A Theory of Life, Social Change, and Preservation in Poor Neighborhoods

The virtue of adversity is fortitude.
> Francis Bacon, *Essays*
> (1625)

Although poor neighborhoods can be described as suffering from a constant condition of extreme scarcity, they are not socially static. Rather, issues surrounding social change are an integral part of the residents' daily lives. Yet it is impossible to appreciate the dynamics of social change or conservation in their lives without considering the context in which they occur, and doing that requires an understanding of poor neighborhoods' social structure. This chapter outlines the structural and cultural contours of poor neighborhoods and the social dynamics affecting them. It will provide a framework for understanding poor neighborhoods as complex, demographically heterogeneous habitats in which social change reflects more than just changes in poverty levels, the arrival of new groups, or the introduction of new products.

A PRELUDE

In the present study, Dory, a twelve-year-old girl, typifies the profound scarcity in income, resources, and space that the children of the urban poor, who inherit the hardships of their parents, experience. She has acute asthma but has been treated for it only at the county hospital's emergency room because her parents do not have health insurance. Her father has held five jobs in four years with significant periods of unemployment, and her family, now living in the Bronx's Palm Court housing project, has moved three times in four years because they could not

pay rent. Like all children, regardless of class background, the children of the poor learn to depend on social institutions to help them navigate their world. Through institutions all people, including the poor, manage their lives.[1] Therefore, any effort to understand poor neighborhoods must begin with their institutional character.

As Douglass North has stated, "Institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction. In consequence they structure incentives in human exchange, whether political, social, or economic."[2] However, Ronald Jepperson has added that "whether we consider an object an institution depends upon what we are considering to be our analytical problem."[3] To understand the dynamics of change and preservation in poor neighborhoods, this book addresses the two most salient institutional types that affect them: state institutions and neighborhood institutions. State institutions are governmental agencies that administer the legislative, executive, and judicial programs and directives determined to be in the best interests of the general society and/or state.[4] The administrative actions of the various state institutions are governed by a set of morals and values that stem from the dominant social norms of the nation, as well as norms derived from internal roles established by these agencies.[5]

Neighborhood institutions, on the other hand, are social organizations composed of people whose patterns of local morals and values are acted out in a consistent and ordered fashion within their local social arena and have over time evolved into a set of norms governing the interactive behavior of the neighborhood's residents. All neighborhood institutions embody, teach, and differentially reinforce local value orientations and social identities, their concomitant activity scripts, and social engagement etiquette. Thus institutions in certain social contexts, including poor neighborhoods, are not necessarily institutions in others.

Neighborhood institutions have three properties: (1) they have a primary orientation toward the local community or neighborhood (as opposed to the city, state, or nation); (2) they are confined to a particular geographic location (e.g., a building or an area of public space like a corner);[6] and (3) they form the primary elements of a local social structure by organizing social behavior both within their confines and in the neighborhood at large. Further elaboration of some integral components of these institutions is necessary for a full understanding of how state and neighborhood institutions affect social change and stability in poor neighborhoods.

MORALS IN THE POOR NEIGHBORHOOD

Institutions are composed of people who have developed morals and values that help them interpret, guide, and direct their lives.[7] For residents of low-income neighborhoods, morals are the big principles of "right" and "wrong" that form their individual or collective character.[8] Morality for the urban poor in the United States centers on the concept of "responsibility," with "responsibility" being considered moral and "irresponsibility" immoral. Every individual adopts a position as to the meaning of "responsible'' and "irresponsible,"[9] although each position is influenced by the individual's condition of extreme material scarcity, his or her associations with particular religious traditions, and the American socioeconomic ideology that acknowledges and celebrates the existence of winners and losers in the competitive arena called the market.[10] Positions on the meaning of "responsibility" carry significant behavioral consequences when individual and local assessments of who is responsible and who is not follow an evaluative code that has been collectively defined and developed over a sustained period of time.[11]

VALUE ORIENTATIONS IN THE POOR NEIGHBORHOOD

The moral concepts of "responsibility" and "irresponsibility" provide the basis for the development of a set of value orientations that influence the daily behavior of the urban poor. Values are the "shoulds" and "should nots" that individuals internalize. For residents of poor neighborhoods a set of values is developed that defines what "responsibility" means. Although a number of value orientations exist among the urban poor, two are dominant. The first is focused on and designed to maximize personal and family socioeconomic and physical "security," and the second to maximize "excitement" and pleasure in personal life.

    In the first value orientation, the individual seeks to live his or her life in a way that will maximize financial security and reduce economic hardship, personal injury, and physical discomfort. The result is a more guarded and measured lifestyle focused on employment, saving money, and staying out of harm's way.

    Contrarily, individuals who possess a value orientation to live for excitement and pleasure make every effort to seek experiences for immediate and maximum enjoyment. Their quest is predicated on the idea that excitement, when available, must be had rather than deferred for the future. These beliefs and actions are not based on hedonism; rather,

they are about living life to the fullest and seizing any opportunity for excitement because of the lack of such experiences in these individuals' socioeconomic environment. This position is consistent with their belief in a God who may not have given them everything in the world but who certainly wants them to use what God has provided.

At first these two orientations may recall Elijah Anderson's description of "street" and "decent" families in his study of poor African Americans in Philadelphia, as well as the general anthropological descriptions of people possessing variations in time orientation, with some oriented to the future and others to the present or past. However, there are some important differences.[12] First, both of the value systems in this study (maximizing security and maximizing excitement) are present oriented. When it comes to economic issues, future-oriented individuals engage in "deferred gratification." Their plan is to sacrifice fun, time, money, and material possessions in the present with the expectation that more fun, leisure time, money, and material possessions will become available later as their economic fortunes in the way of professional credentials and opportunities improve.[13] To most readers, the excitement-maximizing orientation might appear to be an obvious fit for a present orientation, but some might find it surprising or odd that the security-maximizing set of values is present oriented as well. Although by definition anything beyond the present involves some portion of the future, the scale of a person's time horizon must be considered. Security-maximizing individuals are looking to save money every day, but not because of a plan of deferring gratification to accumulate savings that could buy expensive goods and services in the future. They rarely enjoy the fruits of their labor. Rather, they feel incapable of spending because of their fear that when the disaster occurs—and to them it will occur—they will lose their ability to provide for themselves and their families. Their frugality becomes a lifestyle in itself, and they will continue to put away money and buy products on sale or the cheapest versions of them even if they have accumulated enough money to safeguard their present economic condition through at least one disaster. What separates them from the future-oriented individuals who work today for future rewards is the time frame for the work that they are doing. Security-maximizing individuals work for an impending disaster that they believe is always very close to happening. Any accident could be such an event, and when catastrophe does occur to a relative or anyone in the neighborhood it simply reinforces their nightmare. Thus, when future-oriented individuals go to school, study, and save money, they do so for purposes of professional and material consumption in the future,

but a future reckoned most often in years. In contrast, security-maximizing individuals feel they may need to spend their savings in a future as early as tomorrow or later in the same day. Thus middle-class people who are future oriented have a positive view of their prospects, whereas people living in poverty and oriented toward maximizing security have a negative view of their prospects. Future-oriented individuals using deferred gratification are willing to deprive themselves today for the material rewards later, but security-oriented individuals among the poor are willing to deprive themselves today to avoid future suffering.

The differences between my typology of security-maximizing and excitement-maximizing value orientations and Anderson's typology of "decent" and "street" families to describe the moral orientations of poor African Americans in Philadelphia may seem slight, but they are significant. Anderson stated that these categories were not simply imposed by the researcher (in this case Anderson himself) but were often used by the individuals of his study. The "decent families" would be those viewed positively, in moral terms, by contemporary American society as a whole, and the "street families" would be those viewed negatively. It is difficult, given his description of the behavior associated with both, to see them as anything other than the "good" and "bad" families that exist among poor African Americans regardless of whether the researcher or locals use these terms.[14] In this regard Anderson follows a line of argument similar to that in Gerald Suttles's work on the poor, in which the individuals in poor neighborhoods adopt the values of the dominant society even if they fall short of acting them out.[15] In the present study, the categories of maximizing security and maximizing excitement are composites of beliefs about a number of life experiences that form a worldview. Although those who subscribe to each would argue that theirs is morally superior, both orientations have a logic that can be morally construed as "responsible." Both have strengths and weaknesses in helping residents in poor neighborhoods to negotiate conditions of extreme material scarcity and provide a meaningful life for themselves under those conditions. Further, unlike the typologies employed by Suttles and Anderson, these orientations are built without reference or deference to the dominant moral position outside poverty.

