first factor among the determinants of illiteracy; later we will consider the intersection of ethnicity with social-structural inequality in evaluating the functions of literacy. Here we note two points: the similarity among illiterates in each of the commercial cities and the origins of the great majority in places in which educational opportunities were restricted and rates of illiteracy were high—rural, poverty-stricken Ireland and the U.S. South, with its large population of slaves. Ethnicity (and race), while first, was not the only important factor.

The role of ethnic origins, and the disproportionate and undoubtedly highly visible place of the Irish and the Catholic among the illiterate, obscures one fundamental conclusion. Despite the facts of predominance and ethnic stratification, the great majority of the Irish were *literate*: in Hamilton only 20% of all Irish-born were illiterate, and estimates suggest a slightly lower rate in London and Kingston. Among Catholics, 70% were literate, as were 93% of Protestants. They represented, to be sure, a majority of all illiterates, and much of this analysis will focus on them. Nonetheless, we must not—as contemporaries did—neglect the fact that the greatest numbers were able to read and write. Despite the plethora of contemporary and more recent opinion, these immigrants stand out as special individuals with a surprisingly high rate

[7] See Ch. 1 above; Kenneth Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England* (New York: Norton, 1974); Lawrence Stone, "Literacy and Education in England, 1640–1900," *Past and Present*, 42 (1969), 61–139; Carlo Cipolla, *Literacy and Development in the West* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).

of literacy; dominant images are based in error and social myths and fears not founded in social realities.[8]

Age and sex were also critical factors in the composition of illiteracy, and as with ethnicity, a common pattern among the cities emerges. In each case, illiterates were older, 4 or 5 years on the average, than the literate adults of Hamilton, with illiteracy increasing with age (Table 2.2). More revealing than this small gap (which indicates that illiterates were not elderly remnants of a time with less educational opportunity) is the cohort distribution. Only among the youngest adults (20–29) were they largely underrepresented; illiterates closely resembled the distribution of those 30–39. After that age, they were overrepresented to a relatively constant but small degree. Expansion in education was a recent phenomenon, as the literacy rates of youngest adult cohorts point directly to the period of international mass-educational impulses: from the late 1830s to the 1850s, assuming that most schooling occurred before the age of 15.[9] Importantly, this is the only break in distribution; those under 40 faced no such discontinuity but had a more common experience. Old age and the effects of mortality were levelers, closing the gaps without indication of greater age-specific mortality for illiterates. The function of age, finally, was one shared by the ethnic groups.

The contribution of sex to illiteracy is much more distinct, although it intersects significantly with the role of aging. Most obvious is a sharply imbalanced sex ratio: a 3–2 differential female disadvantage in each city (Table 2.3). Women predominated among the illiterate, one important sign of their unequal status in this society, reflecting sexual inequality in educational opportunity through and past mid-century. Sex represented another, inherited characteristic that influenced the structure of illiteracy. Sexual imbalances, moreover, have become a common finding in historical literacy studies, with the important exception of Sweden, which had a long tradition of home education. The degree of imbalance could differ, apparently, through migration and regional effects; rural areas in Upper Canada, for example, in some cases show near-parity ratios and even female ratio-advantage. The latter cases are, however, rather rare.[10]

[8] See, for example, S. C. Johnson, *A History of Emigration from the United Kingdom to North America, 1763–1912* (London, 1913), 320.

[9] See, as one example, R. D. Gidney, "Elementary Education in Upper Canada: A Reassessment," *Ontario History*, 65 (1973), 169–185. See also, Michael B. Katz, "Who Went to School?" *History of Education Quarterly*, 12 (1972), 432–454; Ian E. Davey, "Educational Reform and the Working Class: School Attendance in Hamilton, Ontario, 1851–1891," unpub. PhD. Diss., University of Toronto, 1975.

[10] See Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), Ch. 2; Carroll Smith Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, "The

Table 2.2
Ages of Adults, 1861

Age	Hamilton literates	Hamilton illiterates	Hamilton total adult population [a]	Kingston illiterates	Kingston total adult population [a]	London illiterates	London total adult population [a]
20–29							
N	3,264	221	3,501	97	2,480	83	2,149
%	37.9	24.5	37.5	19.2	37.7	22.3	37.8
30–39							
N	2,447	249	2,705	168	1,814	102	1,596
%	28.4	27.5	29.0	33.3	27.6	27.4	28.0
40–49							
N	1,545	211	1,768	114	1,205	78	1,014
%	17.9	23.4	18.9	22.5	18.3	21.0	17.8
50–59							
N	806	130	824	68	575	59	563
%	9.4	14.4	8.8	13.5	8.7	15.9	9.9
60–69							
N	403	63	368	38	331	39	261
%	4.7	7.0	3.9	7.5	5.0	10.4	4.6
70+							
N	152	29	172	20	168	11	108
%	1.8	3.2	1.9	4.0	2.6	3.0	1.9
Total							
N	8,617	903	9,338	505	6,573	372	5,691
%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.9	100.0	100.0
Mean Age	35.9	39.8	—	40.5	—	41.2	—

[a] Data are from published census tabulations.

Table 2.3
Sex of Adults, 1861

	Hamilton literates	Hamilton illiterates	Hamilton total adult population [a]	Kingston illiterates	Kingston total adult population [a]	London illiterates	London total adult population [a]	Total illiterates
Male								
N	4,202	341	4,897	194	3,161	147	2,820	682
%	48.8	37.8	52.4	38.5	48.1	39.7	49.6	38.4
Female								
N	4,414	561	4,441	310	3,412	223	2,871	1,094
%	51.2	62.2	47.6	61.5	51.9	60.3	50.4	61.6
Total								
N	8,616	902	9,338	504	6,573	370	5,691	1,776
%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

[a] Data are from published census tabulations.

The ethnic factor exacerbated the role of gender, as females in the largest group of illiterates, the Irish-Catholic and Protestant, suffered the greatest and most constant imbalance in sex ratios. Exceeding virtually all other groups, over ⅔ of Irish women were educationally disadvantaged; only the Canadian-born showed a comparable educational disadvantage. Such was the place of women born in Ireland, and the process of educational opportunity in that impoverished land. Women's position differed greatly, with no disproportion, among two other groups, however: the English Protestants and the blacks. This is significant, for as we will see, illiterate members of these groups fared relatively well economically, suggesting a connection between some success in society and a more equal distribution of education. Nonetheless, women dominated among the illiterates. Unequal allotment of schooling in an unequal society missed them most often; the structure of illiteracy was punctuated by sex, as it was by ethnicity.

Not all women suffered this differential equally. Age and sex were not independent influences on the origins of illiteracy in these cities; they intersected crucially in determining the structure of illiteracy. The youngest cohorts of women were most severely disadvantaged, exceeding their overall disproportion and climbing to largest disparities among those aged 20–29, declining thereafter (Table 2.4, Figure 2.1). Importantly, these were precisely the ages at which the effects of increased educational opportunity were detected. The broader chances for schooling, at least at first, were not shared by the sexes, but were ones in which males dominated. In Hamilton, for example, women of these ages continued to have restricted opportunities, regardless of ethnicity. The gender gap narrowed, with the aging of the cohorts, approaching near equality only among the very oldest. Illiteracy embraced a larger share of women at virtually all ages than it did men; the experience of the oldest probably reflects age-specific mortality differentials rather than any earlier time of greater equality. The pattern, finally, held among all ethnic groups, as the sexual imbalances were a common theme even if the degree could differ. Sex, in this way, mediated against a potentially levelling impact of aging, contributing to a lower status and greater disadvantage for women, among the illiterate and throughout

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Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth Century America," *Journal of American History,* 60 (1973), 332–356; Davey, "Trends in Female School Attendance in Mid-Nineteenth Century Ontario," *Histoire sociale,* 8 (1975), 238–254. Lockridge, *Literacy;* Cipolla, *Literacy;* on Sweden, see Egil Johansson, "Literacy Studies in Sweden: Some Examples," *Canadian Social History Project, Report,* 5 (1973–74), 89–123. Graff, "Literacy and Social Structure in Elgin County, Upper Canada, 1861," *Histoire sociale,* 6 (1973), 25–48.

Table 2.4
Age by Sex, 1861 (Three Cities Combined)

Age	Literates			Illiterates		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
20–29						
N	1,413	1,851	3,264	130	271	401
%	33.6	41.9	37.9	19.1	24.8	22.6
30–39						
N	1,280	1,166	2,447	195	322	517
%	30.5	26.4	28.4	28.6	29.4	29.1
40–49						
N	804	741	1,545	151	252	403
%	19.1	16.8	17.9	22.1	23.0	22.7
50–59						
N	416	390	806	106	151	257
%	9.9	8.8	9.3	15.5	13.8	14.5
60–69						
N	207	196	403	74	65	139
%	4.9	4.5	4.7	10.9	5.9	7.8
70+						
N	82	70	152	26	33	59
%	2.0	1.6	1.8	3.8	3.0	3.3
Total						
N	4,202	4,414	8,617	682	1,094	1,776
%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.9	100.0

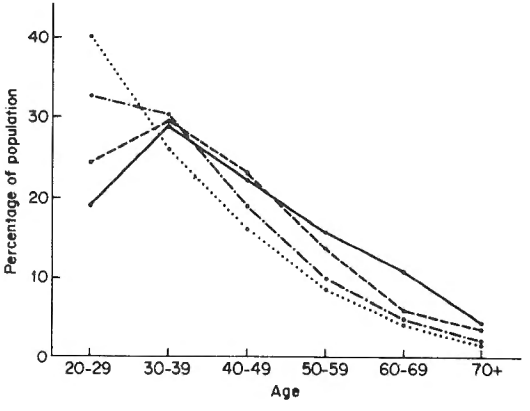

Figure 2.1 Age–sex structure, 1861. (——) Illiterate males; (– – –) illiterate females; (– • – •) literate males; (• • •) literate females.

the society. Changes in the provision of education affected males more than females, as sex continued to shape the origins of illiteracy in striking fashion.

Ethnicity and race, age and sex—these represent the major structural features of illiteracy in urban Ontario in 1861. The ascribed characteristics of Irish birth, Catholicism, color, and female sex, as they intersected with age, constituted the dominant forces among the origins of illiteracy. Identifying the illiterate, these factors interacted with the facts of everyday life, work, residence, and family to shape the role that literacy played.

II. Literacy and the Migration Process

Central to ethnic origins was the experience of migration, the process which pushed and pulled these men and women, literate or illiterate, from their homelands to these and other urban places in North America. Literacy's contribution to migration was important and direct, constituting one of its clearest influences. Migrants to these cities, and probably to places throughout North America, were selected individuals whose rate of literacy was higher than that found among those living in their birth places, regardless of origins, age, or sex. Immigrants, students have come to recognize, were special kinds of people; literacy was among their distinctive characteristics.[11]

Consider the Irish first, the group with the largest representation among the illiterates. As already noted, only 20% of them were illiterate. In Ireland, though, according to the 1841 census, 54% could neither read nor write, or 56% if only nonurban places (the origins of most migrants) are considered.[12] Since these populations comprised all those

[11] See Barbara A. Anderson, "Internal Migration in Modernizing Society: The Case of Late Nineteenth Century European Russia," unpub. Ph.D. Diss., Princeton University, 1973; Larry H. Long, "Migration Differentials by Education and Occupation: Trends and Variations," *Demography*, 10 (1973), 243–258; Sune Åkerman, "Mobile and Stationary Populations: The Problem of Selection," in *Literacy and Society in a Historical Perspective: A Conference Report*, ed. Egil Johansson (Umeå: Umeå University, 1973), 67–81.

[12] T. W. Freeman, *Pre-Famine Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957), 133. Complications arise in the comparability of data. There is little information on the regions within the places of origin, and literacy rates varied tremendously within national areas; we are left with national rates. Bases for comparison differ as well, from census data to signatures, marriage registers, surveys by educational and statistical societies, prison records. A final complication is the timing of migration, which

aged 6 or more years, adult illiteracy would probably be underestimated, for the new Irish educational emphasis, in the form of the National System, was beginning to be felt by this date. So, the Irish immigrants rated especially high in their literacy ability, whether they are compared with rates in rural or in urban Ireland. As with all illiterate immigrants, females from Ireland predominated, with a greater than 10 percentage-point difference. Not until the late 1870s and the 1880s, in fact, did the Irish national literacy levels begin to approximate those of the urban Canadian Irish: a gap of 30 or 40 years in educational advantage for the migrants, as most of them arrived during the famine exodus of 1845–1852.[13]

Projecting, retrospectively, from 1871 marriage registers, religious differences may be assessed. A greater gap separated Catholic and Protestant illiteracy in Ireland than in places like Hamilton (40 to 14%, respectively, in Ireland; 30 to 7% in Hamilton), and the migrants exhibited higher levels than co-religionists who stayed behind.[14] In literacy ability these migrants were special persons, whose experience indicates an important relationship. And of course, this selection process resulted in a very highly literate immigrant population, even among the economically depressed Irish Catholics.

Literacy influenced not only the selection of the immigrants but also the distance they migrated. The Irish provide one clear example of this. A great many migrated only as far as Great Britain; that is, across only the Irish Sea and not the Atlantic, forming a major migratory stream to urban and rural work and with both seasonal and permanent tributaries. Researchers such as Robert Webb have located areas of Irish residence with higher illiteracy rates than those of predominantly native-born districts and Irish parishes with higher illiteracy rates than mixed areas. Educational-society surveys of two London areas in 1837, for example, reported 49 to 55% of adults (parents) unable to read.[15] If these rates are compared to those from the 1841 Irish Census, we find that

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obscures attempts to pinpoint a baseline for the date of migration. Only general tendencies may be established, to await detailed confirmation.

[13] See Donald Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970); see also, R. E. Kennedy, Jr. *The Irish: Emigration, Marriage and Fertility* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Freeman, *Ireland,* 133; Cipolla, *Literacy,* 124, 73; Oliver MacDonagh, "The Irish Famine Emigration to the United States," *Perspectives in American History,* 10 (1976), 357–446.

