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### **Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World**

When I look at the last three words of the title of the learning circle I participated in for the past twelve weeks, I realized that is just what I've been doing all my life, "just getting by." "Getting by" is all I ever saw people do. "Getting by" is what I taught myself to do. This decision and all those to follow were based on my mental model.

My mental model growing up was one of "staying in my place." As an African-American male, I believed that I was stuck in the community I was raised in and that I would be like all the other men in my community. I never saw wealthy or well-to-do black people. Even though some people in my neighborhood drove nice cars, they still lived in the same old beat down buildings I lived in.

Based on what I now know is a distorted model, came my view of God, myself and other people. These distorted views dictated the choices that I made throughout my adult life. Changing my mental model, my belief system was the first step toward understanding poverty; the role I play in it and my quest for life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. Participating in the learning circle helped me to learn and understand where I came from, where I am now, and where I want to be. Learning this information will help me to make the necessary changes for stepping out of poverty and taking charge of my life. Agencies have plans that are not conducive to my goals because in reality the plans are theirs and not mine.

Learning about the hidden rules of class has helped me eliminate some old excuses I use to tell myself about my skin color, my neighborhood, and my education. These excuses kept me stuck and afraid to engage in ventures outside of my neighborhood that may have been a resource or network for advancement and opportunity.

Learning about the hidden rules of class also gave me a chance to look at things from a different perspective. I now understand what is important to other economic classes and why. I've also learned to respect money and how important it is to utilize it properly. Money is a very valuable resource to be managed and invested. It is okay to work for money, but it is better to let money work for you. Life management begins with time management. I am learning to value time and not to waste it foolishly.

My new mental model helps me to build resources that will enable me to support, and finance my vision for removing poverty from my life as well as from the community. My new mental model is based on my experience at the City Mission. I am being exposed to people from different backgrounds. I am learning from their example of volunteering and donating money to those in need. The Mission is a good chance and place for me to network, to build support systems and to meet individual who can become my role models and mentors. Being connected to healthy, positive people will keep me in the learning loop. I am looking for individuals with similar belief systems, with the hope of gaining both bonding and bridging capital. I believe that having relationships with individuals from different backgrounds will point me in the right direction for obtaining my goals and to move from poverty to sustainability.

In my conclusion, I have learned that I can accomplish my goals, that I need to allow others to assist me, and that “my place” is wherever I determine it to be. God does not place limitations upon my capacity to learn and grow and I will not place limits upon myself or allow others to do so. By taking Getting Ahead in a Just Getting’ By World, I learned that resources are all around me. I will stop praying for opportunities, and pray that I am ready when opportunities come. Opportunities are coming and I will utilize what I have learned to be ready accept each opportunity as it arises.