Another difference between Anderson's work and the present study is that Anderson makes no claim that the categories he uses for African Americans are generalizable to other ethnic groups, whereas I argue in this book that the two value orientations are generalizable to other ethnic groups living in poor neighborhoods. The present study employed a

sample that included nine ethnic groups and empirically found patterns of behavior that allowed for generalizations across ethnicities.

Finally, for Anderson, whole families are oriented toward either "street" or "decent" morality. In the present study, however, it is individuals that adopt a security-maximizing or excitement-maximizing value orientation. They do so regardless of whether both parents have the same orientation because these individuals have determined their chosen orientation to be "more responsible" given the challenges and satisfactions they perceive for their lives. Therefore, the conceptual framework used here can better explain the differences that exist within families between husbands and wives, siblings, and parents and children, as well as between families. This conceptual schema is closer to that employed in Ann Swidler's cultural study of love in that both suggest that the frameworks used by individuals offer them alternative moral solutions to structural predicaments.[16] To analytically categorize these as "responsible" or "irresponsible" is to let the researcher's values infiltrate the research in the manner that Weber cautioned against.[17]

In brief, saving money and avoiding risky situations gives those with a "responsibility as security" orientation a sense of financial and physical security from predatory elements of the local marketplace and social environment. However, these individuals also recognize and resign themselves to the fact that successfully achieving their goal of security will not give them socioeconomic mobility. The "responsibility as excitement" orientation is predicated on the belief that the chance of living comfortably in the present environment is unlikely and that people should therefore find as much excitement as possible in such conditions, live each day to the fullest, and share their excitement and fun with friends and family because of the goodness of reciprocity. From this perspective, any other behavior is foolishly shortsighted and individually and socially irresponsible. As presented in this study, the two moral positions on responsibility have given rise to a complex set of values regarding various aspects or spheres of life that together express a worldview. The ten aspects of life most significant to the urban poor are (1) finances, (2) spirituality, (3) sex, (4) support/assistance, (5) desires, (6) self-expression, (7) love, (8) children, (9) dreams, and (10) fear.

Finances

Individuals who operate under the moral code of "responsibility as security" view their world as having limited resources that must be managed

on the basis of the belief that the world is not fair and is not likely to change. Therefore, people should take care of themselves and their family, exercise frugality and sometimes stinginess, mistrust others' motives, and save for future disasters, which could occur at any time.[18]

Individuals who operate under the moral code of "responsibility as excitement" hold the same view of the world. But they believe that they should take care of themselves and their family today, spend money when they have it, consume when they can, share with others when possible, and not plan a great deal, if at all, for tomorrow.[19]

Spirituality

Those who live to maximize personal security follow the adage that "God helps those who help themselves." This belief follows the principles that "righteousness" begins and ends with taking care of family, being a member of a formal church, and attending church regularly (though that does not mean necessarily every week).[20] Those who adhere to these principles will be provided with good things on earth and in the hereafter.

Those who live to maximize excitement understand God as giving and taking away. They feel that people should go to religious services at least on occasion to profess their faith and acknowledge their weakness, but they do not see regular (e.g., weekly) attendance as necessary. Their emphasis on sharing and reciprocity forms the foundation for their beliefs on the afterlife.[21] In essence, their values center on the beliefs that people are not in total control of their destiny and that personal weakness is part of the human condition, so that one should not feel guilt over sinful lapses. Their God is a forgiving God who supports their views about human frailty and allows them to pursue life without much restraint.[22]

Support

Those who live to maximize security believe in dependence on themselves, support for members of their immediate family, and a duty to provide support to extended family. In return, they expect, when possible, to receive support from their families. Thus support, particularly financial, is focused on family, not friends. In fact, these individuals believe that friends should not ask friends for financial support because it could impose a burden. Additionally, asking for support from friends publicly acknowledges one's failure to maximize security, which to them, is immoral and embarrassing.

Contrarily, those who live to maximize excitement believe that people should rely on themselves to some degree but should also share what they have. Giving support and assistance to others is a high priority, and reciprocity is expected. Their modus vivendi is to share what you have and take all that is given.

Self-Expression

Those with a security-maximizing orientation express themselves through a presentation of self-confidence, restraint, and modesty.[23] This presentation reduces their chances of offending people and risking physical retribution from those offended. Additionally, it garners respect and confidence from those with whom they interact, particularly those who are, or might be, in a position to either hire or promote them to a better occupational position.[24]

Those with an excitement-maximizing orientation present themselves in varied and sometimes "outlandish" ways to be less inhibited and to be introduced to a wider variety of experiences than may be available to those who are more focused and reserved. They believe that such a presentation emphasizes symbols of personal strength, thus reducing the likelihood that social predators will view them as potential prey.[25] Finally, outlandish or outrageous behavior reduces the likelihood that they will be anonymous and invisible to others.[26] Thus an individual's choice of clothing or hairstyle or a parent's decision to give a child a distinctive name is an effort to reduce the possibility that oneself or one's child will simply be another anonymous, nondescript person in the sea of the poor.[27]

Dreams

The dreams of poor people assume two divergent characters. Those who live to maximize security believe in dreaming about possibilities that are realistically within their grasp. Doing otherwise would only invite disappointment and lead to further failures, whereas dreaming about realistic possibilities provides a vision that can be used as a functional resource for eventual success.

On the other hand, people who live to maximize excitement believe in dreaming the "outlandish." Such fantasy provides rewarding experiences in a social environment that does not readily allow for such experiences in reality. In essence, for this element of the poor, outlandish dreams keep hope alive and help make their everyday routines manageable.

Desire

Related to dreaming is "desire." Individuals in poor areas reduce grand dreams to a series of everyday desires. For those trying to maximize their security, desires must be controlled because they have the potential to destroy a person's "realistic" life chances.[28] This view is predicated on an understanding that desires are emotional urges related to the concept of "lust."[29] Since lustful urges are usually directed toward affection, sex, power, protection, luxury, and leisure, these individuals believe that when such desires are acted out, they can, and usually do, create negative repercussions. Further, they believe that people who cannot control their desires will compromise the security they have worked hard to achieve and therefore must be avoided.

People who are excitement oriented believe in expressing whatever desires they feel, whenever they feel them and wherever they are. They believe that not expressing their desires will deprive them of an unspecified number of exciting experiences without increasing their likelihood of improving their life chances. In essence, for the excitement-maximizing person, those who deny their desires potentially lose out doubly because they do not allow themselves to live.

Sex

Differences in value orientations are also found with regard to sexual activity. Those who live to maximize excitement view sexual activity as the most pleasurable of human acts and thus as something that should be engaged in whenever one has the desire and the opportunity. They view sex as the one pleasure in life that is free and thus believe it would be foolish and irresponsible to themselves and their partners not to engage in it. Men with such values prefer to have sexual relations with as many women as possible. Women are more likely to embed sex in the desire that their partner love them and be committed to them and are less likely to engage in it merely for the physical pleasure of the act. Further, both men and women of this value orientation, though more commonly men, believe that a person need not be troubled about promises made in the heat of passion. Additionally, both sexes equally believe that people don't need to be anxious about the consequences of sexual encounters; they need only make the best of these consequences.[30]

Those who attempt to live life by maximizing security are more cautious in their sexual activity. Although they acknowledge that sex is

pleasurable, they tend to view it as an activity that can reduce their chances of being economically secure and perhaps their chances of being economically mobile. Consequences such as pregnancy can cause economic vulnerability for women and can jeopardize the father's economic goals if he chooses to help raise the child. The consequence of infection from sexually transmitted diseases could compromise a person's health and impede efforts to achieve socioeconomic security. Sexual activity also runs the risk of increased conflict between people, which can reduce the probability of realizing the socioeconomic goals of the individuals involved.[31] Thus people should be cautious in their number of sexual encounters, and individuals can and should control their actions rather than being controlled by them. Most women with this value orientation do not use birth control, so they feel it is imperative that they be honest with their partners about their intentions to take extreme care to avoid the pitfalls that could compromise their efforts to pursue and acquire a more comfortable life. Thus a woman's honesty about her intentions inhibits sexual activity and deters interest in her as a potential partner. However, if a woman becomes pregnant, it is believed that she should bring the baby to term. This view is partially related to religious beliefs but primarily stems from the more general value placed on life.