[14] Cipolla, *Literacy,* 73; Freeman, *Ireland,* 133, *passim.*

[15] Freeman, *Ireland;* Webb, "Working Class Readers in Early Victorian England," *English Historical Review,* 65 (1950), 333–351. On Irish settlement in London, see Lynn H. Lees, "Patterns of Lower Class Life: Irish Slum Communities in Nineteenth Century London," in *Nineteenth Century Cities,* ed. Stephan Thernstrom and Richard Sennett (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 359–385.

short-distance migrants had literacy levels at best only marginally above those of people at home; the difference does not compare with that of those who made the lengthier and more arduous journey to North America.

The proportion of illiterate migrants and their share of the migratory stream seems to have decreased proportionately to the distance moved, and decreased radically when the Atlantic was confronted. The relationship of literacy to opportunity, awareness, and motivation remains obscure and many without literacy were able to make major movements. Nonetheless, it may well be, as Barbara Anderson has argued, that illiterate migrants came from regions of above-average literacy, in which their position would be enhanced. Their absolute illiteracy and its potential disadvantages in comparison with the position of literates could have been mediated by place of residence and proximity to information, reducing relatively the effects of their illiteracy.[16] They too would be "selected" migrants. Regardless, literacy related directly to migration, and levels of literacy interacted with distance of movement.

The relationship is supported by the experience of the other migrants. English-born immigrants to the cities also had substantially lower levels of illiteracy. In Hamilton and the other cities, only 3.2% were illiterate, while rates in England remained much higher, judging from marriage registers from 1800 to 1861. In 1800, for example, about 50% could not sign their names (40% of males; 60% of females), and in 1861, the rate was still 30% (25% men; 35% women).[17] Migration selected a special segment of the adult population in terms of their literacy.

The Scottish immigrants reveal the same patterns. The most literate of all migrants, they left a land of very high literacy. In 1851, 80% of adults (10 years or over) in Scotland were able to read and write, and between 1855 and 1861, only 15–18% of newlyweds were illiterate (men 10–12%; women 21–25%).[18] In Hamilton, however, only 1.8% of the Scottish-born were illiterate, with perhaps a few more in the other cities. Once again, the evidence, however imperfect, strongly indicates that immigration was selective of literates among Scotland's population, and

[16] B. Anderson, "Internal Migration."

[17] Roger Schofield, "The Measurement of Literacy in Pre-Industrial England," in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 311–325, "Dimensions of Illiteracy, 1750–1850," *Explorations in Economic History*, 10 (1973), 445, Figure 2. See also, Webb, "Readers". For data after 1839, see Great Britain, *Annual Reports of the Registrar General of Births, Deaths, and Marriages.*

[18] Cipolla, *Literacy*, 18, 115; Lockridge, *Literacy;* Webb, "Literacy among the Working Classes in Nineteenth Century Scotland," *Scottish Historical Review*, 33 (1954), 114, 100–114.

that migrants had special characteristics. To their new homes these immigrants brought skills and personal resources, a contribution which needs to be further emphasized in studies of immigration and social development.

U.S.-born migrants, by contrast, exhibit the pattern noted for shorter-distance journeys, such as those of the Irish to England and the French Canadians to Ontario. These adults, white and black together, had an illiteracy rate of 17% in Hamilton, similar to that in the other cities. The impact of race must be distinguished here, for only 11% of whites were illiterate. U.S. census data from 1840 (which may underestimate illiteracy) reveal a 9% level of illiteracy; the 1850 Census found 10% for native-born whites.[19] The areas from which most immigrants to Canada came were even more literate places: New England, New York, the old Northwest. These migrants, we may judge, show no exceptional abilities with regard to literacy; selectivity apparently did not function over a short distance—perhaps it was not required.

Assessments of the literacy levels of blacks from the United States are much more difficult, for there exist fewer data on which to draw. However, it seems that literacy played a more significant role in their movements than it did for whites. Blacks obviously came for different reasons and responded to different pressures. In Hamilton, 48% of black adults were illiterate in 1861, a rate similar to that in London and Kingston. Black illiteracy was first reported in the 1850 U.S. census: 43% of free blacks and, what is doubtful, 100% of slaves.[20] It remains impossible to distinguish the free blacks from the fugitive slaves resident in Canada, yet it is known that many ex-slaves migrated via the Underground Railroad. Very possibly, black migrants to these cities were, as a group, more often literate than U.S. blacks; some degree of selection may well have been at work in determining who came, although we can not precisely evaluate its significance.

Literacy, we may now conclude, served an important function in the process of migration and the peopling of these cities, especially for the longer distance migrations. This relationship, in fact, is not peculiar to North America: studies of nineteenth-century European Russia and Sweden and contemporary surveys point to the same phenomenon in those countries. Anderson, for one, found evidence of selection of mi-

[19] U.S. Commissioner of Education, *Annual Report,* 1870, 478–479; and the Census volumes for those years. For data from wills, to 1790, see Lockridge, *Literacy.*

[20] See Winks, *Blacks.* On attitudes toward education in the South, see William R. Taylor, "Toward a Definition of Orthodoxy," *Harvard Educational Review,* 36 (1966), 412–426; Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordon Roll* (New York: Pantheon, 1974); Thomas Webber, *Deep Like the Rivers* (New York: Norton, 1978); Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964); note 19 above.

grants (literate or not) from areas of high literacy, concluding that literacy ranked among the key explanatory variables in accounting for differential migrations. Migrants, as well, tended to come from areas of what has been called "cultural modernization" and had more characteristics indicative of modernity, skill, or sophistication than nonmigrants. Even illiterates, she concludes, if they were originally from an area with higher literacy levels, were likely to have more and better information and to be more receptive to new ideas than illiterates from other places. Indeed, they might hold some advantage over literate persons from less-advanced areas.[21] Perhaps then many North American immigrants were these kinds of exceptional persons regardless of their own literacy or illiteracy. Anderson's analysis indicates that the most modern came to the cities, a finding adding another important implication for the study of literacy and North American development. The data for the further exploration of these ideas do not now exist; however, the issues raised here could well be the subjects of future interpretive studies.

An analysis of shorter-term movement than the Russian case further supports our conclusions. Sune Åkerman, studying nineteenth-century Sweden, and Larry Long, researching the contemporary United States, also link education to migration distance. Both find that short-distance migrants reveal no educational advantage.[22] The mid-nineteenth-century migration patterns, with their direct relationship to literacy, were hardly unique; immigrants were exceptional, selected men and women. They were overwhelmingly literate in comparison with the people in their places of origin; they were not the dregs of their society that contemporaries and school promoters were so quick to conclude they were. The Irish in particular stand out. In sum, migrations brought to the cities a population with some definite skills, undoubtedly offering them important advantages for social and economic development. The illiterates too gained through selectivity. They also were primarily selected by their inherited characteristics, reflecting the structures of social inequality.

III. Work, Wealth, and Reward

The relationship between schooling and success and the relative importance of achievement over ascription undoubtedly constitute two of the most profound issues in modern social science and social theory.

[21] B. Anderson, "Migration", Chapter X, 8–9.

[22] Long, "Differentials"; Åkerman, "Populations".

In pursuit of these matters, more words are written and more data are collected, I suspect, than in any other area of social inquiry. This is hardly surprising, for the centrality of education in the attainment of prestigious work and its commensurate rewards, and the dominance of achievement over social ascription is at once a major component of modern society with its stress on equality (of opportunity, at least) and an emotionally charged ideal of democratic social progress. The existence and the maintenance of opportunities through access to education and the continued ability to substitute attainment for origins, largely as a result of schooling, represent the progressive evolution of the social organization, even while they insure its future. The premise of these social principles lies in the interpretation that before modernization and mass education—in traditional societies—rewards were distributed more on the basis of ascriptive, inherited characteristics than on the basis of achieved ones. Social placement derived from continuity and succession—primarily natal. The transition—in theory, a major and irreversible shift—occurred with the impact of modernization, and its concomitant institutions, on the social structure. The school, in these formulations, became the setting for much more equal opportunities to advance, as the substitution of achievement for ascription triumphed in social theory as the ideal (and presumably an actualized one) for a new distribution of rewards and positions. The line separating theory and rhetoric from social reality continues to be a difficult and debated one, as both contemporary and historical studies reveal; regardless, the dominance of democratic ideology based upon educational achievement remains firmly in place.[23] (One might add, as well, that students of the relationships between schooling and success are also, by and large, professional educators, who have professional and personal investments in the value of education.)

Nineteenth-century commentators and school promoters appear even more certain of the necessity of education for achievement than modern students and theorists; they had little doubt at all. Egerton Ryerson put it quite plainly when he asked, "How is the uneducated and unskilled man to succeed in these times of sharp and skilful competition and

[23] The literature on these questions is mammoth and growing daily. See however, the works cited in note 3 above, and Peter Blau and O. D. Duncan, *The American Occupational Structure* (New York: Wiley, 1967); W. H. Sewell and R. M. Hauser, *Education, Occupation, and Earnings* (New York: Academic Press, 1975); Sewell, Hauser, and D. L. Featherman, eds., *Schooling and Achievement in American Society* (New York: Academic Press, 1976). For an introduction to the historical literature, see Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools* (New York: Praeger, 1975); Diane Ravitch, "The Revisionists Revised," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Education*, 4 (1977), 1–84 (revised ed. pub. in 1978 by Basic Books).

sleepless activity?" Answering his own rhetorical question, he was certain that "everyman, unless he wishes to starve outright, must read and write, and cast accounts. . . ." [24] This interpretation followed from Ryerson's prototypical view of the components and content of schooling (discussed in Chapter 1); its connection with more recent affirmations is clear. Based on the claim that the attainment of some measure of schooling is instrumental, and required, for occupational and economic success, it was promoted widely and frequently. The attainment of literacy, or at least the acquisition of some education, is considered necessary and sufficient for individuals to overcome their other ascribed characteristics, including those stemming from ethnic origins, family and class background, and sometimes sex and race. Achievement, therefore, is held out as an avenue to those who seek to surmount the handicaps of their social and cultural inheritance, as the poor and immigrant were often expected (or were hoped) to do. The school, of course, in its new institutional structure was offered as the agency best suited for this task. The ideal of success and mobility, however, cautiously presented or qualified in the rhetoric of school promotion, aided, no doubt, the work of formal education in support of the moral economy.

The economic experience of the illiterates, whose origins have been examined, provides an appropriate opportunity for evaluating the promises of modern achievement. Their positions, we would expect, were determined directly by their lack of educational attainment as reflected by their illiteracy. Without this accomplishment, their opportunities for success should be severely restricted, if not totally obstructed. To the superficial observer, in fact, their occupational and economic situations affirm expectations and reinforce the understanding that literacy laid the basis for advancement.

That conclusion, which this section challenges, is incomplete. Regardless of the promise of achievement-through-education (and the probable results of a simple examination of the status of illiterates), qualities such as education and literacy proved insufficient, by themselves, to negate facts of birth, inheritance, and structural inequality. The continued dominance of ascriptive characteristics and a rigidly stratified social structure were far more important influences on economic rewards than educational achievement and literacy.[25] The process

[24] Ryerson, "The Importance of Education to a Manufacturing and a Free People," *Journal of Education,* 1 (1848); *Journal of Education,* 7 (1854), 134; see also Ch. 5.

[25] My perspective on stratification and inequality is indebted to the work of Michael Katz in particular. See *The People of Hamilton, C. W.* esp. Chs. 1, 2, 3, in addition to the literature cited above and modern sociological inquiries, such as those of D. Trieman, E. Laumann, S. Lipset and R. Bendix, B. Barber, M. Tumin, R.

of stratification related directly to ascribed characteristics, which overwhelmingly determined the structures of occupation and wealth. Much as ethnicity influenced the social distribution of education, as we have seen, it also predominated in determining economic position and rewards. Social stratification, consequently, seldom related directly to literacy: most rewards were based on ethnicity, age, and sex. The resulting disparity between promise of achievement and social processes shows literacy to be a mediating and reinforcing factor, not an autonomous or determining one. For many individuals, the attainment of literacy had relatively little effect; for others, though, it could matter. Differential rewards accrued to members of different ethnic groups whether they achieved literacy or not. Only through an intensive analysis of the distribution of occupation and wealth does a clear picture of the complex role of literacy emerge.

The relationship of literacy and schooling to occupational success, with its requirements of skill and performance, is seldom questioned, despite the contradictory results of many empirical examinations. Not surprisingly, illiterate workers clustered in the lower-ranking levels of unskilled work in the three mid-century cities of Hamilton, Kingston, and London (Table 2.5).[26] Highly stratified, more than half of employed illiterates were unskilled common laborers; many others held semiskilled positions. They were not overrepresented, however, in this transitional level, as they were among the lowest ranking. On the surface, we have strong evidence for affirming the expected relationship of illiteracy to low skill and low status. The social reality, though, was not so simple. For example, note that, according to the tabulations, illiterate workers were not a majority at any occupational level. Although the proportions of illiterates increased with lower-class position, significantly, less than one fourth of even the unskilled and only 7% of the semiskilled were illiterate. Despite the disproportionate clustering of the uneducated, a full ¾ of the laborers and 93% of the semiskilled possessed literacy skills. Their achievement was insufficient to influence

Collins, and S. Ossowski. A good review is E. C. Laumann, ed., *Social Stratification* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970). Recent historical work while mixed, is important too, especially that of S. Thernstrom, C. Griffen, T. Hershberg, R. S. Neale, J. Foster, G. Stedman Jones, E. P. Thompson, E. J. Hobsbawm.

[26] I employ the Five Cities Occupational Scale, as determined by Katz, Stuart Blumin, Laurence Glasco, Clyde Griffen, and Theodore Hershberg for comparison of their data on nineteenth century cities. A copy appears in Appendix C. On problems associated with the use of occupations, see Katz, "Occupational Classification in History," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 3 (1972), 63–88; Clyde Griffen, "Occupational Mobility in 19th Century America: Problems and Possibilities," *Journal of Social History*, 5 (1972), 310–330.

