

children; he once watched a woman use her baby's bib to sop up the blood of a teenaged drug dealer who was shot to death in front of Venkatesh. William Julius Wilson, back at the U. of C., was having regular nightmares on Venkatesh's behalf.

Over the years the gang endured bloody turf wars and, eventually, a federal indictment. A member named Booty, who was one rank beneath J. T., came to Venkatesh with a story. Booty was being blamed by the rest of the gang for bringing about the indictment, he told Venkatesh, and therefore suspected that he would soon be killed. (He was right.) But first Booty wanted to do a little atoning. For all the gang's talk about how crack dealing didn't do any harm—they even liked to brag that it kept black money in the black community—Booty was feeling guilty. He wanted to leave behind something that might somehow benefit the next generation. He handed Venkatesh a stack of well-worn spiral notebooks—blue and black, the gang's colors. They represented a complete record of four years' worth of the gang's financial transactions. At J. T.'s direction, the ledgers had been rigorously compiled: sales, wages, dues, even the death benefits paid out to the families of murdered members.

At first Venkatesh didn't even want the notebooks. What if the Feds found out he had them—perhaps he'd be indicted too? Besides, what was he supposed to do with the data? Despite his math background, he had long ago stopped thinking in numbers.