Miller’s (1958) focal concerns are alive, well, and extensively documented. If Miller (and Anderson) is correct about the role of fate in lower-class life, then the whole anomie/strain argument about blocked opportunities may be well off base. If lower-class individuals perceive their opportunities in a fatalistic “live-for-the-moment” way, or spurn them as antithetical to the street code, they, or the visions of reality and the values imparted by their subculture, are blocking them, not the “system.”

Table 4.1 summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of the social structural theories.

Policy and Prevention:
Implications of Social Structural Theories

If socially disorganized slum neighborhoods are the “root cause” of crime, what feasible policy strategies might be recommended to public policymakers? One of the first things you might want to suggest would be the strengthening of community life, but how do we go about it? Clifford Shaw began by securing funds for the Chicago Area Project (CAP), which consisted of a number of programs aimed at generating or strengthening a sense of community in neighborhoods with the help and cooperation of schools, churches, recreational clubs, trade unions, and businesses. Athletic leagues, various kinds of clubs, summer camps, and many other activities were formed to busy the idle hands of the young. “Street corner” counselors were hired to offer advice to youths and to mediate with the police on their behalf when they got into trouble. Neighborhood residents were encouraged to form committees to resolve neighborhood problems.

Despite the money and energy investing in the CAP between 1932 and 1957, its effects were never evaluated in any systematic way. Similar programs in other cities had a number of positive outcomes, but their impact on crime and delinquency rates was negligible. Writing about the overall impact of CAP-type programs, Rosenbaum, Lurigio, and Davis (1998) concluded that there were “few positive program effects. The local programs did not affect official crime rates and in some cases were associated with adverse change in survey-based victimization rates” (p. 214).

The ideas of strain theory had tremendous impact on public policy via President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty. If crime is caused by a disjunction between cultural values emphasizing success for all and social structure denying some access to legitimate means of achieving it, then the cure for crime is to increase opportunities or dampen aspirations. The latter option is not acceptable to policymakers of either the right or the left, so we are left with the task of trying to increase opportunities.

Following in the footsteps of CAP, Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin (1960) developed a delinquency prevention project known as Mobilization for Youth (MFY), which concentrated on expanding legitimate opportunities for disadvantaged youths via a number of educational, training, and job placement programs. MFY programs received generous private, state, and federal funds and served as models for such federal programs as Head Start, the job corps, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), affirmative action, and many others (LaFree, Drass, & O’Day, 1992).