Table 2.5
Occupational Hierarchy, 1861

	Hamilton literates	Percentage illiterate	Hamilton illiterates	Kingston illiterates	London illiterates	Total illiterates
			Six categories			
Professional/ proprietor						
N	306		3	1	—	4
%	3.6	1.0	0.3	0.2	—	0.2
Nonmanual/ small proprietor						
N	768		21	13	6	40
%	8.9	2.7	2.3	2.6	1.6	2.2
Artisanal/ skilled						
N	1,467		72	34	29	135
%	17.0	4.8	8.0	6.7	7.8	7.6
Semiskilled						
N	959		75	85	32	192
%	11.1	7.3	8.3	16.8	8.6	10.8
Unskilled						
N	638		216	107	84	407
%	7.4	25.3	23.9	21.2	22.6	22.9
None/Others [a]						
N	4,479		516	265	221	1,002
%	52.0	10.3	57.2	52.5	59.4	56.3
Total						
N	8,617		903	505	372	1,780
%	100.0		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
			Five categories (employed)			
Professional/ properietor						
N	306		3	1	—	4
%	7.4	—	0.8	0.4	—	0.5
Nonmanual/ small proprietor						
N	768		21	13	6	40
%	18.6	—	5.4	5.4	4.0	5.1
Artisanal/ skilled						
N	1,467		72	34	29	135
%	35.4	—	18.6	14.2	19.2	17.4
Semiskilled						
N	959		75	85	32	192
%	23.2	—	19.4	35.4	21.2	24.7

(continued)

Table 2.5 *(continued)*

	Hamilton literates	Percentage illiterate	Hamilton illiterates	Kingston illiterates	London illiterates	Total illiterates
Unskilled						
N	638		216	107	84	407
%	15.4	—	55.8	44.6	55.6	52.3
Total						
N	4,138		387	240	151	778
%	100.0		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

[a] Largely women (wives, widows).

occupational position or to benefit them; other factors were more important.

Many other illiterates, in fact, fared better, despite their lack of schooling. Almost one fifth gained artisan or skilled work, and they were distributed across a broad range of jobs. Blacksmiths, cabinet makers, carpenters, dealers, engineers, masons, tailors, and watchmakers—these positions illustrate the significant fact that skilled work did not always presuppose schooling and that illiterates were by no means disqualified from jobs exceeding the least skilled places in urban society (for a complete list, see Appendix D). Literacy may well be important to some artisan traditions; but no evidence exists that it is central in their work processes. Learning a job surely remained empirical—by seeing and doing and gaining experience on the job; manual dexterity, "knack," and good sense contributed more to job skills than a common-school education. Technical literacy undoubtedly differed from literary skills, as artisan's accounts make scant mention of the practical uses of literacy in their work.[27] If literacy facilitated the gaining of skilled positions, its benefits lay elsewhere, we may surmise. Thus, these urban illiterates were only underrepresented by half compared with the distribution of literates. Nonetheless, in recognizing the success of some uneducated, their small share (5%) of skilled positions can not be overlooked: literacy did carry some importance, albeit by virtue of an often indirect influence.

At the upper levels of the occupational hierarchy, access for illiterates was, expectedly, more restricted; commercial, clerical, and pro-

[27] See, for example, John Burnet, ed., *Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working Men From the 1820's to the 1920's* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974); George Sturt *The Wheelwright's Shop* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923); and Edward Shorter, ed., *Work and Community in the West* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

fessional roles surely demanded literacy more than other work did. Yet, 40 uneducated persons (including a Hamilton merchant and clergyman—a black leader) found a niche above the skilled and manual level. No doubt as a result of significant striving and savings, they became small storekeepers, inn- or tavernkeepers, or public servants (even "gentlemen") without the advantage of literacy.[28] For them, apparently, literacy was not a requirement for commercial life nor for public responsibility. Clearly exceptional individuals who escaped the fate of most illiterates, their occupational success challenges the achievement-emphasis of contemporary and later interpreters, demonstrating, with the skilled workers, that in mid-nineteenth-century commercial centers, gains could come without education. For many of them, ascriptive characteristics counteracted any disadvantage that illiteracy might represent. For many others, though, the achievement of education brought no occupational rewards at all; inherited factors cancelled the potential of advancement through literacy.

Sex continued to be an element of social inequality independent of literacy, as the pervasiveness of sexual inequality restricted virtually all women who sought to work. Illiterate women workers compared relatively favorably to literate ones in an economic system in which few women worked officially and fewer could hope for independence. Overall, illiterate women were only slightly disadvantaged: almost 90% of each group were semi- or unskilled. Faced with sexual stratification, women found very few benefits in education. (However, one must note the very real opportunities that the mid-century feminization of the teaching force presented to women.)

Ethnicity, more than any other factor, influenced the structure of inequality in these cities, and in so doing overwhelmingly determined the place of illiterates. This was a class society, with class divisions rooted in ethnic differences.[29] As it governed the incidence of literacy itself and the success enjoyed by literates, ethnic origin directly affected the status of the uneducated; and ascription dominated the effects of education. Contradicting any presumably independent role for literacy as a social structural determinant, this interpretation carries important

[28] For examples of this kind of mobility, see Stephen Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964); Clyde and Sally Griffen, *Natives and Newcomers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978). On achievements of illiterates in Marseilles, see W. H. Sewell, Jr., "Social Mobility in a Nineteenth-Century European City," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* 7 (1976), 213–234.

[29] See, in particular, Katz, *The People of Hamilton,* Ch. 2; Stanley Leiberson, "Stratification and Ethnic Groups," in *Social Stratification,* ed. Laumann, 172–181, provides a sound introduction to the importance of ethnic stratification.

implications. It further demonstrates the integration of the illiterates into the primary social processes; they were neither segregated nor isolated from the major functions of stratification. Moreover, that the same processes operated among illiterates and literates brings literacy's own role into proper context. For among the uneducated, social stratification differentiated the status of members of the various ethnic groups, as ranking among them strikingly paralleled the ordering of the literate members in its social influences, with ethnicity mediating the influence of literacy and literacy reinforcing that of origins. Both literacy and illiteracy were strongly determined by ethnic origins; illiteracy could be a handicap, especially in its ascriptive associations, as literacy by itself was no advantage.[30]

Despite their common illiteracy, the occupational status of the members of different ethnic groups varied widely (Table 2.6). Ethnic stratification differentiated their occupational attainments quite similarly in each city, to the effect that the groups form a clear hierarchy. As a result, instead of a common depressed profile, we find that whereas 73% of Canadian Catholics, 60% of Irish Catholics, and 50% of Irish Protestant illiterates were unskilled, only 35% of English Protestants, 33% of blacks, 28% of Scottish Presbyterians, and 26% of Canadian Protestants were. In proportions skilled or higher ranking, the order is reversed, with the English and the blacks improving their place over the Canadian Protestants, who were much younger. The handicap of illiteracy clearly was not shared equally.

The role of ethnicity, with its parallels in both illiterate and literate experience, is seen more easily through the use of a simple index of occupational standing. Subtracting the sum of the percentage of those at skilled or higher levels from the total of those with a lower rank isolates the unskilled membership of each group. High index numbers indicate an excess in lower positions; low to negative scores signify

[30] To establish this case even more firmly, the data analysis should advance from the cross-tabulations and contingency tables presented here to multivariate procedures. Unfortunately, as I began to replicate the analysis with Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA), the University of Texas at Dallas Computing Center *lost* my data tape; back-up copies disappeared in a relocation of facilities at the University of Toronto. Multivariate replication, to my great regret, proved impossible. Although it is insufficient to "prove" my case, I can, however, point to my first, incomplete results and to unpublished tabulations on Hamilton by Katz's York Social History Project, 1976–77. Katz did find that literacy, by itself, reduced a person's probability of becoming a laborer by only 3%, that it increased the chances for skilled work by 6%, and that it did little to increase wealth. In contrast, illiteracy was more depressing: a 24% greater chance of being a laborer. Literacy's impact was greater on occupation than on wealth. Personal communications from Katz, 1976–1977.

parity to higher standing. Drawing a line at the skilled level permits the further exploration of the relationship of literacy to skills and provides flexibility. The use of this scale facilitates a direct comparison among the groups (Table 2.7). It shows more clearly the distinct profiles of the separate groups and their stratification. In rank order, the English came first (−3.0), the only ones among the illiterates with a majority of skilled or higher ranking, followed by blacks and native-born Protestants, and Scots. A widening gap separated these groups from the Irish, both Protestant and Catholic (54.2 and 62.6), and the Catholics, both Irish and Canadian, those most concentrated in lowest positions. The rank ordering is significant, and it is very consistent across the cities.

Explicit in these distributions is the differentiated experience of illiterates, proving that they were not a homogeneous lot, equally depressed, as their contemporaries often implied. A recognition of this variation brings us much closer to the meaning of literacy, whose potential advantages were shared no more equally than the disadvantages of illiteracy. Ethnicity directly influenced their occupational placement, cutting deeply into any contribution that literacy might make. Literacy, correspondingly, supported these processes of stratification, reinforcing the lines between groups, as the ordering of the illiterates paralleled, and derived from, the inequalities in the larger, literate society. English Protestants, for example, ranked high in each city (second to the younger, native Protestants in Hamilton), whereas Irish Catholics stood even more consistently lowest. (The few Canadian Catholics' position resulted from their older age.) Significantly, the only group able to improve its relative position when illiterate was the blacks. To them, illiteracy was hardly a material handicap when added to that of racial status and discrimination; consequently, among illiterates they stood relatively well, while ranking lower among literate adults.

The process of ethnic stratification and its relationship to literacy emerges most clearly from a systematic comparison of the literates and illiterates of each group. Irish Catholics ranked lowest, whether illiterate or not, but their disadvantage was not shared equally (scores of 63 and 41). More of the uneducated were unskilled and more stood below the skilled level, although the difference was not great: three-fifths to two-thirds. Two conclusions follow. First, regardless of education, the overwhelming numbers of Irish Catholics did poorly. Unable to escape their ascriptive bonds, literacy brought only the slightest of benefits and a very small chance for skilled work. Second, the handicap of illiteracy proved greater than the advantage of literacy. To be Irish and Catholic was to be severely disadvantaged, regardless of education. Irish Protes-

Table 2.6
Occupation by Ethnicity, 1861 (Three Cities Combined)

Ethnic group	Professional/ proprietor (1)	Nonmanual (2)	Skilled (3)	Semiskilled (4)	Unskilled (5)	4 + 5 (%)	1,2,3 (%)	*N*
Irish Catholic								
Literate								
N	9	59	139	226	272			705
%	1.3	8.4	19.7	32.1	38.5	70.6	29.4	
Illiterate								
N	1	11	50	109	261			432
%	0.2	2.5	11.6	25.2	60.4	85.6	14.4	
Irish Protestant								
Literate								
N	57	91	170	152	98			568
%	10.0	16.0	29.9	26.8	17.3	44.0	56.0	
Illiterate								
N	0	5	12	20	37			74
%	—	6.8	16.2	27.0	50.0	77.0	23.0	
Scottish Presbyterian								
Literate								
N	47	145	295	195	69			751
%	6.3	19.3	39.3	25.9	9.2	35.1	64.9	
Illiterate								
N	0	8	8	13	8			29
%	—	27.6	27.6	44.8	27.6	72.4	27.6	
English Protestant								
Literate								
N	62	194	467	139	105			967
%	6.4	20.0	48.3	14.4	10.9	25.3	74.7	

Illiterate								
N	1	10	24	9	24			68
%	1.5	14.7	35.3	13.2	35.3	48.5	51.5	
Canadian Protestant								
Literate								
N	71	142	130	85	9			442
%	16.2	32.5	29.7	19.4	2.1	21.5	78.5	
Illiterate								
N	0	5	4	8	6			23
%	—	21.7	17.4	34.8	26.1	60.9	39.1	
Canadian Catholic								
Literate								
N	0	18	30	28	10			86
%	—	20.9	34.9	32.6	11.6	34.2	65.8	
Illiterate								
N	0	0	1	3	11			15
%	—	—	6.6	20.0	73.3	93.4	6.6	
Black								
Literate								
N	0	7	17	22	17			51
%	—	11.1	26.9	34.9	26.9	61.8	38.2	
Illiterate								
N	1	1	23	18	21			64
%	1.6	1.6	35.9	28.1	32.8	60.9	39.1	
Others								
Literate								
N	60	112	219	112	58			561
%	10.7	19.9	39.0	19.9	10.3	30.2	69.8	
Illiterate								
N	1	8	13	12	39			73
%	1.4	10.9	17.8	16.4	53.4	69.8	30.2	

Table 2.7
Index of Occupational Standing [a]

	Hamilton literates	Illiterates			Total illiterates
		Hamilton	Kingston	London	
Irish Catholic	41.2	64.5	64.0	73.8	62.6
Irish Protestant	−11.8	57.1	54.8	46.8	54.2
Scottish Presbyterian	−29.8	10.0	71.4	81.8	45.0
English Protestant	−49.4	− 4.6	40.0	− 4.4	− 3.0
Canadian Protestant	−57.0	23.2	25.0	0.0	21.8
Canadian Catholic	−11.6	100.0	33.4	100.0	86.6
Black	23.6	21.6	−33.3	40.0	21.8
Others	−39.6	8.6	57.8	57.0	39.8
Total	−22.8	50.4	60.0	53.6	54.2

[a] Index: (percentage unskilled + percentage semiskilled) − (percentage skilled + percentage nonmanual + percentage professional/proprietor).

tants, in comparison, were less socially and economically depressed than the Catholics, and more of them rose to skilled or higher ranking positions. If their disadvantage was less, they too fared poorly, whether illiterate or literate. Education could only marginally cancel the effects of their origins.

English Protestants, in sharp contrast, met some success, whether educated or illiterate. The highest ranking among illiterates—by a wide margin—over half gained skilled or nonmanual work. Among literates, they also stood well, second only to Canadian Protestants. For the English illiterates, the fact of their ethnic origins reduced the significance of education as a career determinant, as they benefitted from the advantages of birth. A lack of education could handicap them—illiterates more often were unskilled, but their opportunities for higher status remained good. Above the line of skilled work, for example, the differential was not large: 50% of illiterates, 68% of literates. Canadian Protestants, the closest rivals to the English in accomplishment, reveal the same factors of ascription outdistancing achievement. Indeed, it was only the Canadians' relative youthfulness that allowed the English to fare better among the illiterate.