Individuals subscribing to either value orientation believe that life deserves a chance. If life were fair, their present situation would be different, but all people must be given a chance to live the best life possible in their present circumstances. They acknowledge the difficulty of their lives but are thankful for the opportunity to live. Further, people of both value orientations believe that children, like death, are simply part of the life cycle that cannot be avoided. Thus giving birth is not a significant issue but merely an integral part of their physically oriented world.

Love

Closely associated with sexual relations is the concept of love. People who live to maximize security believe that love should be sought out, experienced, and expressed and that the term love should not be used loosely or falsely for the mere purpose of sexual relations. False expressions of love can result in disgruntled lovers, pregnancy, or health problems. Thus they inherently believe in committed relationships, but they take a cautious approach, since the emotional power of love can consume much energy that could otherwise be used in the pursuit of material goals.[32]

For people who have an excitement-maximizing orientation, a person should also be very guarded in expressing and experiencing love because if one does express and experience love, one leaves oneself vulnerable to being emotionally hurt.[33] In essence, excitement-maximizing individuals believe that love should be sought after but never emotionally offered. They also believe that while it is perfectly appropriate to verbally commit to another person, one should not commit emotionally. The advantage to evading emotional commitment is that it allows the pleasures of sex while avoiding the potential pain of rejection and/or ridicule by one's partner.[34]

Children

One consequence of desire, sexual activity, and love is children. People who live for maximum security think that children should be loved but view raising them as a chore because, under their conditions of extreme material scarcity, children make life more difficult to manage. Individuals who hold this value orientation are intent on managing their environment to maximize their own and their family's security within their existing economic parameters. Because these parents are so intent on providing security for their children, and because that security demands and often consumes considerable resources of time, money, and energy, they find it often difficult and sometimes impossible to fully enjoy the experience of child rearing. Thus they are more likely to try to limit the number of children they have.

Along with feeling the burden of children, people with a security-maximizing value orientation sense that children can potentially offer them immortality. Therefore, their feelings of anonymity, inadequacy, or even failure can be alleviated by the idea that their children will carry on the family name and memories of their parents' efforts to improve their lives. In addition, people operating within this value orientation often view children as a resource contributing to the family's economy in good times and bad.[35] Thus these individuals believe that if families are to maximize their security, children must be controlled at all cost, including physical domination.[36]

For the men and women with an excitement-maximizing value orientation, children are not only a consequence of sex but the result of the capacity of one individual to dominate another. The ability to procreate is understood as the main defining characteristic of what it means to be a man and as symbolizing the man's domination through power

and virility. Women's ability to give birth is a sign of being wanted or desired and a symbol they use to define themselves as women. Even if a woman deludes herself about being wanted or desired, she views her decision to bring a child to term as a tangible sign of power. Ultimately, both men and women operating under the excitement-maximizing value orientation consider the act of impregnating and giving birth a significant step toward moral responsibility. Some consider having as many children as nature provides to be both positive and responsible. Further, they do not believe that biological parents, to be considered responsible, must manage the daily care of their children. Rather, in their view, children are simply a part of life and must, as their parents did, learn to fend for themselves. Hence parenting is as much a process of coexisting with children as it is providing them with material and emotional support.[37]

Fear

Those who operate under the security-maximizing value orientation believe that putting oneself in danger and thereby risking bodily harm is enormously foolish and irresponsible. Although they know it is impossible to control all the events that might negatively affect them, they feel they can avoid life-threatening situations if they act strategically.

Divergently, people who operate under an excitement-maximizing value orientation believe that depriving oneself of an exciting experience for fear of physical risk is foolish. Because they view life as fragile by definition, they believe that as much pleasure as possible should be had and that regrets about losing a chance for fun and excitement out of fear should be avoided. To these excitement-maximizing individuals, regret is a classic consequence of irresponsibly depriving oneself of life's exhilarating experiences out of fear.

In sum, these two value orientations dominate the low-income neighborhoods of this study, but they are not evenly distributed within each neighborhood; the proportion varies. Further, the initial value orientation an individual develops is not immutable: individuals can switch from one value orientation to the other, though this is extremely difficult and rare. Most importantly, individuals with either value orientation claim moral "responsibility" and assign "irresponsibility" to those operating under the other orientation. Further, both value orientations develop criteria to establish status categories and assess individual performances on the basis of these categories. The interactions of the two

orientations and their respective status categories provide the substance of the social institutions within poor neighborhoods.

Finally, neither value orientation is strategically better able to obtain social mobility than the other. Neither has an intrinsic advantage, for both have strengths in dealing with the condition of poverty and weaknesses in achieving socioeconomic mobility. Initially it might appear that the excitement-maximizing orientation would be incapable of deferring gratification and investing in human capital to improve possibilities for economic mobility, whereas the security-maximizing orientation would be more compatible with both. However, since those who hold the security-maximizing orientation seek safety within their low-income environment, they are more prone to resisting certain risks that would increase their chances for socioeconomic mobility and thus are likely to restrict themselves to remain "safe." In contrast, those operating under an excitement-maximizing orientation are more likely to take entrepreneurial chances, but they often do so in the illicit economy, which carries much higher risks and rates of failure.[38]

TYPES OF POOR NEIGHBORHOODS

Within this study, a "neighborhood" is defined as an area of contiguous streets constituting eight to ten square blocks that is perceived by its residents, as well as those outside, as constituting a single unit of social identification. I have identified two general sociological types of poor neighborhoods, the "contested" and the "fragmented," distinguished by how their residents are socially divided. Despite the social divisions present in both types, each is a cohesive unit with its own specific set of regularized interactions. In this regard, the contested neighborhood is one in which social divisions are driven by residents' ethnic differences. However, social divisions can also occur between recent immigrants and second- and later-generation residents of the same ethnic group because of a distinct cultural difference between recent immigrants and those who have adapted to American culture (e.g., in the Mexican population). These divisions are structured by in-group solidarity and discipline and strong enmity toward the out-group(s). Such neighborhoods are characterized by hostility between groups and territorial behavior regulated by social separation, avoidance, and aggression.

The fragmented neighborhood is represented by social divisions based on the two value orientations discussed above, length of residence

in the neighborhood, origin of birth, citizenship, employment status, occupation, and gender. These factors establish a status hierarchy according to which residents identify, label, and assign individuals. Within this system of division, a high rate of agreement exists among the residents as to the assignment of individuals to each substratum, but little agreement as to the status level (high/low) of a particular substratum. The system is characterized by (1) an acknowledgment of substrata divisions; (2) a propensity to subjectively view certain substrata as morally superior; (3) a preference to associate more with others in the same substrata; and (4) wariness of those in the substrata identified as morally inferior.[39]

Neighborhood types are not static but can evolve from one to another. Table 1 gives the changes in neighborhood type over the nine years of the study. Such changes depend on a number of demographic and social changes that internally alter the history of individuals and groups in the neighborhood. Thus a contested neighborhood that experiences competition between ethnic groups will evolve into a fragmented neighborhood if only one group remains in the neighborhood, leaving it ethnically homogeneous, or if competition and antagonism cease to regulate interaction and are replaced by a shared set of cultural rules governing internal divisions. The latter outcome ocurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the Bronx's highly contested Elmway neighborhood, where ethnic groups included African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and a small number of Irish and Italians. Over time nearly all the Irish and Italians moved out, and the other residents formed a hierarchy in which each individual's place was based on individual characteristics associated with a particular substratum. Likewise, when a significant number of people from a new ethnic group move to a fragmented neighborhood, abiding by their own cultural rules of internal division rather than those established and shared by the existing group(s), the neighborhood becomes contested. Brooklyn's Eagleton neighborhood experienced such a shift, with the rapid influx of West Indian residents into a stable population of African American and Puerto Ricans. However, both types of neighborhoods are structured, and the rules of interaction are identifiable and regularized. Therefore, no matter how much conflict exists between groups, neither type of neighborhood represents a condition of disorganization, and neither neighborhood type can be considered more developed than the other.

