The book and video “There Are No Children Here” by Alex Kotlowitz details the challenges two young boy’s face by being raised in the inner city housing project (Henry Horner Homes). These challenges stem from racism, discrimination, the social construction of reality, social location, social class, and the deviance theory, which is due to their location and influences (social control) at which causes many youths to lead a life of crime. The book and video focuses on the Conflict and Symbolic Interaction theories of sociology. Although the video does not consist of exactly all that is entails in the book, it does portrays the challenges these two boys, the River’s family, and others face on a day to day bases when living in the inner city housing complexes.

The two boys, Lafayette and Pharoah, in which the video and book focuses on, are two of eight children in the Rivers family. They live in a small apartment with their mother LaJoe, their older siblings (the ones not in jail), and their occasional, on and off father, Paul. Paul has a drug and alcoholism addiction problem; which cause him to not be able to hold a job and when he does, he uses the money to pay for his addictions, not his family. Due to the boy’s father not being consent in their lives, they have close relationships with their mother, LaJoe. Lafayette is forced to take on the role of the man in the house when it comes to helping around the house and working side jobs (washing cars) to help his mother save money in hopes to one day leave the inner city housing complex. Lafayette’s older brother (Terrence) had once had the same bond with LaJoe but had fallen into the social norms as many of the youth in the neighborhood; steeling, robbery, becoming a member of one of the gangs. Terrence would often warn Lafayette to stay away from the gangs, unfortunately, he is now considered “lost” to the cultural patterns many youths in the inner city fall into due to their social location. Pharoah is the younger of the two brothers and chooses to ignore violence and living conditions in which they are subjected to day in and out. He loves to learn and excels in school. He enjoys being part of spelling bees.
and focuses much of his time on education because he mother LaJoe tries to insteal to them that education will be the only means of giving them the opportunity to one day get out of the inner city.

Throughout the book and video, nurture (social environment) plays a key part in how people (children thru adults), who live in the inner city, fall so easily into the social class in which our society has set for them. The norm for individuals in the inner city is to drop out of school. The girls become mothers at a young age, become addicted to drugs, and often turn to prostitution as a means to serve and pay for their additions. The boys turn to the gangs for means of making money by steeling, transporting drugs for the gang leader, and joining the gangs for protection in a world that revolves around gun groups against groups. It is normal for open gun fire and death caused by the gun fire, to be part of the daily life of individuals in the inner city. One example that was portrayed in the video was whine “dog-man”, a youth that had fallen into the norm of many youths in the inner city (gang involvement), was confronted by another gang and killed. Everyone ran for cover as the gun fire began and once the gun fire was over, dog-man was dead, his body laid there lifeless, and life went back to normal as if this boy’s death was not important.

When it came to social control and deviance in the inner city, the norm was not to walk the straight and narrow; it was to be part of gang life. The inner city is controlled by gang leaders who solicit youths into the gangs by offering them protection and a means to make money (social control) which leads to deviance throughout the inner city. I believe that this is an example of the Symbolic Interactionism Perspective which uses the labeling theory to explain this deviant behavior. These individuals that have chosen to be part of the gangs are then labeled by means of negative assigned labels (names and reputations) that the gangs have been designated by the labeling theory. Once an individual is labeled with any gang relationship, it is then hard for them to beat or defer from the labeling caused by social location.
Social construction of reality is very prevalent in both the book and video. People are prejudged by where they live by society. There is prejudice and discrimination from those of a higher class then those who live in the inner city. We saw this prejudice and discrimination (being prejudged) throughout the book and video. For example; when Lafayette’s was charged with a crime due to his association with those who had committed the crime and when LaJoe lost her benefits from the state due to her on and off husband using her home address and when collecting unemployment benefits which LaJoe did not claim as income coming into the home. In both instances, the Rivers were treated as if they were liars and criminals. Because of Lafayette being from the inner city, there was this predetermine theory about any youth that lived in the inner city from the court system. LaJoe was treated with disrespect by the welfare office because of the prejudgment they had form about people that lived in the inner city. Furthermore, due to the location in which they lived, the importance of sanitary living condition was not priority to the city. They were forced to live in the mists of garbage, broken sewer systems, dead animals, etc. Also, the children were forced to either stay in their apartments or play on the railroad tracks because the city had only a few areas for them to play. These areas had become run down and it was unsafe for kids to play in. It is unsure why the was such neglect for those areas of the inner city, but one could only think that it had to do with how this race (African Americans) has been treated for years (racism).

LaJoe first came to live in the inner city housing complexes when she was a youth. She tells of how they once were beautiful places to live. They had activities for the youth; scouts, sewing classes, etc. in the basements and beautiful playgrounds for kids to play in. They had educational classes for adults that were trying to make a better life for their family. Now, due to financial cuts, the only ones able to benefit from clubs such as the girls and boys club are individuals that have the finances to do so; thus, leaving out many of the inner city children because their parents do not have enough finances to serve day to day. The basements are now filled with garbage, broken down appliances and dead
animals. The play grounds are either broken down and field with drug paraphernalia which makes it unsafe for the kids to be in. There are no educational classes available for individuals to better themselves.

I feel that the groups that form the inner city represent the bases of the Conflict Theory. These groups that make up the inner city must compete for the scarce amounts of resources that are available to them. Because of this competition and the lack of resources causes the gangs in the inner city to prevail over the youth in the inner city because for most of them this is the only way to serve, so they think. Even when these youths are headed in the correct direction, the slightest disappointment or challenge the face can cause them to turn toward the gangs how will show them friendship, but on their terms.

I would have to say, this is another example of the promise for a better life that is so often given to the minorities and lower class. Like many promises the government has given, this promise was short lived. The title of the book and video “There are no Children Here” is very true. Children in the inner city are faced with so many social constructions of reality due to the social class they are forced to matcher in. They have no time to be children because they are faced with adult issues at such a young age. Even in the rule area’s we live in (South Coast of Oregon), many children are forced to take on roles in which they lose their ability to function as children. They are forced to be caregivers for younger siblings, take on the responsibilities in caring for the home, or have the opportunity to be part of after school activities such as basketball, baseball, etc. because their parents do not have the finances to pay for them to join. They also live in conditions similar to individuals living in the inner city housing complexes; for example pile after pile of garbage, unsanitary conditions (non-operable pluming and unsafe drinking water), filth, and unsafe play areas to play in. The big difference here is it is not due to racism here; it is due to social location and social class. Even looking back to how my home town of Myrtle Point was
established. The labor’s lived or built their homes down in the lower areas, close to the river banks; were as the higher class built their homes on the hills overlooking the valleys below. These are examples of “social construction of reality”.