The experience of blacks differed radically from that of the others, yet it did not run counter to the facts of stratification. Compared with virtually all other illiterates, uneducated blacks were quite successful, ranking second, while their literate peers stood only second to the lowest.

In fact, the distributions of literate and illiterate blacks are extremely similar, much more so than those of any other group; chances to gain skilled or higher status posts were the same. To a racial minority, faced with racial discrimination, education brought no discernible benefits, and illiteracy no detriments; race carried an independent influence. Among these groups, education was far from a primary component in the stratification of their society. In the attainment of occupation, ethnic origins proved far more influential and powerful than literacy. Although education undoubtedly contributed to inequality, its contribution was not direct; rather, the extent to which its absence was detrimental or its possession was advantageous followed from the individual's ethnic group membership. The achievement of schooling simply did not often contradict the facts of birth in this society.

Age also influenced the process of stratification and occupational success in these cities, especially as it intersected with ethnicity. Another dynamic in the process, aging reinforced the dominant patterns of ethnic determination, differing in its importance to members of different groups only to a small extent. As the evidence of the social-structural integration of illiterates suggests, aging had a similar impact on all workers; regardless of education, their chances for success rose in the younger to middle years, then diminished with advancing years (Figure 2.2.). These data, and the patterns of the ethnic groups, demonstrate that in the relationship connecting occupational success, social inequality, and the life course, literacy had remarkably little impact. Illiterates, with few exceptions, shared the experiences of their ethnic peers more than they followed different career paths. To the extent that aging intersected with illiteracy, it lay in the depressing fact of their older ages rather than any more direct influences; at most, it accentuated the effects of ethnicity.

There were several small, but revealing, exceptions to these trends, which advance an understanding of the nature of the handicap presented by illiteracy. Patterns of access to skilled work and to nonmanual ranks for illiterates diverged somewhat from those of literates. For the skilled, success came to the uneducated slightly earlier in life (especially in the thirties, with 40% of all skilled illiterates), a less gradual attainment than for others. Their rising to this level—their most frequent point of success, and a real success—apparently involved a greater role for youthfulness and may have also reflected earlier entry into work. Starting to work earlier, they obtained their skills and experience at less advanced ages than many literates. In addition, they may have migrated while younger and consequently benefitted from lengthier periods of residence in and adaptation to their new homes. Estimates of age at migration, while very approximate, provide some evidence that illiterates

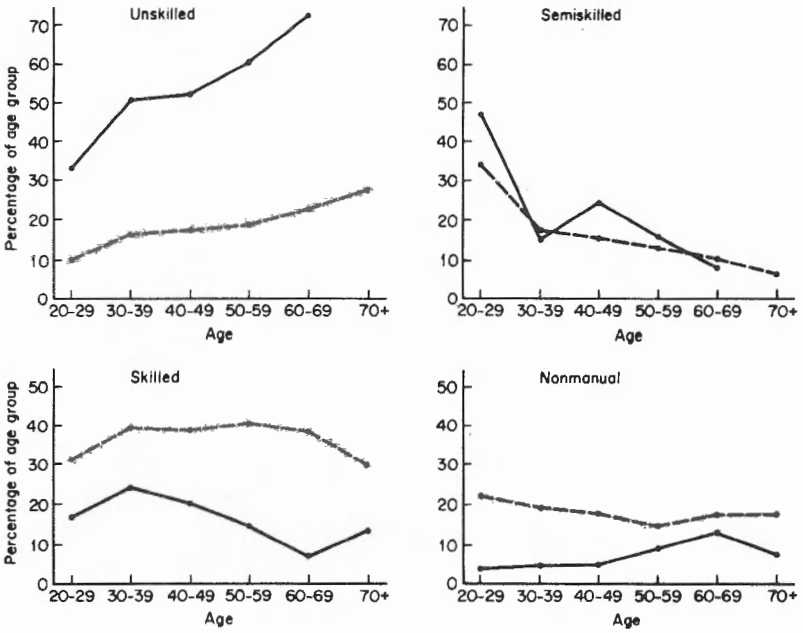

Figure 2.2 Occupation by age, 1861 (percentage of age group in each occupation). (– – –) literate; (——) illiterate.

who gained skilled or even higher ranking work migrated at relatively youthful ages (before their mid-twenties) and were not newcomers to North America by this point in their careers. These estimates also suggest that skilled illiterates may well have migrated earlier in life than the unskilled.[31] For some then, the interaction of career, selective migration, and life course could partially compensate for the effects of ethnicity and illiteracy. This was especially true for a group such as the Irish Catholics in their struggles to overcome the barriers to their success. For, the more disadvantaged the group, the greater the depressing role of advancing age; the influences of inequality did not diminish across the life course for the greatest majority.

For a very few illiterates, the timing of success differed. Contrary to the experience of most literates, those who reached nonmanual and small proprietary positions were older, holding this rank most often in their forties and fifties. For them, this position meant not a transitional

[31] These estimates of age at migration were made for illiterate heads of household who had children living at home, at least one of whom was born abroad and one in North America. They involve a minimum and maximum range of probable times of migration. While quite imprecise and difficult to summarize, they support my argument. For full details, see "Literacy and Social Structure," unpub. PhD. Diss. University of Toronto, 1975, 118–120, 206–207, 485–488.

stage as it did for many literates, but the peak of success, no doubt the end of a long striving for security To an illiterate, these occupations probably represented a greater accomplishment. Analogously, at the semiskilled level—another transitional stage in occupational succession—illiterates also gained work more often at older ages, especially their forties, than literates. In the world of lower class status and poverty, this level could mean a real gain, and not merely a transitional rank.[32] Overall, though, these variations are small, if revealing; aging primarily reinforced the structure of inequality and the dominance of ethnicity, its impact greatest for those who faced the largest obstacles to their success.

In their quests for occupational success in these mid-nineteenth-century commercial cities, most illiterates fared poorly; they stood among the lowest ranking, as many expected. Despite their lowly positions, it was *not* their lack of education that determined social placement. Social ascription, primarily their ethnic origins and sometimes their sex or age, remained most responsible. Their illiteracy contributed to their depressed status, but was not an independent influence, as their origins were. Nonetheless, many without education climbed above the skilled level, as literacy by itself proved even less of an advantage than illiteracy proved an obstruction.

Important as these insights into the social structural correlates of literacy are, our understanding of the processes remains incomplete. Occupation as a measure of status, class, or rewards, despite its frequent use in stratification research, provides only one indicator; and its employment is complicated by the variation in rewards which come to the same occupational levels.[33] To this evidence we must add that of wealth, advancing the analysis of the economic standing of these individuals. Measures of wealth, importantly, validate the interpretation developed here, reinforcing it, while permitting a deeper understanding of the social context of literacy in nineteenth-century urban society. Ascription outweighed the importance of educational achievement, with regard to wealth as to occupation, as the distribution of rewards was determined directly by ethnicity—which literacy did not contravene. Literacy probably played an even smaller role. The structure of inequality is manifest, and the benefits of literacy to the great many seem even dimmer.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to note that the population under

[32] Katz, *The People of Hamilton*, Ch. 3. Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress*.

[33] See esp. Katz, "Occupational Classification in History," *The People of Hamilton*, Chs. 2–3. Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973); W. A. Armstrong, "The Use of Information About Occupation," in *Nineteenth Century Society*, ed. E. A. Wrigley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 191–335, make the case for the use of occupations.

examination is reduced. The census manuscripts supply no direct information on wealth-holding, so we examine only those heads of households found also in the city assessment rolls of 1861.[34] Fewer illiterates, in fact, were traced to these rolls, compiled 3 months after the census: only 50% of heads of households compared with 80% of literate heads. Indicative of illiterates' greater transiency, discussed in the next chapter, the analysis is obviously biased toward the stable elements of the population, as any examination built upon record-linkage must be. The predominance of poverty among even persistent illiterates reduces any chances of additional distortion, I believe. Finally, in discussing wealth, the assessment category of *total annual value* is used; it provides the most inclusive data amenable to comparison. The data are available for Hamilton and Kingston (there was no comparable category for London), and the literate population of Hamilton continues to serve as the control group.

The poverty of illiterates stands out dramatically among the patterns of wealthholding (Table 2.8). Ryerson's view that a man would starve outright if unable to read or write appears to be vindicated; over 70% of assessed illiterates fell below the 40th percentile, the line taken to represent poverty in Hamilton.[35] Only 36% of Hamilton's literate population were poor; therefore, an illiterate's chances of poverty were twice as great. Yet many uneducated persons did escape poverty's boundaries. In the middle ranks, they fared better, with 22% among the 40th–79th percentiles, and compared more favorably in the third quintile, the level above the poor. And, despite their rather pronounced underrepresentation at the highest levels, those few who did succeed (e.g., 10 in the 80th–89th percentiles in Hamilton) represented slightly more than half the proportion of literates. These were exceptional men, illiterate but wealthy. Overall, as we would expect, poverty and lower class status befell the illiterates; however, as we should now expect, this was not merely a function of their lack of education.

It is significant, too, that of *all* the poor in Hamilton—with its pervasive inequality—only 13% were illiterate. One certainly did not have to be uneducated to be poor. Illiterates made up only a tiny percentage of the poor; therefore any rhetoric or social analysis aimed at their condition was obviously not based upon their numbers. Their economic plight was shared by a great many others who could read or write—almost 90% of all of Hamilton's poor.

Equally important is the role of ethnic origins in determining the

[34] The record linkage is described in Appendix E and persistence is analyzed in Chapter 3. References to nominal record linkage will be found there as well.

[35] See Katz, *The People of Hamilton*, Ch. 2.

Table 2.8
Wealth: Total Annual Value, 1861
Linked Heads of Household (Census–Assessment)

Dollars	Hamilton literates	Percentage illiterate	Hamilton illiterates	Kingston illiterates	Total illiterates	Percentile
0–23						
N	329		76	16	92	0–19
%	12.9	18.8	40.6	22.2	35.5	
24–42						
N	609		62	36	98	20–39
%	23.9	9.2	33.2	50.0	37.8	
43–71						
N	447		22	11	33	40–59
%	18.7	4.7	11.8	15.3	12.7	
72–168						
N	593		15	8	23	60–79
%	23.2	2.5	8.0	11.1	8.8	
169–375						
N	230		10	1	11	80–89
%	9.0	4.2	5.3	1.4	4.2	
376–700						
N	141		1	—	1	90–94
%	5.5	0.7	0.5		—	
701–2367						
N	117		1	—	1	95–98
%	4.6	0.4	0.5		—	
2368–9999						
N	55		—	—	—	99
%	2.2	0.0				
Total	2,521		187	72	259	
Mean	$ 98.8	6.8	53.6	38.9		

distribution of wealth. Gaining economic rewards, much as succeeding in occupation, derived most directly from ascriptive characteristics. Success in this stratified society went hand-in-hand with ethnicity. The results of systematic structural inequality therefore functioned similarly among literate and illiterate alike; the same dynamics divided the population. Economic differentiation among the illiterates followed from their ethnicity primarily, and to some extent from their sex and age, in noticeable parallel to stratification within the larger society. The achievement of literacy only occasionally counteracted the force of other factors. Accordingly, English Protestants ranked first among the assessed literates, and also stood first among the uneducated (Table 2.9). Con-

Table 2.9
Percentage Poor (0–39th Percentiles), 1861
(Census–Assessment Linked)

	Hamilton literates	Illiterates		Total illiterates
		Hamilton	Kingston	
Irish Catholic				
N	399	109	48	157
%	64.6	78.0	70.8	75.8
Irish Protestant				
N	359	13	8	21
%	39.3	77.0	87.5	80.9
Scottish Presbyterian				
N	678	4	1	5
%	36.8	75.0	100.0	80.0
English Protestant				
N	690	24	4	28
%	26.8	62.5	75.0	64.3
Canadian Protestant				
N	215	5	2	7
%	17.2	60.0	100.0	71.4
Canadian Catholic				
N	23	—	3	3
%	34.7	—	100.0	100.0
Black				
N	42	17	—	17
%	59.5	64.7	—	64.7
Others				
N	353	15	4	19
%	31.4	73.3	50.0	68.4
Total				
%	36.8	73.8	72.2	73.3

versely, Irish Catholics were extremely depressed among both literate and illiterate, while the blacks, when illiterate, equalled the position of their literate fellow blacks. In this measure of rewards, we find first the same process relating to literacy as found previously; the uneducated were not equally handicapped and ethnicity punctuated their experience.

The pattern of intraethnic differences shows the processes of inequality and social differentiation even more clearly.[36] Among the Irish Catholics, the largest and poorest group, literacy brought little benefit;

[36] *Ibid.*

65% of the literate and 76% of the illiterate were poor, those with some education hardly gaining (these are smaller differences than those in occupation). The difference was even smaller in the middle ranges of reward, a scant 6 percentage-point advantage (28 to 22%) to the readers, and very few fared better than this regardless of literacy. To the Irish Catholic pursuit of survival and success the acquisition of education was largely irrelevant; social forces worked against them, with poverty the most common outcome. Education meant even less to blacks. Among them, even less distance separated the position of literates from that of illiterates, with virtually equal proportions poor (60 and 65%) and middling (33 and 35%). The disadvantages with which ethnicity and race confront these groups were simply too great for education to reduce significantly, or for illiteracy to handicap much more.