TABLE 1. CHANGE AND PERSISTENCE OF NEIGHBORHOOD TYPE OVER TIME OF STUDY

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Bronx									
Elmway	C	C	C	C	C	C	F	F	F
Monument	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	C	C
Brooklyn									
Eagleton	F	F	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
Los Angeles									
El Rey	C	C	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
Richardson	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C

NOTE: C = contested neighborhood; F = fragmented neighborhood.

INSTITUTIONS IN POOR NEIGHBORHOODS

Through the neighborhoods' institutions, the two dominant value orientations are integrated to form the social order of a community. Further, the struggle between the dynamics of change and preservation in the neighborhood takes place within these institutions. Therefore, to best understand the dynamics of change and preservation, it is necessary to focus on the social arena of institutions in poor neighborhoods.

Institutions in poor neighborhoods are established through a set of social interactions within a physical structure that gives them a consistent point of reference. While many other social interactions occur in the absence of a physical structure, they cannot constitute the elements of a neighborhood institution as interactions within physical structures can. Without a physical place to form and to dispense and renew their functionality, social institutions in poor neighborhoods would be incapable of regulating societal behavior. To consistently affect the social order of a neighborhood, a physical location is needed to provide residents with an arena where social interactions can be systematically arranged and managed. Ultimately, physical establishments provide an environment in which social actors can develop, strengthen, and exhibit their moral and value orientations, launch efforts to maximize their interests, and host people from other establishments within the neighborhood.

Poor neighborhoods contain commercial, social, and governmental establishments. All of these can assume different dispositions, depending on the extent to which they are integrated into the neighborhood where they are located. Commercial establishments may be either what I have termed "enterprises" or neighborhood institutions. An enterprise's interactions are primarily concerned with the exchange of goods, services, and money for the expressed purpose of serving personal, professional, or group economic interests. Interactions between patrons based on noneconomic interests do not arise from an enterprise's management and are discouraged while patrons are on the premises. Although the environment is not necessarily inhospitable, or managers or workers unfriendly, any friendly interactions are essentially associated with business concerns. Enterprises in poor neighborhoods are never local institutions because they are neither willing nor able to contribute to the existing neighborhood social structure. Although they may fit into the social structure of the larger society, they are not a fundamental element in the poor neighborhood's social structure. In contrast,

when a commercial establishment is a neighborhood institution, the everyday activities of both patrons and owners or managers express local values, the morals associated with these values, and local norms through a set of rules that facilitate order, producing regularized behaviors that influence and govern interactions within the establishment and the neighborhood. In essence, local institutions reinforce the existing value orientations, morals, norms, and interaction rituals in the neighborhood. Since they constitute the foundations of the local social structure, any change in the nature of a particular institution, or the removal of an institution altogether, creates important shifts in a neighborhood's social organization.

Social establishments, such as gangs and churches, also assume these two possible dispositions. As enterprises, they are business ventures that are merely located in the neighborhood as they go about their activities. As neighborhood institutions, they are an organic part of their neighborhood's social structure and order. Although the gang is examined in this book, the church is not; however, there are numerous examples of churches assuming these two dispositions.[40]

Governmental establishments in poor neighborhoods are establishments run by governmental agencies (for example, public housing projects and schools. These take on an "enterprise" character when they are governed primarily by values, norms, and interests exogenous to the neighborhood and fulfill primarily the needs and interests of the state and the broader society, in which case they are what I have termed "state institutions," or primarily their own interests, which generally focus more narrowly on aspects related to maintaining or expanding their budget or responsibilities. In either event, like commercial enterprises, they provide services in compliance with regulations (i.e., not qualitative criteria) and cost management. At times the objective of state institutions is to alter or undermine a neighborhood's existing social structure with the intention of improving the residents' condition. However, at other times these institutions simply conduct their business, and their actions innocently undermine the existing social structure. Because the state's agendas represent exogenous interests, they rarely support the local social structure and are generally resisted by the local residents.[41] When residents succeed in making housing projects and schools predominantly reflect and reinforce the neighborhood's values, norms, and interests rather than the state's, these establishments take on the disposition of neighborhood institutions.

THE PROCESS OF INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The process by which some local establishments become neighborhood institutions and remain as such is related to the issue of institutionalization. There is a good deal of literature on institutionalization, but the present study will differ significantly from a number of important works. Although much research on institutionalization concentrates on formal organizations, most institutions that operate and significantly contribute to poor neighborhoods are informal.[42] Thus it is necessary to focus on the dynamics of local institutionalization and not those of formal organizations. Further, some institutions, like the public housing authority, schools, the YMCA, Boys Clubs, and gangs, are organizations that operate at the community level, but by no means do they automatically become neighborhood institutions. Whether they do depends on a number of contingent factors, but at a minimum they must support the local norms of the two main value orientations that coexist within poor neighborhoods, even though their coexistence can be contentious.

The genesis of institutions has been a topic of much debate. Some researchers, subscribing to the "invisible hand" approach to institutional development, view it as a spontaneous emergence of voluntary associations in which people with no particular common goal engage in a series of self-interested activities. [43] However, other theories on institutional genesis are based on the premise that institutions emerge when people with a common goal group together and adhere to a set of self-imposed rules to realize their goals. Michael Hechter refers to this approach as the "solidaristic approach," explaining that the genesis of cooperative institutions is based on individuals' demand to acquire "private (i.e., excludable) goods" and their ability to keep fellow compatriots from free-riding.[44] Aspects of the solidaristic approach are adopted in this study, but with some important caveats.

One of the most important differences between the solidaristic approach and my approach is the assumption that institutions emerge from people acting with common goals. This assumption cannot be made for the residents of poor neighborhoods. The emergence of institutions in poor neighborhoods has three prerequisites and assumes two different trajectories. In each, those who participate in institutions do so for reasons that are devoid of a common goal. What binds people together are the value orientations, morals, and norms that provide the foundation for the status categories that they assume and use to navigate their daily lives. These status identities are either created by the

individuals themselves or assigned to them by members of the local society.[45]

For an establishment to develop into a neighborhood institution, a status hierarchy must form on the premises, with a set of rules and norms to establish consistent expectations to govern beliefs and interactions among the holders of the status positions. These rules and norms must be clear to all participants of the institution to maximize compliance.[46]

Further, a "caretaker" is needed to establish the rules governing the behavior of individuals while in the establishment. The caretaker is also charged with disseminating information concerning the rules, monitoring norms, and managing conflicts that emerge inside or outside the establishment's walls. He or she is generally the owner or manager, since it would be difficult, if not impossible, for a local institution to exist without the owner or manager's cooperation.[47]

For institutionalization to progress, the regularized behavior that emerges from the norms and rules of the status hierarchy within the establishment must be strong enough to influence behavior outside the physical boundaries of the establishment.[48] That is, the status categories of the establishment must be integrated into the neighborhood in one of two ways. Either the actors must either hold status ranks complementary to those in the neighborhood, or they must integrate the status assigned to them in the neighborhood, which is based on the values, morals, and norms that gave rise to the status hierarchy and govern it, with the values, morals, and norms operating inside the physical bounds of the establishment. If the rules and consequent behavioral patterns do not influence the behavior of the establishment's actors on the outside, the establishment either is insufficiently institutionalized or is becoming deinstitutionalized.[49]

As previously mentioned, two trajectories of institution development are found in poor neighborhoods. The first, which I call the "demand trajectory," occurs when people in the community search for a place where they can have certain needs fulfilled. Some of these needs are (1) a desire for a shelter from the tension associated with the competition for scarce resources; (2) friendship and companionship to avoid loneliness and isolation; (3) respect, deference, and leisure; and (4) access to a quasi-economic safety net. The quest to satisfy these needs arises from a general scarcity of social space in poor neighborhoods to realize these needs.[50]

Within the "demand trajectory," individuals may initiate the start of a local institution, but their effort is insufficient for institutionalization to occur. Rather, the process is gradual, beginning with potential institutional actors frequenting an establishment and integrating themselves

into a system of relationships that will ultimately form the institution's foundation. From this network of emergent relationships, a set of social statuses must be developed for the individuals of the institution.[51] Next, one or more persons (depending on the institution) must become the caretaker(s) of the institution. Finally, a set of rules related to the norms of the neighborhood must be set up to regulate individual conduct within the establishment. This process ultimately results in an institution that functionally serves the neighborhood.