English Protestant illiterates, not surprisingly, gained from their origins. Ranking second among literates (to Canadian Protestants), they stood first among the uneducated: fewer than two-thirds were poor. Ethnic advantage outweighed their handicap—a situation in contrast to that of other illiterates; nonetheless, they did not succeed as often as literate English, only 27% of whom fell into poverty. Their experience illustrates the nature of ascriptive advantages, which, if most important, were still limited by a lack of education. Ethnicity was not powerful enough to erase totally an absence of achievement; literacy's significance derives from its relationship with the other factors. As noted before, a lack of literacy, in this social order, depressed more forcefully than its acquisition contributed to success. In the interaction lies the meaning of literacy. English illiterates, as a result, gained greater financial (and occupational) rewards than other illiterates while unable to match their literate peers. In the middle ranks, the difference continued: 50% of educated to 18% of uneducated. Despite this restriction, these illiterates succeeded at the highest levels; in the 80th–99th percentiles ranked 19% of them, as compared with 24% of literates. The exceptional individual could still draw upon ascriptive advantage for high attainments, even in the absence of education. Literacy's role, we again discover, was rarely direct or independent; it did not counteract the dominant patterns of inequality but largely reinforced them.

With sex as well, ascription could only be slightly moderated by achievement. All women were heavily restricted by virtue of gender, and one-half of those literate and 70% of those illiterate were poor. The advantage of literate women continued into the middle range (48 to 23%); however, few attained independence. Wealth quite often derived from the husband's property and was not of a woman's own making. Literacy perhaps aided some women to a limited extent, in a society

with little opportunity for work outside the home or remunerative roles for them. Sex, therefore, largely constituted an independent influence.[37] As with ethnicity, the achievement of education could not cancel the disadvantages of birth. Literacy, overwhelmingly, supported the social structure, with little independent contribution to advancement, and, conversely, greater disability from its lack. Contrary to contemporaries' claims, the greatest numbers of unskilled and poor were nonetheless literate, while real success came to small numbers of the illiterate.

The limited significance of literacy appears most dramatically in the financial rewards of work. The relationship between occupation and wealth, while fairly direct, was not a perfect one; both individual positions and job levels were variably rewarded, with nomenclature sometimes disguising the nature of skill and status.[38] Significantly, in economic returns, very little difference separated the literate from the illiterate among the unskilled or semiskilled (Table 2.10). Seven percentage points divided the unskilled: 85% of illiterates were poor and 78% of literates. Among the semi-skilled, the returns were even smaller: a 2 percentage-point benefit to the educated. Possession of literacy for workers at these levels brought no rewards; education made remarkably little difference to their wealth. The effects of ethnicity, moreover, were only reinforced. If one was Catholic or Protestant or black, literacy scarcely boosted one's standing (Table 2.11). Percentage poor hardly differed among the semi- and unskilled of these groups; Irish Catholics sharing common poverty, Protestants benefitting only slightly (unskilled: 78% of literates, 89% of illiterates poor), blacks showing no differences at all.

Biographical examples from the total population of illiterates and literates nicely illustrate these processes. Consider the Lawlor, Alexander,

Table 2.10
Percentage Poor by Occupation, 1861
(Census–Assessment Linked)

	Hamilton literates	Illiterates		Total illiterates
		Hamilton	Kingston	
Unskilled	78.3	85.5	82.2	85.6
Semiskilled	47.6	45.5	75.0	50.0
Skilled	37.3	69.2	41.7	62.8
Nonmanual	17.5	20.0	80.0	40.0

[37] *Ibid.*, 55–60.

[38] On the nature of this complex relationship, see Katz, *The People of Hamilton*, Chs. 2, 3; see also notes 25, 26, above.

Table 2.11
Percentage Poor by Occupation and Ethnicity, 1861 (Census–Assessment Linked)

	Unskilled	Semiskilled	Skilled	Nonmanual
Irish Catholic				
Hamilton literates	82.3	52.2	48.2	35.7
Total illiterates	82.3	54.5	69.6	50.0
Hamilton illiterates	84.3	25.0	80.0	0.0
Kingston illiterates	76.9	71.4	50.0	66.0
Irish Protestant				
Hamilton literates	78.2	61.5	39.2	20.0
Total illiterates	88.9	100.0	100.0	100.0
Hamilton illiterates	83.3	100.0	—	—
Kingston illiterates	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
English Protestant				
Hamilton literates	72.0	28.5	29.5	7.2
Total illiterates	100.0	0.0	62.5	0.0
Hamilton illiterates	100.0	0.0	62.5	0.0
Kingston illiterates	100.0	—	—	—
Blacks				
Hamilton literates	72.8	66.7	53.9	—
Total illiterates	66.7	50.0	55.5	—
Hamilton illiterates	66.7	66.7	62.5	—
Kingston illiterates	—	0.0	0.0	—

and O'Brien families, all resident in Hamilton in 1861. John Lawlor was an Irish Catholic laborer; aged 52, he was married, living with his wife and son in a rented one-story frame house. The 14-year-old son neither attended school nor reported an occupation. Lawlor and his wife were unable to read or write, and they were quite poor (0–19th percentiles in wealth ranking).

The Alexanders were a family of 11. James and his wife lived with their 9 children (3 boys and 6 girls) in a two-story frame house. The family head was a Scottish-born, Free Church Presbyterian, aged 50; he worked as a carpenter. Five of the Alexander children attended school: girls aged 6, 8, 10, 13, and 15. The boys, aged 17, 19, and 21, worked as carpenters and glaziers, probably in their father's construction business. The Alexanders not only owned their home, they were quite well-to-do, ranking in 80th–89th percentiles of Hamilton's assessed population. Mr. Alexander, we note, was illiterate.

Finally, the O'Briens were a famiy of 6: husband, wife, 2 sons, and 2 daughters. Mr. O'Brien, 30 years of age, was Irish and Catholic; he was a railroad laborer. The family rented a one-story frame house,

sent no children to school, and ranked among Hamilton's poor (20th–29th percentiles). O'Brien was in fact able to read and write—Irish, Catholic, literate, and a poor laborer.

The realities of the working world of the mid-nineteenth-century city contrasted sharply with the rhetoric of school promoters. What sense did Ryerson's assertions make to the people situated in them, so many educated but still in poverty? And irony punctuated assurances such as Horace Mann's that "very few, who had not enjoyed the advantages of a Common School education, ever rise above the lowest class of operative." This was true, but of course neither did a great many others who had some education. Education, and literacy, certainly did not insure success, a social rise, or social mobility. One answer, which links these findings to those of Chapter 1, lies in Ryerson's view that the "proper education of the mechanic is important to the interests of society as well as to his welfare and enjoyment." For enjoyment perhaps, for society certainly; to his own welfare much more questionably. Promises of success through schooling held little truth for these workers. The ever increasing school attendance of their children therefore derived from other perceptions, including the moral bases and some special hopes for success, related to realities other than their own.[39]

In fact, the skilled worker who was literate did have greater chances for financial rewards, very possibly providing an example to others. More skilled illiterates remained poor (63% across the three cities, but only 42% in Kingston) than skilled literates, of whom 37% were poor. A meaningful difference apparently lay in the economic returns to schooling from artisanal or skilled positions. Literacy aided in boosting men into skilled work and commensurate rewards, which parents saw and—in hopes for their children—accepted the school's hegemony. Ethnicity of course influenced these economic gains, as more Irish and black artisans stayed poor, regardless of education. For blacks, literacy continued to make no difference, although it boosted the status of the Irish (48 to 70% poor). English Protestants fared best, whether educated or not, but within this ethnic group, literates most often escaped poverty (only 30% poor) and exceeded the position of illiterates (62% poor). At this level, literacy, while reinforcing the influence of ethnicity, brought rewards which may well have attracted a response from others

[39] Mann, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board of Education*, 5 (Boston, 1842), 89. Chapter 3 details the social mobility of the illiterates. *Journal of Education*, 2 (1849), 20. See Ch. 5, and Ch. 4, below, on school attendance, and Ian Davey's Ph.D. Diss. (note 9) on school attendance throughout the period.

who did not themselves share in them, especially for the uneducated who attained skilled work but not a fairer return.

For the much smaller number who gained nonmanual, largely small proprietary posts, literacy carried less importance, especially in Hamilton. Although the numbers are tiny, only 2 of 10 illiterates at that level remained poor, compared with 18% of literates; 6 in fact attained the 80th–89th wealth percentiles, a tremendous success for one unable to read. No doubt such success resulted from lengthy periods of efforts and savings. In three ranks, the unskilled, semiskilled, and nonmanual, very slight differences in wealth separated the educated from the illiterate; to these workers schooling's benefits were not important ones and the returns to the illiterate were nearly equal. Conversely, literates at these ranks gained little from their education alone. Nevertheless, at the skilled level, the difference was greater and it carried more significance, very possibly affecting the educational responses of others. Illiteracy created barriers to the skilled ranks, and even more to its rewards, despite its reduced and indirect effects elsewhere.

In the acquisition of wealth and in the rewards of work, age made remarkably little difference. Literates and illiterates alike improved their economic standing as they grew older; those aged 50–59 were the least often in poverty (25% of literates, 66% of illiterates). At every age, in fact, regardless of ethnicity, illiterates were poorer, although the differences were quite small among the most depressed groups. The passage of life did not benefit those who were disadvantaged ethnically or educationally. Age only reinforced the dominance of the facts of birth in a society so deeply stratified.

In these three mid-nineteenth-century commercial cities, ascription was the first and most important fact of inequality and social position. Ethnic origins, primarily, determined the processes of social differentiation, and in so doing, their impact was shared by literate and illiterate. Neither homogeneous nor equally depressed, the illiterates were not a distinct and separate class in society. They either gained through their origins or suffered a common disadvantage. Literacy, consequently, reinforced rather than countered the structures of inequality: achievement did not replace social inheritance. Literacy's one contribution came at the level of skilled work and its rewards—and it is a revealing one, especially in the social meaning that might be drawn from it and its probable support to the school. Overall, literacy by itself influenced remarkably little one's life-chances, as illiteracy in its ethnic relations proved to many a real handicap.

IV. Homeownership, Property, and Residence: Urban Adaptation (1)

Despite their common plight of frequent poverty and low occupational standing in a deeply unequal urban society, the illiterates and the poor adjusted to urban life, sometimes with real success. Handicapped by illiteracy and heavily burdened by ascriptive characteristics, these men and women often proved themselves resourceful in their ability to settle, survive, form families, and make their way in environments new and alien to them. Drawing on their traditions as well as devising other strategies, even those without the advantage of education found adaptation and integration, in a variety of ways, within their grasps. This evidence allows us to go beyond the analysis of work and wealth, which while central to their experiences and to the meanings of literacy, allow an incomplete understanding of the illiterates' place in society. By examining their patterns of property and homeownership, residence, and, in the final section of this chapter, family formation, a more complete and even more complex social and cultural dynamic emerges into view, permitting deeper insight into the social processes and the place of literacy within them. This section and the next complement the argument, underlining the limits of literacy, the resourcefulness of illiterates, and the contradictions between social perceptions and social reality.

The analysis of the illiterates' adjustment and adaptation in mid-nineteenth-century Hamilton, Kingston, and London further challenges nineteenth- and twentieth-century thought about the culture, values, and abilities of the uneducated, the illiterate, and the poor. In both centuries, as we have seen, opinion commonly emphasized a pervasive culture of poverty among these elements of the population. The poor, in these views, often immigrant and alien to North American Protestant culture and ill-prepared for the demands of modern urban life, are disorganized, unintegrated, unstable; constituting a serious challenge to social order, they restrict productivity and impede progress. Public schooling, the carefully structured provision of literacy, has been proclaimed as the solution to the problems posed by the unassimilated and unprepared. As discussed in Chapter 1, arguments for education and many of the goals of proper schooling stress the social integration of the poor, the immigrant, and the lower class. Unattended, they would retain their foreign ways and distinct culture, remaining isolated from the dominant middle-class norms and moral economy that reformers and school promoters held essential for cohesion, development, and advancement. Illiterates, especially, represented a threat to these goals,

maintaining a gap between the classes and reproducing increasing numbers of unintegrated, socially disorganized poor.[40]

In sharp contrast, the evidence presented here shows the illiterates, overwhelmingly poor immigrants, to be successful in adapting to these urban environments. Hardly disorganized, they used their resources to gain some security in the cities, by purchasing homes and also by modifying their family organization, in useful and sensible ways. A different interpretation follows: Without literacy and with limited assets, these illiterates were able to adapt resourcefully; they were not trapped in a culture of poverty. On several measures, they reveal success in adjusting to urban life, through adapting traditional rural customs or through calculating strategies.

Predominant poverty excluded most illiterates from maintaining a business establishment of any kind. Compared with 18% of Hamilton's literates, only 3 to 5% of illiterates reported themselves to be proprietors of businesses to the census-takers. However, much as illiteracy did not prohibit artisanal or proprietary work, it did not preclude ownership and operation of an enterprise, however small or localized. Illiterates ran groceries, craft shops, inns, and taverns, along with one prosperous manufactory (which produced vinegar). Twenty-seven persons without education were able to succeed in this manner: 5 in London, 6 in Kingston, 16 in Hamilton. Their attraction to inn- and tavernkeeping is important, too. Not only was small shop and pubkeeping one prized path of mobility for the lower class, but pubs were also local centers of news and information.[41] It is instructive that illiterate men and women could have this role; illiteracy did not prevent them from acquiring the capital or the means necessary for such operations. No direct evidence indicates that literacy skills were required to run a shop in cities where commerce was king, and the accomplishment of these persons is a virtual rejoinder to the received wisdom that reading, writing, and shopkeeping must march linkstep. If, in fact, literacy were needed for conducting business, others in the family, or employees, could lend their skills. A small number of illiterates (15) also owned carriages, a sign of high status in these cities that only 5% of households

[40] See preceding text, and note 2.

[41] The returns of business establishments in the 1861 census were incomplete. The numbers reported here are, therefore, not inclusive, but rather indicative of trends. There is no reason for a difference in underenumeration between literates and illiterates. On the social and cultural importance of pubs, see Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians* (London: Faber, 1971), "Pubs," in *The Victorian City*, ed. H. J. Dyos & M. Wolff (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1973), 161–190.

the heads of which were literate claimed. Lack of literacy did not prevent these forms of property ownership and the successful integration they represent.

These individuals clearly represented exceptions to the dominant experience of illiterates. For the greater numbers, there were other ways to adapt to the city and to fend off the perils of poverty. To keep livestock was one; and it was seized more often by families headed by an illiterate. Twenty per cent of literates, and 25% of Hamilton's illiterates, 40% of London's, and 15% of Kingston's kept animals in their urban residences; they probably also grew other foodstuffs. Rural and traditionally oriented, stock-keeping was one strategy with which to confront urbanism and poverty. Illiterates' stock was lower in monetary value, suggesting that they more likely used animals for self-sufficiency than for investments. This was one way for the poor to mitigate their circumstances in their search for security, adapting older customs to new places; illiterates made it work for them.[42]

Of greater significance than these measures are the homeownership patterns of illiterate household heads, representing perhaps their most important approach to adjustment and security. Homeownership, as recent scholarship has demonstrated, constituted an important and complex process among residents of nineteenth-century cities. Ownership patterns derived from the interaction of social class, demographic behavior, and ethnicity; property-holding thus related to cultural values, inequality, persistence of residence, and power.[43] It was more than a linear consequence of wealth. To this imposing roster, we add literacy, for homeownership served an especially important function for the illiterates who settled in the three cities. Illiterates, in their struggle to survive, tried and apparently succeeded more often than many literate

[42] See, for examples of traditional values in adjustment, Virginia Yans McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); Josef Barton, *Peasants and Strangers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975); John W. Briggs, *An Italian Passage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); John Bodnar, "Immigration and Modernization," *Journal of Social History,* 10 (1976), 44–71; Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Knopf, 1976). See also, Louise Tilly's comments on Yans McLaughlin's earlier work, *Journal of Social History,* 7 (1974), 452–459.

[43] See Katz, *The People of Hamilton,* Chs. 2,3; Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress;* Mark Stern, "Homeownership," qualifying research paper, York University, 1976; Michael Doucet, "Building the Victorian City," unpub. Ph.D. Diss., University of Toronto, 1977; Daniel Luria, "Wealth, Capital and Power: The Social Meaning of Home Ownership" *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* 7 (1976), 261–282; the unpublished research of David Hogan. Chapter 3, below, explores the relationship of persistence and ownership for the illiterates.

household heads in obtaining their own homes. In this behavior, they reflect the responses of many of the Irish, and, equally importantly, they did not act as marginal, disorganized, or unstable individuals. Rather, their behavior represented the calculating, culturally influenced strategies of men and women who, in climbing above crises of subsistence and poverty, sought to protect themselves and their dependents from the vagaries of an unequal market economy. Exhibiting a great desire for property, illiterates in this way found security and successful adjustment. (As with the analysis of wealth, the population under study narrows to those heads of household, literate and illiterate, who were linked between the assessment and census of 1861.)

Despite their overwhelming poverty, illiterates across the cities owned their homes at least as frequently as the literates: 29% of illiterates to 27% of literates (Table 2.12).[44] Twenty-four per cent in Hamilton,

Table 2.12
Homeownership, 1861 (Census–Assessment Linked Heads)

	Own	Rent
Hamilton literates		
N	695	1,856
%	27.2	72.8
Hamilton illiterates		
N	45	142
%	24.1	75.9
Kingston illiterates		
N	16	56
%	22.2	77.8
London illiterates		
N	34	38
%	46.6	53.4
Total illiterates		
N	95	236
%	28.7	71.3

[44] Their homes were, of course, not as substantial as those of some higher-ranking literates. Fewer lived in stone or brick homes, while most families, literate or illiterate-headed, resided in frame dwellings. On working class housing in Hamilton, see Michael J. Doucet, "Working Class Housing in Hamilton," in *Essays in Canadian Working Class History,* ed. G. S. Kealey and P. Warrian (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 83–105; more generally, S. D. Chapman, ed., *Working Class Housing: A Symposium* (Devon: David and Charles, 1971); Enid Gauldie, *A History of Working Class Housing* (London: Unwin, 1974).

22% in Kingston, and 47% of illiterates in London succeeded in the saving, sacrifice, and effort required to purchase the property on which they lived. London represents the extreme case, as the illiterates' achievement undoubtedly reflects higher rates in that city. The accomplishment of illiterates in all three cities is remarkable, given their economic and occupational situations. Owning their homes must have had a special meaning to these individuals, who with far fewer material resources equalled the property-holding rate of literates. In large measure, their success was influenced by ethnicity, wealth, and age, resembling the relationships among the literate heads of households. Homeownership, in fact, among either the educated or the uneducated, was to a degree independent of direct socioeconomic influences. Constituting a mark of security, individual power, and personal independence, it involved cultural traditions as well as assets. Among illiterates, these functions combined to produce a special emphasis on ownership which obviously represented a deeply held value and a significant goal. For these disadvantaged persons, possession of their own homes carried a peculiar significance, which exaggerated more general ethnic, economic, and life-course tendencies. Some, particularly the Irish, perhaps escaped for the first time their age-old subservience to a landlord. Illiteracy, a sum, neither limited their ability to transact the business of ownership nor narrowed their vision into a headlong and early rush to own property. Cultural values intersected with wealth and age, all encouraging an adaptive response to the urban environment.

Illiteracy, consequently, did not reduce significantly the propensity of any ethnic group to purchase homes (Table 2.13). Among three groups, of widely different standing, illiterates obtained property more often: Irish Catholics (31 to 22%), English Protestants (40 to 30%), Scottish Presbyterians (33 to 27%), though these comparisons suffer from tiny numbers. The Irish and English are most interesting. Despite their ascriptive differences, both exceeded the proportions of literates owning homes by 10%, revealing the special significance of ownership and their success in it. The Irish rate is all the more remarkable considering their overwhelmingly depressed position, but only the English with their advantages exceeded that rate. When Irish Protestants are added to the Catholics, the great success of the Irish-born becomes one shared by all Irish, regardless of literacy or religion, a discovery common to studies of several nineteenth-century cities. The "Five Cities" analysis, for example, while finding that the lowest class most often lacked property, concluded that the experience of Irish laborers contradicted their generalization. Ethnicity and cultural values, thus, blurred a clear link between class and property. When occupation was held constant, the

Table 2.13
Homeownership by Ethnicity, 1861 (Percentage Owning) (Census–Assessment Linked)

	Irish Catholic	Irish Protestant	Scottish Presbyterian	English Protestant	Canadian Protestant	Canadian Catholic	Black	Others
Hamilton literates								
N	87	130	125	204	59	2	10	78
%	21.8	36.2	26.6	29.9	27.4	8.7	23.8	22.1
Hamilton illiterates								
N	30	2	2	6	—	—	4	1
%	27.5	15.4	50.0	25.0	—	—	23.5	6.7
Kingston illiterates								
N	10	3	—	2	1	—	—	—
%	20.8	37.5	—	50.0	50.0	—	—	—
London illiterates								
N	19	2	1	8	—	—	1	3
%	59.4	33.3	25.0	66.7	—	—	20.0	23.1
Total illiterates								
N	59	7	3	16	1	—	5	4
%	31.2	26.9	33.3	40.0	12.5	—	20.8	12.5

Irish more often owned property.[45] With the Irish, cultural norms and traditional values very likely combined with the need to gain some measure of security in cities dominated by ascribed status, inequitable rents, and discriminatory labor markets. Their native-Irish experience of landlessness and exploitation, in the context of a cultural heritage rooted in the possession of land, pushed them to acquire property in the new world, giving them at once a goal more attainable and a strategy for additional security and independence. This gave them a stake in the cities, increasing their likelihood of staying as well. Shared by literate and illiterate alike, opportunities for success were not handicapped by illiteracy, and among Catholics, illiterates succeeded more often than literates.

The English experience is analogous. Benefitting from their social structural advantage, both illiterate and literate household heads were able to purchase very often. The poorer illiterates among this ethnic group also sought security and protection for themselves and their families, with the result that they too more often bought property: 40% across the cities, with rates of 50 and 67% in Kingston and London, respectively.

For both literates and illiterates, economic position as measured by wealth related directly to property acquisition (Table 2.14).[46] Clearly visible is interaction between the economic handicap represented by a lack of education and the illiterates' exceptional emphasis on homeownership whenever possible. While members of each group increased their proportions owning homes directly with levels of wealth, illiterates responded far more readily to rising from poverty. Equalling the literates' rate among the poor (0–39th percentiles), the illiterates leaped into ownership upon reaching the middle ranks of wealth-holding; over half (53%) owned homes at these levels, contrasting with 28% of literates. A modicum of financial status—at least a movement up from poverty—was for most a prerequisite of ownership. The urge toward security and the cultural stress on property therefore did not push them toward ownership at all costs; owning represented instead a more rational decision based upon the utilization of available resources. Security, in

[45] Theodore Hershberg, Michael Katz, Stuart Blumin, Laurence Glasco, and Clyde Griffen, "Occupation and Ethnicity in Five Nineteenth Century Cities: A Collaborative Inquiry," *Historical Methods Newsletter*, 7 (1974), 204, 203–207. See also, Katz, *The People of Hamilton*, Ch. 2; Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress*.

[46] Occupation had little affect on homeownership with only the exception of the semiskilled (largely Irish Catholic) in Hamilton. The implications of this are drawn in Chapter 3.

Table 2.14
Homeownership by Wealth, 1861 (Percentage Owning) (Census–Assessment Linked)

Percentile	0–19	20–39	40–59	60–79	80–89	90–94	95–98	99–100
Hamilton literates								
N	24	124	119	186	94	63	60	25
%	7.3	20.4	24.9	31.4	40.9	44.7	51.3	45.5
Hamilton illiterates								
N	6	12	14	10	3	—	—	—
%	7.9	19.4	63.6	66.7	30.0	—	—	—
Kingston illiterates								
N	3	7	4	2	—	—	—	—
%	18.8	19.4	36.4	25.0	—	—	—	—
Total illiterates								
N	9	19	18	12	3	—	—	—
%	9.8	18.6	54.5	52.3	30.0	—	—	—

other words, followed savings. The importance of gaining this measure of security, moreover, led some of them to value it more highly than their children's schooling, as will be discussed in Chapter 4. That was another aspect of their adjustment and survival strategies. And, of course, it was the Irish Catholics who led in this adaptive behavior; over 60% of them owned homes at the middle levels of wealth. Illiteracy did not preclude homeownership, nor did the plight it might entail lead them blindly into early and unstable actions; it did not prevent calculating responses to their circumstances and efforts to ameliorate their positions.

The final determinant of homeownership is the life course, represented here by household heads' age and family size. Among the literates, both aging and increasing numbers of children at home were directly associated with higher rates of ownership. These factors obviously worked through their relationships with wealth, on the one hand, and domestic needs, on the other. For all families, illiterate- or literate-headed, aging was accompanied by greater opportunities for purchasing their residences; this was one regular feature of the life course (Table 2.15). Illiterates, however, were less influenced by family size in their decisions and abilities to purchase homes (Table 2.16). In fact, family size made remarkably little difference to their actions, hardly the direct impact it had among literates. With fewer resources to spare or expend, and living in tighter circumstances, family formation carried a different and more severe meaning for the illiterates. Larger families, as noted

Table 2.15
Homeownership by Age, 1861 (Percentage Owning) (Census–Assessment Linked)

	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70+	*N*
Hamilton literates							
N	35	206	235	134	67	17	695
%	9.5	22.7	34.8	37.2	38.5	28.3	27.2
Hamilton illiterates							
N	1	12	6	20	6	0	45
%	5.3	23.1	14.3	42.6	30.0	0.0	24.1
Kingston illiterates							
N	2	5	3	4	2	0	16
%	16.7	29.4	17.6	23.5	28.6	0.0	22.2
London illiterates							
N	2	8	10	7	6	1	34
%	33.3	40.0	50.0	52.9	66.7	100.0	46.6
Total illiterates							
N	5	25	19	31	14	1	95
%	13.5	28.1	24.1	38.3	38.9	14.3	28.9

Table 2.16
Homeownership by Family Size (Number of Children), 1861 (Percentage Owning) (Census-Assessment Linked)

	Small (0–2)	Medium (3–5)	Large (6+)	*N*
Hamilton literates				
N	1,393	883	227	2,503
%	23.0	32.6	37.9	
Hamilton illiterates				
N	106	66	15	187
%	23.6	25.8	20.0	
Kingston illiterates				
N	43	26	3	72
%	25.6	15.4	33.3	
London illiterates				
N	41	27	5	73
%	46.3	44.4	60.0	
Total illiterates				
N	55	33	7	332
%	28.9	27.7	30.4	

in Section V, were not virtual signs of success in occupation and wealth among illiterates as they were among many literates; rather they pressed harder upon limited assets, preventing ownership by channelling resources away from savings. The strategies that could succeed toward homeownership for them were circumscribed so their path was often a narrow one. The restraints on their actions heighten the significance of the achievement that the illiterates made in their rates of homeownership, considering their handicaps in both ascriptive and achieved characteristics. Overall, their success in gaining security and protection through property, which equalled that of literates, is impressive. In conjunction with the evidence of other indicators, we may conclude that these uneducated, often poor immigrants were hardly the disorganized, maladjusted persons of contemporary judgments and cultural stereotypes. They exhibited important indications of a more adaptive, calculating approach to their environment and to the use of their resources, human and material, in finding security and stability in the cities. Their approach to family formation shows similar tendencies.