I have termed the second trajectory of institution building in poor neighborhoods the "evolutionary trajectory." This form of development simply emerges when people routinely frequent a place near where they live for a purpose other than any desire or need to create an institution. Through the routine of visits and communicative and physical interaction, a set of mutually reinforcing relationships is formed and a local institution commences.

\Because the various statuses of individuals emerge from competing value orientations and interests, their accommodation has important implications for interaction within the establishment. Through regularized interaction, some individuals have their status immediately recognized because of their importance in the community, while others achieve their status through a consistent display of deeds outside or inside the establishment. Status identities are not necessarily based on actions viewed as positive; they can also be achieved by actions considered negative.[54] All that is required is that the actions be sufficiently clear to assign a status to the individual and place him or her within the ranking system.

Whether the two sets of identity statuses are complementary, and thus functional, depends on the willingness and competence of the designated caretaker of the institution. To achieve success, a caretaker must craft and enforce a set of rules and norms to regulate the behaviors of those inside the establishment. In addition, the caretaker must constantly inform the participants of the prevailing norms and rules.

The general process of institutionalization of establishments requires the social interactions of three broad groups: (1) regular patrons, (2) periodic patrons, and (3) occasional patrons. Regular patrons are those who frequent the establishment nearly every day, or, in the case of the housing units studied, those who live in the units. Periodic patrons frequent the establishment on a regular basis with standardized gaps, usually every four or five days, in their visits. Finally, occasional patrons frequent the establishment sporadically with significant time gaps between visits but are not strangers to the regular or periodic patrons and have good relations with

them while present.[55] Although regular patrons are the foundation, the periodic and occasional patrons are critical in transforming the establishment into a local institution.[56] If an establishment is composed entirely of regulars, it becomes insular and assumes the sociological character of a private social club and not that of a neighborhood institution. The periodic and occasional patrons, many of whom are regulars of other institutions, link one establishment to the various others in the neighborhood, forming a network that reinforces the neighborhood's social structure.

Any process of institutionalization involves change. For an establishment to become an institution, a process of change is necessary, although ironically, seeds of preservation are also needed to maintain the establishment. When the owner and patrons of an establishment create a comfortable environment where residents want to spend their time, the norms of the neighborhood must be integrated into those governing social relations inside the establishment. When the cultural norms of the establishment mirror those in the neighborhood, it becomes a local institution. With this accomplished, the new institution assumes a strategic position to directly affect what Lynne Zucker describes as the three main aspects of cultural persistence: "transmission, maintenance, and resistance to change."[57]

NEIGHBORHOOD INSTITUTIONS AND LOCAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Despite the consensus in the literature that poor neighborhoods are disorganized, they are in fact organized primarily by neighborhood institutions. Neighborhood institutions both support and are supported by the values and norms of their residents. How the various institutions in a neighborhood are linked defines the neighborhood's particular social structure.

The social structure in poor neighborhoods develops from those who frequent social institutions, what they do in them, and how each institution links to others. These links are formed and maintained when the neighborhood's residents interact in various local institutions through a process similar to cross-pollination. The result is the interconnection of various institutions in a way that structurally supports the daily lives of the neighborhood's residents.

Each neighborhood has a social structure that operates through its social order. This order is constructed from individual identities, the existing status categories assigned to these identities, and the rules and norms that regulate interaction within and between institutions of the neighborhood.[58] Thus the social order represents the normative posi-

tions of individuals within and among the various institutions through their interactions with each other, as well as defined appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

Gerald Suttles argued that the social order of poor neighborhoods centers on ethnicity, gender, and age and that the experiences associated with these ascriptive categories are responsible for the ordered segmentation existing in the "slum" community.[59] Certainly the factors that Suttles identified as part of the ordered segmentation in the Chicago neighborhood he studied are operative in most low-income communities in America today. However, with the exception of ethnicity, which plays a significant, though not dominant, function in contested neighborhoods, they play a subordinate role to other factors, such as the residents' (1) length of time in the neighborhood and the country (one's own, one's family's, one's ethnic group's); (2) economic standing; (3) personal attributes such as physical attraction, strength, the ability to think quickly, and the ability to persuade others to support their interests; and (4) social capital in the form of extensive personal networks. One of the major changes since the completion of Suttles's work in the 1960s is that these four factors have assumed a more dominant role in establishing social order in the contemporary poor neighborhood. The sections that follow describe the impact of these four significant factors on the establishment and operation of the social order in poor neighborhoods.

Longevity of Residence

In ethnically homogeneous poor neighborhoods, social order begins with the length of time a person or family has resided in the United States or the neighborhood, which I refer to as "generational factors." The most recent arrivals occupy the lowest rung of the neighborhood's social order, while members of succeeding generations assume higher ranks. In ethnically heterogeneous neighborhoods, the ethnic group that (as a group) immigrated or migrated to the neighborhood first, if it maintains significant numbers, assumes the highest position in the social order, whereas the groups that arrive later assume positions commensurate with their time of arrival as compared to the arrival of other groups. However, the social order is more complicated when multiple ethnicities and generations are present. In such situations, it is understood that immigrants of the most recently arrived ethnic group assume the lowest rung of the social order following the first, second, and third generations of their group and that they in turn are followed by the generations of the succeeding groups.[60]

Economic Standing

Although some people might view low-income neighborhoods as simple composites of homogeneous poor inhabitants, this is not the case. While nearly all have low incomes, variations exist within the low-income category.[61] Further, some inhabitants of poor neighborhoods are not poor. It is important to understand that the residents of these neighborhoods construct the hierarchy contributing to the development of the neighborhood's social order.

Within the poor neighborhood's social hierarchy, the lowest category is the "idle poor," which includes those who, for a variety of reasons, simply do not work. Some cannot work due to physical or mental disability, others are women unable to work because they have dependent children and receive public assistance,[62] and some are no longer willing or able to work because of drug or alcohol addiction.[63] Finally, the homeless find it impossible to obtain work because employers require a place of residence that they don't have.[64]

The second category is the "periodically working poor," composed of people who generally work in the secondary labor market, where wages are low and there is little security. Since many are employed in industries that are competitive and seasonal and have small profit margins (e.g., the apparel industry or construction day labor), industry managers and owners tend to cut their workforce during cyclical periods when sales are low. Thus workers in this economic sector experience structurally determined periodic unemployment.[65] Other periodically working poor are employed in the lower echelons of the underground economy, which have a very fast turnover rate, leaving workers in a constant state of uncertainty as to how long their jobs will last.[66] In addition, there are the obvious risks that the owners or managers of these underground businesses or the employees themselves may be apprehended by law enforcement at any time, in which case employees will lose their jobs.[67] Finally, some of the periodically working poor are physically and mentally incapable of keeping a job. Those who suffer from physical and psychological disabilities, many of which are job related, generally have a work life punctuated by long periods of unemployment. Those with alcohol and drug addictions find it difficult, if not impossible, to keep a job because their addiction usually leaves them physically and mentally incapable of consistently going to work each day or competently performing their job-related duties. Therefore, they are usually terminated and unemployed for significant periods of the year, and supporting them-

selves is generally a cyclical routine of hustling others until another employment opportunity arises, briefly keeping clean from drugs while they are employed, getting fired, and resuming drug use.