This conclusion is reinforced by their patterns of residential settlement in the three cities, further highlighting the potential for adaptation and integration.[47] Spatially, the mid-nineteenth-century cities were complex places,[48] and illiterate men and women were not residentially segregated or isolated within them. In Hamilton, Kingston, and London, illiterate individuals and families headed by illiterates resided in every area of the cities. Their apparent clustering in some wards and districts derived not surprisingly from ethnic patterns of congregation, and not from rigid separation by class or wealth. Areas in which large numbers of illiterates of one ethnic group resided, especially Irish Catholics, in-

[47] The importance of residential patterns has recently been reinforced by John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1974), "Nineteenth Century Towns—A Class Dimension," in *The Study of Urban History*, ed. H. J. Dyos (London: Edward Arnold, 1968) 281–299. See also, Alan Armstrong, *Change and Stability in an English County Town* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

[48] See in particular, the work of Michael J. Doucet and Ian Davey in *The People of Hamilton*, Appendix, among Doucet's work. See also, Peter Goheen, *Victorian Toronto* (Chicago: University of Chicago, Department of Geography Research Papers, 1970); David Ward, *Cities and Immigrants* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), "The Internal Spatial Structure of Immigrant Residential Districts in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Geographical Analysis*, 1 (1969), 337–353. See in general, Larry Bourne, ed., *The Internal Structure of the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Gerald Suttles, *The Social Construction of Communities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973); Karl E. and Alma F. Tauber, *Negroes in Cities: Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Change* (Chicago: Aldine, 1965).

variably were also home to large numbers of literates of the same group. For example, in three Hamilton wards, St. Lawrences', St. Mary's, and St. Patrick's, lived 85% of these illiterates and over two-thirds of their literate countrymen. Finer, district-level data reveal the same pattern (e.g., Census Districts 9 and 14 held 19 and 14% of Irish Catholic illiterates, 13 and 11% of literates, respectively). Some clustering did occur, of course, following the ethnic base of communities (such as Hamilton's Irish "Cork Town") and the availability of affordable housing stock. Overall though, the cities were residentially mixed and the illiterates were neither more isolated nor more segregated than any others.

This lack of segregation, even in the gross level, leads to important implications for the social, cultural, and economic integration of those unable to read or write. The illiterates lived in close proximity—sometimes in the same dwelling—to others who could read and write. They shared work places and frequented the same taverns, shops, and streets, walking the same routes. Information and news were undoubtedly exchanged informally. Constant contact with literates would moderate any loss in which illiteracy, in theory, may have resulted. (Recent evidence, in fact, shows that the most dramatic influence of the press and other mass media is through the diffusion of its message by personal contact, and not by the media's direct impact. Other data further suggest that illiterates use print media; they often purchase newspapers and magazines and have them read to them. Even in underdeveloped places today, as in the mid-nineteenth-century cities, few households do not contain at least one literate person [see pages 7, 104]). Local leaders and neighbors, moreover, not the media, are considered to be the best sources of information. It was little different a century ago.) Print culture may or may not have been an important source of the basic data for living; regardless, illiterates were not excluded from that source. Newspapers were read aloud and discussed in shops and pubs. Oral culture, by which much news was transmitted, was equally available to them; it may have been more important than other sources, too. As Robert Webb concluded, "in any estimate of the newspaper audience, it must be emphasized that it extended far beyond the limits of the reading public. There was also a hearing public." The integration and adjustment of illiterates, then, need not have been significantly hampered by their own inability to read.[49]

[49] See the studies of John E. deYoung and C. L. Hunt, and E. M. Rogers and William Herzog cited in the introduction. For the nineteenth century, see Brian Harrison, *Drink;* Robert K. Webb, *The British Working Class Reader* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1955), 34, *passim;* E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1963), 712–719, *passim.* See also, Introduction, Chs. 5, 7.

V. Family Formation: Urban Adaptation (2)

The family-formation strategies of the illiterates also reveal illiterates' resourcefulness in dealing with the challenges raised by their disadvantages and poverty in the urban environment. Contradicting the opinion that saw the poor, the immigrant, and the uneducated as disorganized—especially in family life—the illiterates displayed adaptive strategies in domestic life, too. Modifying their family organization in useful ways was another effort to temper the effects of structural inequality and poverty; in controlling the size, shape, and composition of their domestic units, they attempted to counteract both poverty and demographic pressures.[50] Through choice or necessity, illiterates could and did act to protect themselves and their dependents. There is little evidence, moreover, that illiteracy led to demographically or familially dangerous behavior or unsound vital decisions. Their responses to urban conditions are seen in the structure of their families and in their approach to family formation, in this final section.

Household status and domestic position were distributed among illiterates differently from the way they were distributed among literate adults in these cities. Most importantly, illiterates were heads of household or spouses more often (71 to 63% of all adults); in addition, they were more often married, rather than single, regardless of age or ethnicity (Table 2.17). The differences, in fact, were greatest among the youngest, aged 20–29—the consequence of an earlier age at marriage. Marriage, as is typically assumed, is regulated by the age at which a potential husband judges himself, or is judged by others, somewhat independent or secure economically (at least considering his prospects); in Hamilton, this commonly occurred in one's late twenties (around age 27), while brides were a few years younger (on the average, aged 23), with no major ethnic distinctions. Illiterates, the distributions suggest, married earlier in all groups, however. Contrasting starkly with the marital experience of those who remained in Ireland whose age at marriage got higher throughout the nineteenth century, the behavior of these men and women, predominantly Irish Catholic and predominantly poor, had significance for their lives.[51]

[50] See for example, M. Anderson, *Family Structure;* W. J. Goode, "The Process of Role Bargaining in the Impact of Urbanization and Industrialization on Family Systems," *Current Sociology,* 12 (1963–1964), 1–13; Sidney Greenfield, "Industrialization and the Family in Sociological Theory," *American Journal of Sociology,* 67 (1961), 312–322; F. F. Furstenberg, "Industrialization and the American Family: A Look Backward," *American Sociological Review,* 31 (1966), 326–337; David Levine, *Family Formation in an Age of Nascent Capitalism* (New York: Academic Press, 1977).

[51] Kennedy, *The Irish.*

Table 2.17
Marital Status by Age, 1861

	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70+	Total
Single							
Literates							
N	1,885	432	145	48	23	6	2,539
%	57.8	17.7	9.4	6.0	5.7	3.9	29.5
Illiterates							
N	142	53	23	20	13	5	256
%	35.4	10.3	5.7	7.8	9.8	8.3	14.4
Married							
Literates							
N	1,330	1,886	1,225	550	210	56	5,257
%	40.7	77.1	79.3	68.2	52.1	36.8	61.0
Illiterates							
N	244	423	302	166	85	15	1,234
%	60.8	81.8	75.3	64.6	60.7	25.0	69.5
Widowed							
Literates							
N	49	127	175	207	170	90	818
%	1.5	5.2	11.3	25.7	42.2	59.2	9.5
Illiterates							
N	15	41	76	71	42	40	285
%	3.7	7.9	18.9	27.6	30.0	66.7	16.1

Contradicting the traditional relationship between poverty and later marriage, illiterates' marital actions reflected a shift in behavior toward a more direct, rather than an inverse, relationship between class and marriage-age during early industrialization. Further, they may have derived from traditional rural Irish practices before the demographic effects of later marital ages and a higher incidence of celibacy were felt. In addition, as examined later, earlier marriage could bring negative demographic repercussions in higher (age-specific and lifetime) rates of fertility. Yet marriage may have aided the illiterates' adaptation, adjustment, and acculturation. Solace could be found in sharing a life with a spouse—benefits whose importance need not await some minimum of success. Marriage added stability in the chaos of the city, a stability that might have carried more importance to one who could not read and who was also poor. Illiterates, in fact, married other uneducated persons only 50% of the time; marriage, then, had direct advantages for communication and information from printed sources, when and if required (Table 2.18). Not all illiterates, for that matter, resided in households headed by other illiterates. Wives of course could also work and contribute to

Table 2.18
Illiterate–Literate Marriage Patterns, Residence Patterns, 1861
(Heads and Spouses)

A. Marriage patterns

	Male and female illiterate		Male illiterate–female literate		Male literate–female illiterate	
Hamilton	185	54.4%	36	10.6%	119	35.0%
Kingston	66	41.2%	35	21.9%	59	36.9%
London	81	51.9%	17	10.9%	58	37.2%
Total illiterates	332	50.6%	88	13.4%	236	40.0%

B. Co-residence: Number of illiterates in a household headed by

	Hamilton literates				Hamilton illiterates				Kingston illiterates				London illiterates			
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
0	3,110	99.3%	2,949	94.1%	86	24.0%	53	14.8%	29	18.4%	65	41.1%	33	21.7%	32	21.2%
1	21	0.7%	171	5.5%	248	69.3%	253	72.1%	117	74.1%	84	53.2%	107	70.4%	107	70.4%
2	2	0.1%	9	0.3%	19	5.3%	31	8.7%	11	7.0%	7	4.4%	12	7.9%	12	7.9%
3			3	0.3%	3	0.8%	14	3.9%			2	1.3%			1	0.7%
4+					2	0.6%	2	0.6%	1	0.6%						

the family economy, reducing the impact of poverty, whether this work was registered in the census or not. To get married was a decision that illiterates made often, and a step taken earlier for them than for many others.

Despite the potential for stable family life, illiterates nevertheless exhibited a high incidence of female-headed, single-parent households. Twenty-eight percent of illiterate-headed households were female-headed, compared with 13% of literate-headed units. Some of this disproportion undoubtedly followed from the preponderance of women among the illiterates, but not all. Much of it reflected their more common widowhood (18% of illiterate heads-of-households, 11% of literate), which plagued all ages, not merely the oldest. Virtually all ethnic groups were affected, as illiterate women were more often heads of households and widowed. Among the Irish, who also dominated in female headship among the literate (16%), illiterates suffered more often (23%). Poverty was the most pronounced of the causes of this plight; the poorest ethnic groups had the greatest frequency, and for the illiterates this frequency was increased. These circumstances reinforced the disadvantaged position of women in this society, striking hardest among the poor illiterates.

For domestic life, the most important consequence was the single-parent family (Table 2.19C). Twenty-seven percent of all illiterate-headed families had a single head compared with 20% of the literates. Overwhelmingly, these were women, with their frequency paralleling that of female heads; the Irish, literate or not, faced this situation most often. Blacks, however, did not share this condition; despite their depressed economic status, their rates of female-headed and single-parent families were about half that of the Irish, and lower than most others.[52] The illiterates' families, in their common poverty, confronted these threats to their stability and cohesion. Single- and female-headedness, nevertheless, did result in smaller families, through the loss of the spouse, which moderated their disadvantage. Illiterate female-headed families were more often small (71%), with fewer than three children, than either literate female-headed units (62%) or male-headed ones (56% and 58% of literates and illiterates, respectively). The illiterates' overall stability in rates of male-headed and two-parent families (admittedly a normative measure), which fell *only* 15 and 7%, respectively, below those of the literates, is more significant than these complications.

[52] On the black family, see Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* (New York: Pantheon, 1976); *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 6 (Autumn, 1975), special issue on the history of the black family, among an important revisionist literature.

Table 2.19
Household Characteristics, 1861

	N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	Mean	Total
A. Family size (number of children)	Small 0–2		Medium 3–5		Large 6+			
Hamilton literates	1,768	56.4	1,094	34.9	272	8.7	2.4	3,134
Total illiterates	406	60.7	220	32.9	43	6.4	2.2	669
B. Household size	Small 1–3		Medium 4–6		Large 7+			
Hamilton literates	829	26.5	1,743	55.6	552	17.6	5.2	3,124
Total illiterates	222	33.5	363	54.8	77	11.6	4.6	662
C. Number of parents	One		Two		Total			
Hamilton literates	623	19.9	2,511	80.1	3,134			
Total illiterates	180	26.9	488	73.1	668			
D. Number of families with one—	Relative		Boarder		Servant			
Hamilton literates	303	9.7	311	9.9	511	16.3		
Total illiterates	57	8.4	55	8.2	23	3.4		
E. More than one—								
Hamilton literates	208	6.5	316	10.0	195	6.2		
Total illiterates	57	8.5	45	6.7	2	0.3		
F. Number of families in a dwelling house	One		Two		Three +			
Hamilton literates	2,819	92.5	236	7.8	17	0.6		
Total illiterates	518	82.6	72	11.5	27	4.3		

We may judge it a major accomplishment in their response to urban life that the indicators of instability were no higher.

The household statuses of other illiterates add to this interpretation. Very few illiterates were grown children living at home (3 to 10% of literates). If a child remained with parents, then, he or she most likely was not illiterate; even with a smaller chance for schooling, intergenerational transmission of illiteracy was by no means certain. The paucity of children reflects also the dynamics of poverty and the illiterate adjustment process. Limited circumstances forced more children to leave home at earlier ages, for fewer parents were able to afford their keep. Relatives and boarders existed among the illiterate about as often (7 to 6%, and 9 to 12%, respectively, of illiterates and literates); their presence in the household undoubtedly contributing similarly—in additional income, care of kin and countrymen and women, shelter for the single youth or elderly.[53] The aged, especially women, were likely to be relatives in the homes of either literates or illiterates (Table 2.19D,E), while boarders were somewhat less common. Significant here, however, are the small differences among households regardless of the education of their heads. Among Hamilton's entire population, the presence of both relatives and boarders related directly to wealth, but illiterates differ relatively little (8 to 10% with one relative, 8 to 10% with one boarder, though fewer had more than one). Boarding and especially kinship also may have worked to their advantage; these persons could contribute to the family, directly or indirectly aiding in their care. This eased the perils of poverty and assisted in their adaptations.

Some illiterates—invariably women—were servants. Despite the contemporary stereotype of the illiterate servant, the fact that 7% of all literate adults were domestics and 5% of illiterates were shows that illiteracy was hardly a badge of domestic service. The Irish Catholic representation is most interesting, for they were so often branded as illiterate, dissolute, dirty, untrustworthy, and illequipped as servants, by employers and other critics. In fact, only 5% of these illiterates were recorded in service, and only 13% of Irish Catholic servants were uneducated. Of all servants in Hamilton, only 6% could not read or write. The complaints of masters and mistresses related to causes other than illiteracy alone, I suspect.

The most important aspect of the formation of illiterate-headed families, however, was their size and the dynamics that regulated size. Fam-

[53] See John Modell and T. K. Hareven, "Urbanization and the Malleable Household: An Examination of Boarding and Lodging in American Families," *Journal of Marriage and the Family,* 35 (1973), 467-479. M. Anderson, *Family Structure;* Katz, *The People of Hamilton,* Ch. 5.

ilies and households headed by illiterates were on the average smaller and simpler than those of literates (Table 2.19A,B). Single parents contributed to a smaller household and fewer contained boarders or servants, although 6% in Hamilton did claim a resident domestic, a sign of some status. Only in the presence of relatives within the household did their families tend toward complexity; relatives no doubt helped the family, providing resources, information, and childcare. Other kin probably resided near by.[54] The result of course was smaller households for these illiterates: 4.7, 4.4, 4.6 persons in Hamilton, Kingston, and London, respectively, to 5.2 for Hamilton's literates. Regardless of marital status, sex, race, ethnicity, occupation, or age, their households were smaller, with no important exceptions. The influence of size and composition of the household on socialization, adjustment, or success has yet to be ascertained for past or present, but, in any case, the size of the illiterates' households need not have overburdened them. Certainly they carried the potential for various kinds of important support.

The illiterates also had fewer children residing at home than the literates. In the three cities, their average family size in respect of number of children was 2.1, to the literates' 2.4—a clear if not substantial difference. Despite some small variations, this distinction held among the ethnic groups, too, as illiterates' families were regularly smaller. This finding, while very important as we will see, does conflict sharply with their tendency to marry earlier. In a time and society in which the diffusion of knowledge and use of contraception remains unknown to interpreters, we should expect earlier marriage among the uneducated to produce larger families rather than smaller ones.[55] Calculations of fertility, in fact, indicate that illiterates did have more children born to them, owing to their earlier marriages.[56] Nominal census data, deriv-

[54] On contributions of kin, see M. Anderson, *Family Structure*. Richard Sennett, *Families Against the City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970) also attempts to assess the presence of kin in the household.

[55] Recent research has begun to revise the traditional interpretation that contraception did not exist to any significant extent among pre- or early industrial populations. No new consensus has been produced but see Charles Tilly, ed., *Historical Studies of Changing Fertility* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); James C. Mohr, *Abortion in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); James Reed, *From Private Vice to Public Virtue* (New York: Basic Books, 1978); Angus McLaren, "Abortion in England, 1890–1914," *Victorian Studies*, 20 (1977), 379–400, "Women's Work and Regulation of Family Size," *History Workshop*, 4 (1977), 70–81, *Abortion in England* (London: Croom Helm, 1978); Levine, *Family Formation;* the seminal studies of E. A. Wrigley and Louis Henry.

[56] The difference could be greater, as more children of illiterates left home before the age of 16. If female heads were eliminated, the margins would increase as well. See Ch. 4.

Table 2.20
Fertility Ratios, 1861 [a] *(Three Cities Combined)*

Ethnic group	Urban illiterates	Hamilton literates
Irish Catholic	2.930	2.789
Irish Protestant	2.622	2.981
Scottish Presbyterian	2.818	2.565
English Protestant	2.684	2.610
Canadian Protestant	2.000	2.086
Canadian Catholic	2.000	1.929
Black	2.030	1.788
Others	2.045	2.357

[a] $\text{Fertiliity} = \dfrac{\text{Number of children (5–16)}}{\text{Number of heads (20–48)}}$

ing from one snapshot, limit calculations of specific fertility rates, permitting only an estimation of fertility by a child-head ratio.[57] These ratios show illiterate fertility to be higher than that of the literates for virtually all ethnic groups (Table 2.20). The estimates are conservative; if more precise calculations were possible, the differences might well be greater. Two of the largest ethnic groups, Irish Catholics and blacks, largely contributed to the difference. This higher marital fertility stemmed overwhelmingly from their earlier ages at marriage; there is no reason to expect illiteracy to have otherwise directly influenced the birthrates in this society.[58]

Nevertheless, we find their families smaller in size than those of literates. The explanation for an apparent paradox lies in the dynamics of their family formation. Illiterates used family size, as they did family

[57] The common procedure, the child–woman ratio, employing the population of women assumed to be fecund, those aged 16–45, could not be used since data was not collected on literate wives of illiterate male heads of household. Therefore, the heads aged 20–48 (revised upwards to account for age differences between marrying men and women) form the denominator of the ratio. The numerator derives from the number of children aged 5–16 (again a revision to reduce the distortions of possible differentials in infant mortality due to poverty). The fertility ratio therefore is the ratio of the children 5–16 divided by the heads 20–48. The results are *not* comparable with those derived by the common (0–5/16–45) ratio, but allow a realistic comparison among these illiterates.

[58] I have considered more generally the relationship between education and literacy and fertility in "Literacy, Education, and Fertility—Past and Present: A Critical Review," *Population and Development Review*, 5 (1979); David Levine is now studying the fertility and domestic strategies of illiterates in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

structure, to ease the problems of poverty and of their adaptation in urban society. This they did through regulating the size of their families by controlling the numbers they kept at home. Consequently, families were larger in the earlier stages of the family life cycles, especially in comparison with literates, but did not increase directly and regularly with aging (Table 2.21). The process worked through their children's

Table 2.21
Number of Children by Age, 1861 (Heads of Household) (Three Cities Combined)

	Small 0–2	Medium 3–5	Large 6+	*N*
20–29				
Hamilton literates				
N	426	69	2	497
%	85.7	13.9	0.4	
Illiterates				
N	65	20	—	85
%	76.5	23.5	—	
30–39				
Hamilton literates				
N	578	441	46	1,065
%	54.3	41.4	4.3	
Illiterates				
N	98	72	5	175
%	56.0	41.1	2.9	
40–49				
Hamilton literates				
N	350	322	141	813
%	43.1	39.6	17.3	
Illiterates				
N	88	64	18	170
%	51.8	37.6	10.6	
50–59				
Hamilton literates				
N	211	175	68	454
%	46.5	38.5	15.0	
Illiterates				
N	89	41	12	142
%	62.7	28.9	8.5	
60+				
Hamilton literates				
N	194	84	15	293
%	66.2	28.7	5.1	
Illiterates				
N	63	23	4	90
%	70.0	25.6	4.4	

leaving home more often and earlier, as discussed in Chapter 4. The release of the young was the regulatory mechanism for many of these families, reducing family size despite higher fertility and earlier marriages and thereby not weighing too heavily upon scarce resources. Daughters, in fact, left home more often than sons, probably for domestic service, leaving families with an excess of males (110 sons to 100 daughters at home), who could contribute more to the family economy. Reduction of the family's dependency ratios (the proportion of those unable to contribute to those who were able) made for a smaller domestic unit, whose survival and adaptive capacities were increased.[59] Illiterates could and did manipulate family size and organization in their struggles to succeed in the city, in spite of the odds against them. This is a further indication of their abilities to rationally adapt and use their resources in seeking out security.

The full significance of this strategy of family formation emerges in the relationship between family size and economic achievement. Illiterates who succeeded generally had smaller families than either those who remained poor or literates (Table 2.22). They were sometimes older men, whose families decreased in size as all did, but their families remained smaller than those of the literates. Most striking is the almost total absence among illiterates of the direct relationship, found among the others, which joined large families to wealth. In efforts to succeed, large families could only be a drain; in addition, we find here another reason that family size did not relate directly to higher rates of homeownership among the uneducated as it did among literate heads of families. Among the poorest, not surprisingly, the family sizes were closest to one another, but successful Irish Catholics and English Protestants displayed this strategy in their formation. Illiterates, in most cases, required fewer children, rather than the economic contribution of more, if they were to escape poverty or to fare even better. They regulated their family size accordingly.[60]

Surely the dynamics of family formation were even more complex

[59] The dependency ratio is commonly expressed as those members of family or household aged $\frac{(1\text{–}16) + (66 \text{ or older})}{(17\text{–}65)}$. It would have to be revised for nineteenth century applications of course. See Allan Schnaiberg, "The Concept and Measurement of Child Dependency: An Approach to Family Formation Analysis," *Population Studies,* 27 (1973), 69–84.

[60] The relationship of family size or structure to mobility remains quite obscure. See, Sennett, *Families;* Bernard Farber, *Guardians of Virtue: Salem Families in 1800* (New York: Basic Books, 1972); Goode, "Family Systems and Social Mobility," in *Families East and West,* ed. R. Hill and R. Konig (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), 120–131.

Table 2.22
Family Size by Wealth, 1861

Percentile	0–19	20–39	40–59	60–79	80–89	90–94	95–98	99–100
				Small (0–2)				
Hamilton literates								
N	205	344	264	339	111	72	60	30
%	62.3	56.5	55.4	57.2	48.3	51.1	51.3	54.6
Total illiterates								
N	60	54	15	12	6	1	1	—
%	65.2	55.1	45.5	52.2	54.5	100.0	100.0	—
				Medium (3–5)				
Hamilton literates								
N	102	218	171	205	92	53	42	14
%	33.4	35.8	35.9	34.6	40.0	37.6	35.9	25.5
Total illiterates								
N	27	38	14	9	4	—	—	—
%	29.3	38.7	42.4	39.1	36.4	—	—	—
				Large (6+)				
Hamilton literates								
N	22	47	42	49	27	16	15	11
%	7.2	7.7	8.8	8.3	11.7	11.4	12.8	20.0
Total illiterates								
N	5	6	4	2	1	—	—	—
%	5.4	6.1	12.1	8.7	9.1	—	—	—

than this interpretation indicates. Small numbers restrict extensive ethnic or life course analysis and investigation of other relationships. The question of motivation, awareness, and consciousness must remain open as well. Nevertheless, illiterates clearly seized a variety of approaches to adaptation and adjustment, in confronting their urban environments and in attempting to reduce the social structural forces they met. Family formation, family structure, patterns of home and property ownership, residential patterns—these were all drawn on by the illiterates, as they sought to survive and sometimes succeed in an unequal society. These were not the actions of marginal, disorganized, or isolated men and women, whose illiteracy was paralytic; they faced the world with resources and used them as well as they were able—their efforts, considering their lack of education, are impressive.

Three themes unify this analysis of literacy and illiteracy in the mid-nineteenth-century commercial cities of Hamilton, Kingston, and London (Ontario) in 1861. Each holds significance for revision and reinterpretation. These threads, as we have seen, converged in the thought

and assumptions about the uneducated, the immigrant, and the poor, contributing to arguments and social theories that have dominated discussions of the importance of literacy in both the nineteenth and the twentieth century. Most significant is the evidence presented in this chapter that the facts of mid-century urban life were never completely congruous with the perceptions, claims, and expectations of commentators, reformers, or social observers. Only at the more superficial levels of understanding can confirmation for their views be found, despite the consistency and maintenance of opinion. At most there was a small, but apparently sufficient, amount of support (as in the rewards to skilled persons) for their assertions to be accepted and the school's hegemony to be developed.

To review: The first theme concerns the nineteenth-century view of immigrants, especially the Irish and Catholic, as the illiterate, disorderly, dissolute, and unwashed dregs of their society who brought their problems to North America with themselves. Despite this long-accepted conclusion, the great majority of migrants to these cities, regardless of origins, religion, age, or sex, were literate, confirming other research which directly relates distance of migration to literacy. North America received a select group of immigrants, including the Irish, who, nevertheless, often remained poor despite their education. The illiterate, moreover, were selected as well—negatively—by the disadvantage of their ascriptive characteristics, especially in ethnicity, but also in race, sex, and age.

As for the second theme: Social thought and social ideals have, for the past two centuries, stressed the preemption of ascription by achievement as the basis of success and mobility, and the importance of education and literacy in overcoming disadvantages deriving from social origins. In the three cities, in 1861, however, ascription remained dominant. Only rarely was the achievement of literacy sufficient to counteract the depressing effects of inherited characteristics, of ethnicity, race, and sex. The process of stratification, with its basis in rigid social inequality, ordered the illiterates as it did those who were educated. Only at the level of skilled work and its rewards did literacy carry a meaningful influence. Literacy, overall, did not have an independent impact on the social structure; ethnicity, primarily, mediated its role, while literacy largely reinforced that of ethnicity. Literacy's very distribution, along with its economic value, followed this pattern of ethnic differentiation. The possession of literacy alone rarely entailed occupational and economic gains; its benefits were very few in these areas, in sharp contrast to theory and assertions. Sex, ethnicity (especially Irish Catholicism), and race were far more important than literacy or education. Illiteracy

of course was a depressing factor; the converse, however, did not hold true.

Within these basic limits, literacy could be important, of course, to individual men and women as well as to their society. Though most of the differences remain revealingly small, literacy did result in occupational and economic advantages. Skilled work may not always have required literacy, but literacy facilitated opportunities for entry to it and, consequently, commensurate remuneration. Literacy, to be sure, carried little independent influence and its absence precluded few kinds of work; yet the acquisition of literacy brought to some individuals potential advantages in social and cultural areas as in material ones. Access to a rapidly expanding print culture (not, though, altogether distinct or isolated from oral and community patterns), literature, additional news and information, and some channels of communication were open to those able to read and write. With ever rising levels of popular literacy and the promotion of schooling, illiteracy could, in some circumstances, become a personal or social embarrassment, although no direct evidence of this has been found. The working class, as we will observe in Chapter 5, was ambivalent about the schooling offered to them and about the promoted uses of literacy, but accepted much of its value nevertheless. Education was tied to notions of respectability and advancement; here the illiterates were surely disadvantaged and perhaps less respected by their literate peers. The promoted uses of literacy, considered in Chapter 7, were not synonymous, however, with the popular ones. The social and cultural needs for reading and writing, while growing in number and importance, competed with the needs of daily life and needs for survival. For the latter literacy was hardly central.

As for the third theme: A "culture-of-poverty" interpretation has predominated in discussions of the poor, the immigrants, and the uneducated. Generally assumed to be disorganized, unstable, irrational, and threatening to social order, without schooling their plight was assured. Illiterates in the three cities, contrary to the stereotypical expectations, proved themselves to be far more adaptive, integrated, and resourceful in confronting the urban environment with its unequal society. Using their traditions and human-material resources effectively and impressively, they strove to protect themselves and their families against the ravages of the marketplace and poverty. To this end, they purchased homes when possible and sensibly regulated their family organization and its size. Illiteracy did not prevent their adaptation or integration into the processes of stratification which discriminated against them and against so many of their literate peers. For some illit-

erates, ethnicity was an advantage which could cancel some of the restrictions of illiteracy.

These conclusions are sweeping, especially in their implications for historical understanding, observers' perceptions, and social theories. They raise further important questions, too—all of which require additional exploration and testing. For the present, however, we must ask, How did the illiterates fare over time? How did parental illiteracy impinge upon the future of their children? To these immediate questions the next two chapters are addressed.