The third economic segment, or substratum, of the poor neighborhood is the "working poor," who are generally in the secondary labor market.[68] They hold steady jobs characterized by low wages, no benefits or advancement opportunities, and little job security.[69] In fact, because the firms that generate these jobs operate in the service industries, construction, or a very competitive area of the production sector, they require flexibility in their labor pool, which causes a great deal of worker movement from one firm to another.[70] Although the working poor are steadily employed, the community views those who remain in this economic sector as stuck because they lack either the initiative or the time to gain the human capital skills necessary to advance to the primary labor market.

The fourth substratum in the low-income community is the "working class," composed of individuals with steady incomes who hold traditional blue-collar jobs in the primary labor market, most of which provide respectable wages and benefits. Thus the working class are envied by the less fortunate members of the neighborhood. Workers in this segment view their situation as superior to that of most others because they work every day and more closely resemble what the wider society considers "responsible."[71]

The fifth substratum in low-income areas is the "middle class." Although middle-class residents are rare in poor neighborhoods, the few that exist do play a role in the neighborhoods' social order. A few are remainders from when a particular neighborhood was socioeconomically mixed,[72] but the largest portion emerge from business dealings associated with the illicit underground economy. These individuals live in poor neighborhoods because their market is in the area or because their neighbors give them security warnings regarding their various dealings with competitors who could physically harm them.[73]

Personal Attributes

In low-income areas, personal attributes substitute for material resources and are important assets in defining and negotiating a person's social condition. Three personal attributes contribute to the social order in poor neighborhoods, deriving from the comparative evaluation of a person's particular attribute, the degree to which the person has it, and its quality

as evaluated by peers. The condition of the attribute is thus tied to the community's social norms, giving it both a specific local substance and the fluidity necessary for desired change.

The first personal attribute is an individual's physical attractiveness. Since so much of the experience of people living in poor neighborhoods centers on the physical, it is not surprising that physical attractiveness plays an important role in the social order. Both women and men direct much attention to judging and being judged as physically attractive, so objects that accentuate this attribute, particularly adornments to one's body such as clothing, are important. Although every segment of society is "clothes conscious," people living in poor areas are especially aware of their own and others' clothing. Expensive and "stylish" clothing is desired, not simply because it represents status, but because its quality is thought to enhance one's attractiveness. Therefore, every effort is made to purchase it.[74]

The second personal attribute is physical and psychological strength. In the case of the former, a physical world demands physical prowess in both men and women, and those who develop it have power over others in the community who have less. Essentially, they have more freedom to do what they want and cause others to do what they would not on their own volition.[75] Certainly firearms reduce the impact of a person's physical strength, but they do not eliminate it. Because brute strength, unlike a gun, can be directly associated with a person's individual qualities, it is important because, like physical attractiveness, it can affect the actions of others.

Those who possess psychological strength are powerful and are viewed as such by those in the poor neighborhood. They can pursue their economic and leisure interests without hesitation or fear; thus their psychological strength is measured by their display of personal stability, responsibility, and resolve (tenacity) to pursue their interests despite the hardships that could demoralize them.[76] The more people demonstrate strength in these areas, the more power they have and the more deference they are granted by those in their community.

Quick thinking is another highly valued attribute and is used by individuals to entertain others, save themselves from embarrassment or physical harm (get out of trouble), and develop schemes to obtain money and/or material possessions. For instance, people who play well at a version of the game "The Dozens" or who succeed in a number of sophisticated scams gain deference and status.[77]

Finally, the ability to persuade others through conversational skills is thought to be an important attribute. Individuals with this attribute are

used to being called "sweet-talkers," "con artists," or "foxes." Some people in the low-income neighborhood attempt to develop whatever abilities they possess in this area. Those who have a special capacity to be liked, thereby getting what they want, are acknowledged as special. The more a person demonstrates such abilities, the higher his or her neighborhood status ranking.

Social Capital

A final factor determining one's status in the social order is an individual's social capital(that is, the extensiveness and quality of the individual's personal networks. Thus individuals attempt to nurture personal relationships that they believe will secure the goods and services they might need in the future. Since most poor people think it is "who you know" that determines how well you will fare in life, relationships with individuals who will do one a favor at strategic times are seen as essential. Most residents of poor neighborhoods differ from those in the middle class in that (1) they believe that private and state bureaucracies cannot or will not give them needed help; (2) they have little or no knowledge of what specific bureaucracy would be most effective in helping them achieve a desired goal; or (3) they do not know how to get a particular bureaucracy to work for them. Therefore, they rely on personal networks, and the extensiveness of an individual's personal networks is a key ingredient in raising his or her status and power within an institution and the neighborhood.

To review, whereas Suttles found ethnicity, gender, and age to be the important factors segmenting poor neighborhoods in the 1960s, I found that in contemporary poor neighborhoods ethnicity, ethnic generational factors, longevity of residence, value orientation, certain personal attributes, and an individual's social capital emerge as the primary determinants of social division and segmentation. Although age, gender, and sometimes territory complement these factors to form division and segmentation, the status hierarchies that develop from the factors mentioned above are the primary mechanisms that sustain segmentation in poor neighborhoods. Therefore, the configuration of social status has important implications in the arrangement of power in the neighborhood, ultimately defining the social order. In turn, the social order is important in understanding not only the social structure of poor neighborhoods but the dynamics involved in their change and preservation.

CHANGE AND PRESERVATION
IN POOR NEIGHBORHOODS

I begin with two strikingly different reactions to homecoming that were
expressed by returning residents within the same week in two different
neighborhoods. In the first, a former resident had just come home from a
stint in the military. Two days after his arrival he said to an army buddy at
a local bar, "I haven't been home for three years, and so much has changed.
There are new grocery stores and a whole lot more Mexicans here than
when I left." In the second, a former resident had just moved back to the
neighborhood after three and a half years away in Tennessee, where her
father had gotten a permanent job. She said to a friend at the community
basketball courts, "I can't get over it, nothing has changed in the neighbor-
hood since I left. . . . The people and the stores are just the same!"[78]

Poor neighborhoods are constantly involved in processes of social
change and preservation. In fact, the competitive actions of social change
and preservation agents create the ongoing social condition of the neigh-
borhood at any given time. Change agents can be defined as instruments,
or forces, of human, spiritual, conceptual, or material form that either
create conditions for change or directly or indirectly cause change. Alter-
natively, preservation agents are instruments that affirmatively retain the
existing social structure and culture. Both types of agents are active at
both macro and micro levels of urban society.

At the macro level, change agents affect, directly or indirectly, neigh-
borhood institutions, which in turn affect, to varying degrees, the entire
structure of the poor neighborhood. These agents, usually coming from
outside the community, include demographic shifts in population den-
sity, as well as shifts in ethnic, social class (gentrification), and age pop-
ulations.[79] Further, structural changes to the economy of the local
neighborhood can result in profound changes in the neighborhood's
population. Such changes as the opening of a once-closed illegal drug
economy, the reduction of blue-collar jobs, or the expansion of occupa-
tions in the lower-level service sector affect the social composition of the
neighborhood. Finally, alterations to the physical state of the neighbor-
hood through disaster or urban renewal also affect social structure.[80]
Thus changes in the socioeconomic and physical condition of a neigh-
borhood directly affect the content, organization, and functioning of its
various institutions in everyday life.[81]

Outside pressure has other effects on neighborhood institutions as
well, such as changes in the personnel of an institution, which signifi-

cantly affect the institution's internal operations. Further, changes in property taxes and wholesale prices affect the institution's ability to function, and changes in police, fire, and sanitation services directly influence the local institution's ability to perform. Because many neighborhood institutions are business establishments, changes that affect business operations invariably affect the establishment's institutional functions. Business pressures thus shift the establishment away from its institutional role and toward a more enterprise-oriented role. Although this shift seems subtle at first, it begins a process of patron disengagement, ultimately causing an establishment's institutional death.

Change agents that work at the micro level of the neighborhood are usually associated with behavioral changes within the neighborhood or within the institutions themselves. The three most prevalent and potent changes affecting the behavior of neighborhood residents are increases in robbery, vandalism, and violence, all of which produce change within neighborhood institutions. People who once were integral parts of an institution may patronize it less often because of the increased risk, causing an aesthetically less inviting environment or constraints on the various institutional actors' abilities to perform the routines that are crucial to the continued health of the institution.[82]

Social changes can also come from within the institution, and the agents of such change are the very people that form its core element. First, change agents can be the institution's in-group personalities. Each neighborhood institution is composed of people who know each other and have accommodated themselves to each other's personalities. Because of the wide range of personalities in any institution, formal rules and roles aid in the integration of different people.[83] To support these formal rules and roles, participants are asked to be tolerant of others' personalities, and this is accomplished through the development of institutional norms. Since these norms can be conceived of as group-accepted standards in behavior, individuals who come into an institution with a significantly different personality from those present can significantly change the institution's operational environment.

Second, the change can involve the institution's status hierarchies. Competition between the various institutional actors or the arrival of new actors necessitates change because it leads to shifts in the status hierarchy. Such changes modify the internal interpersonal interactions of the institution by forcing others to adapt to a familiar person occupying a new, unfamiliar (to both the person and themselves), or perceived illegitimate role in the established internal status hierarchy. In a situation

that involves new actors, not only do new people occupy new positions, but people with different personalities are introduced as well. This presents a predicament for the people in the institution because they must now adapt to a new personality within the group or to a person whose personality creates a new set of role behaviors attached to a status position previously held by someone with a different personality.

Although changes of personnel inside the institution are important, none is more significant than a change involving what I call the institutional caretaker. Change occurs when the new caretaker of an institution is of a different age, ethnicity, gender, or personality than the previous caretaker. The institutional caretaker is greatly respected and often revered by the active participants in the local institution. Thus a change in the institutional caretaker requires significant adjustments on the part of the participants to simply maintain the institution. Such a change may also alter how the institution is perceived or functions in the neighborhood at large, causing important implications for change in the neighborhood's social structure and order.

Dynamics of preservation also occur in poor neighborhoods. Preservation involves residents' actions to keep the neighborhood operating at its present status. Those who act as agents of preservation actively engage in maintaining all, or most, of the neighborhood's social structure (configuration of institutions) and social order (status hierarchies). Three primary sets of individual and group interests are involved in preserving poor neighborhoods—cultural, economic, and social.

Concerning culture, preservation agents are aligned with the development and maintenance of a local subculture. Claude Fischer's subcultural theory of urbanism is an important conceptual tool for understanding much of this process. Fischer's theory postulates that the larger the city, the more apt it is to develop, hide, and protect subcultures; certainly this is the case for the subcultures within poor neighborhoods.[84] Fischer's theory provides insight into why a particular poor neighborhood, like the five studied, remains operationally consistent for over twenty-five years: the dynamics of urbanism (particularly size) keep a neighborhood hidden as a distinct ethnic, religious, and/or poor entity. The sheer size of a city or metropolitan area thus provides an optimal environment for developing and maintaining a local subculture that preserves the neighborhood's character.

Among the poor, preservation of the existing subculture arises from two similar but distinct experiences: living within the norms of a particular ethnicity and living with material scarcity. For instance, those who

integrate their ethnic culture with the social conditions of the neighborhood can preserve that culture only if they and their neighbors maintain the existing social structure and social order, even if this means reducing their chances for economic mobility.[85] Agents of preservation then view their actions as a rational means of preserving a way of life that they believe is more important than economic gain, even if the neighborhood's ethnic culture has changed since they first arrived from the country of origin. Thus, whatever the state of their present ethnic subculture, the agents of preservation consider it an honorable enough form of the "mother culture" to be kept alive. Their meaning of life emerged from, and is predicated on, the form of ethnic culture that currently exists in their neighborhood, and this reinforces their desire to maintain the existing social structure and social order even if it is counterproductive to their economic mobility.[86]

For subcultural agents of preservation to succeed, they must be able to enforce neighborhood discipline, whether through appeals to ethnic group solidarity or through group sanctions.[87] In the case of the former, preservation agents gain control through positive reinforcement and achieve solidarity through the celebration of local ethnic culture by sponsoring ethnic cultural events and encouraging local residents to frequent and patronize institutions that support their ethnic culture in the neighborhood.[88] The most efficient means to secure neighborhood solidarity is through language. No matter what the local language is, it provides the mechanism by which people make sense of and give meaning to their world. Use of their ethnic language, which can be a combination of English and the native tongue or a lower-class version of English, is a public sign of group solidarity because whatever their generation in the neighborhood, formal English is constantly present as the dominant language of the larger community. The more local language is used as the primary means of communication, the more group solidarity will exist. Therefore, preservers of the neighborhood's subculture define their ethnic group as poor and promote the idea that they are not an element of an ethnic group socioeconomically left behind but a "true and pure" remnant of the ethnic group practicing the "old ways."[89] Further, they argue that the only "real" members of the ethnic group are those who think and behave in the ways that others in the neighborhood think and behave.[90] Since most neighborhood residents have low incomes, an unstated premise exists that this condition is advantageous in maintaining traditional culture and that those from the group who become economically mobile have been forced to abandon traditional culture and assimilate.

People intent on maintaining the existing social structure and order in the neighborhood also negatively sanction local residents who they believe threaten the existing condition. The tactic most commonly used is to socially "shun" those identified as deviant from the local cultural norms by excluding them from full participation in ritualized conversations and social activities viewed by the vast majority in the neighborhood as central to its identity. Such tactics are designed to stigmatize the deviants as "sellouts" of their culture.

Culture is also related to preservation through the effects of residents' immediate socioeconomic environment on the development of a distinctive culture. Research on poverty over the years shows the importance of structural conditions in creating inequality and poverty.[91] However, people living in poverty adapt to their circumstances by fashioning a social life with valued cultural meaning and symbols that, over time, are appreciated by the larger society in the areas of sports, clothing, speech, and entertainment. Many researchers believe that poor people are middle-class people without money,[92] a myth perpetuated by forty years of research that emphasizes the structural origins of poverty while attacking any suggestion that the poor have developed a culture related to deprivation.[93] The result has been the gross neglect of the existence and workings of a culture among the poor. Preservation within poor neighborhoods is predicated on a culture directly formed from the experiences of prolonged financial and material deprivation, a condition I have labeled the "subculture of scarcity."[94] Of course, the discipline of economics is the study of scarcity, so it should be made clear that I am referring to a subculture whose origins and operation involve managing daily life in a condition of extreme financial and material scarcity over a long period with little probability of significant economic improvement.

Because the United States is a nation of immigrants, and the newest immigrants are generally in the lower class and have little income,[95] some aspects of this subculture are ethnic in origin.[96] However, these ethnic aspects are merely the fringe of the subculture. The subculture of scarcity includes a worldview of material deprivation as the central organizing principle of life. In such a worldview, no matter how well off one is, a vulnerability to poverty with no safety net is always lurking in the future.[97]

The values and norms that emerge from this worldview are described in the preceding sections of this chapter and represent important agents in sustaining the social character of poor neighborhoods by providing the blueprints for its maintenance. The blueprints, on the other hand, estab-

lish the framework of what are considered the "appropriate" strategies and instruments for individuals to realize their interests. Of course, a group of people faced with scarcity could share the limited resources available rather than competing for them, but the prevailing "winner take all" ideology of the United States does not support sharing. Rather, this ideology supports only a sharing of misery and a belief that anyone who accumulates surplus wealth should consider giving a portion of it as charity to those less fortunate.[98] Hence, many of the strategies and instruments of choice used by poor people in the United States involve power, advantage, and physical force. Culture thus shifts from worldview and value orientations to what Ann Swidler calls the use of a "tool kit" to realize the value orientations engendered in the worldview.[99] Therefore, culture as described in this study incorporates two separate but complementary aspects. First, culture includes a set of morals and values that arise from a particular worldview that explains how and why the world operates as it does. Second, once this worldview is established, culture determines the what, where, and when of any particular social action, how an action is to occur, and its strategic importance to the individual, group, or society in general. Thus my concept of culture integrates the idea of "value orientations" in the work of Weber, Parsons, Clyde Kluckhohn, Florence Kluckhohn, and Fred Strodtbeck with the idea of culture as a "tool kit" advanced by Swidler and draws on Fischer's "subculture of urbanism" framework to account for the subculture of scarcity's physical location and persistence within large cities over time.[100]

Through the interplay of the worldview described above, with its set of values and norms, and the strategies and instruments used to realize individual interests, a variety of status identities and social hierarchies are constructed to form a subcultural system that local participants value and want to pass on to succeeding generations. Nothing is more fundamental or normal to any cultural system than the desire and effort to pass on the present morals, values, and norms in the society or subsociety to the next generation. Most poverty researchers have failed to fully appreciate the degree to which this exists in poor neighborhoods. As a result, they have missed that the transfer of what is considered valuable to the next generation is accomplished through the everyday activities of local institutions, where young people and newcomers alike are formally and informally socialized into the subcultural world of the poor neighborhood.[101]

Another factor besides the subculture that works to preserve the status quo in a poor neighborhood is the economic interests of those dependent on the neighborhood for the well-being they have achieved or hope to

achieve. The interests of these individuals vary a great deal. Some are owners of small businesses in the illicit economy,[102] others are small business owners in the legal economy,[103] and still others hope to enter the illicit economy, taking their chances for mobility within it.[104] Few people find the hope of entering the legal economy attractive because the types of economic establishments active in poor neighborhoods do not offer opportunities to increase a person's life chances.[105] Those who have economic interests in the low-income community are provided with employees, clients, and a protected environment from economic competitors and/or law enforcement. Thus these people resist social change because it has the potential to disrupt the prevailing operating system, introducing more uncertainty and greater risk to their economic life. Most of these people vigorously work to maintain the existing social order.

The last element of the poor community that works to preserve the existing social environment consists of those who find their social interests, and thus their lives, integrally tied to their neighborhood's present social structure and order. Over time, indigent people develop a subculture that facilitates their everyday activities and gives evaluative meaning to their lives.[106] The most important aspect of this subculture is the social statuses that have emerged from the prevailing values and social norms. These status categories give individuals a social identity and system that creates prestige, honor, and respect in their lives and establishes some attractive aspects of life for people who are marginalized by members of the wider society (but who may still be big fish in a small pond).[107] Thus the residents of these poor neighborhoods have a vested interest in maintaining the prevailing local social order. Of course, as in the wider society, those who occupy statuses with the most prestige have more interest in preserving the present system than those at the lower rungs, but surprisingly, they are not alone in resisting change and conserving the prevailing social system (and social order) in their neighborhood.[108] Even people at the lower rungs of the community try to preserve it because they have internalized the values associated with the existing socioeconomic conditions. It is for this reason that someone who left the community and has achieved more financial success will say, "Yeah, I have more money and don't live here anymore, but I really ain't any different, and I like coming here."

THE DYNAMICS OF CHANGE AND PRESERVATION

The term social dynamic is used in this study in reference to the forces that produce activities of change and maintenance in a given social

arena. These forces, either competing and conflictual or consensual and complementing, are the mechanisms that create or maintain a particular society. The persistently poor neighborhood is a composite of activities producing a social equilibrium that forms the basis of a functionally reproducing neighborhood. Within this equilibrium exist agents intent on producing social change and agents intent on resisting it. This tension, or dialectic, produces a synthesis that becomes what people observe as the "existing neighborhood."

The dynamics of change in poor neighborhoods occur in four distinct patterns. In the first and most prevalent pattern, actions change a neighborhood institution into an economic enterprise (as when a grocery store that supported a variety of neighborhood interactions becomes an establishment run for profit only); in the second pattern, actions change a neighborhood institution into a state institution (as when a school reinforcing neighborhood norms becomes one that reinforces state/national norms). In both cases, change agents could affect either the institution as a whole or the institution's internal social order, beginning a process of internal decay that would eventually result in the establishment's collapse as a neighborhood institution and its assumption of the character of an "enterprise" or state institution. The outcome is ultimately a net loss of an institution in the neighborhood. Since the social structure of the neighborhood is composed of the interconnection of institutions, any institutional loss upsets and weakens the neighborhood social structure, creating instability. Neighborhood instability is a condition in which individuals' or groups' lack of a functional social consistency (routine) causes varied, random, and unpredictable behavior among the residents. In such a condition, the mechanisms of social control cannot fully eliminate behavior that is socially detrimental to the maintenance of the neighborhood's social structure. However, this situation should not be confused with the elimination of behavior that the outside society finds detrimental to the neighborhood or its interests. Although some might call this condition disorder, such a judgment misses the fact that a number of preservation agents still operate to reestablish the existing social order. In brief, only rarely does a particular poor neighborhood change from a condition of order to one of disorder.[109]

Two additional patterns of change occur in poor neighborhoods: when an economic enterprise becomes a neighborhood institution and when a state institution becomes a neighborhood institution. Such changes occur through instrumental acts of preservation intended to either restore the prior structure and social order or maintain the existing one. These

efforts strengthen cohesion in the neighborhood, even though the eco-
nomic, social, and physical condition of the residents remains the same.
A successful preservation effort revitalizes the existing social structure
and strengthens the subjective meaning that residents assign to their lives.
This meaning is not false consciousness on their part or that of an out-
side researcher "idealizing" poverty;[110] nor is it the residents' tolerance
of an intolerable condition. Rather, it is a meaning that develops from a
subculture of scarcity that is positive and strong enough to maintain loy-
alty to subcultural values and norms even when prior residents have left
the neighborhood and improved their economic status.

Because of the large structural arrangements of the society, residents
of poor neighborhoods confront extreme material scarcity and social
deprivation as an everyday condition. Within this condition they develop
a set of values and norms that produce the elements of a social hierarchy.
In turn, these elements are brought by individuals into local social insti-
tutions to be further developed and nurtured, forming a social order that
governs the behavioral interactions in the institution and, by extension,
in the neighborhood at large. Finally, the ways in which social institu-
tions and their social orders are linked in the neighborhood define its
social structure.

Within this context the forces of change and preservation create con-
stant tension in poor neighborhoods. The change agents (from outside
or inside the neighborhood) usually affect the external and internal envi-
ronment of the social institution, modifying its content and character.
Such an alteration changes how the social institution relates to other
institutions, causing instability until institutional shifts patch any social
damage to the overall structure.

Social maintenance occurs as a result of individual acts to protect the
operative subculture. Because change agents challenge the existing sub-
culture, instability occurs in social relations. In such cases, social institu-
tions cannot work at full capacity to support the neighborhood's social
structure, so people are less able to predict others' behavior, an uncer-
tainty that significantly impairs social outcomes. Yet as preservation
efforts progress, people's ability to predict behaviors and social outcomes
improves because information regarding others' behaviors is integrated
within the context of the existing subculture. When the local subculture
is restored, equilibrium within the local social structure is reestablished.

Instability in the neighborhood's social order is not to be equated with
disorder. Unlike other studies, this study does not define social disorgan-
ization as the number or density of networks. Rather, disorganization

occurs when the neighborhood has no functional social order that addresses common local issues. This allows for a better appreciation of how the neighborhood is constructed and organized and focuses on the social issues of normal, everyday interaction rather than, as social disorganization theorists conceptualize, the neighborhood's ability to solve large social problems like drug addiction, litter, public intoxication, or prostitution.[111] Any neighborhood, or society, can have difficulty solving large social problems but still be socially organized.

My argument is not that social disorganization is nonexistent but that the criteria previously used cannot adequately determine it. Social disorder exists in poor neighborhoods, but only when there are too few people to support a functional institutional environment as described in this study and residents are consequently forced to find institutional affiliation outside their neighborhood. When consistent institutional affiliation outside the neighborhood is the modus vivendi of the few residents that still live within the geographic area of the old neighborhood, then and only then has the neighborhood become functionally disorganized or socially dead.