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The Suburban Scripts: Built Environment and Socioeconomic Change in the American Suburbs

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THE SUBURBAN SCRIPTS:

BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIOECONOMIC CHANGE IN THE AMERICAN SUBURBS

Michael Owen Benediktsson

A DISSERTATION
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The Suburban Scripts:

Built Environment and Socioeconomic Change
in the American Suburbs

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For Kate.

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The Suburban Scripts:

Built Environment and Socioeconomic Change
in the American Suburbs

The American suburbs are undergoing a profound transformation. In the last two decades, people and resources have been drawn away from many suburban communities. As a result, suburban inequality and poverty have spread. In recent years, mounting foreclosures have entered this picture, affecting the vitality and stability of neighborhoods built around homeownership. The majority of the country's poor now live in suburbs, but social research has been slow to respond.

As a result of the processes outlined above, changes are occurring in the way that suburban spaces are inhabited. Homes constructed for small, middle class families are housing extended families and single laborers. Streets designed for the automobile are accommodating people who walk to work. And millions of homes formerly occupied by owners are now lying vacant. These changes have something to tell us about how the built environment figures into social order. The physical landscape serves as a reference point for social infrastructure: people attach behavioral routines, social institutions and meanings to the places they inhabit. What happens when streets and buildings designed for a specific lifestyle are forced to accommodate new patterns of social use?

Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, I seek answers to this question in the changing suburban neighborhoods of the New York metropolitan region. In the first chapter, I investigate the physical consequences of mismatch between the built environment and the physical needs and capabilities of residents, finding that places where the suburban working poor inhabit sprawling, automobile-centered landscapes are associated with higher pedestrian risk and risk of fatal house fires. In the second chapter, I examine the political consequences of changes in the use of suburban space, finding that crowding and conspicuous use of public street corners are symbolically tied to themes of broad moral decline and deterioration. Finally, I examine institutional consequences of socioeconomic change, focusing on reactions to vacant housing in the context of the ongoing foreclosure crisis. I find that on an economically mixed suburban block with a growing stock of vacant suburban homes, neighbors see a basis for mobilization and dissent.

It is the structure of the city which first impresses us by its visible vastness and complexity...[it] has arisen in response to the needs of its inhabitants, [but] once formed, it imposes itself upon them as a crude external fact, and forms them, in turn, in accordance with the design and interests which it incorporates.

Park, Burgess, et. al. (1925)

With the continued growth in the number of planned communities and large-scale housing developments… contemporary housing provides an unparalleled near-experimental setting for the study of 'what might be' rather than the continued observation of 'what is' and 'what has been' in human relations within the local community.

- Robert Merton (1951), cited in Foley (1980)

Introduction:

The Suburban Scripts:
Built Environment and Socioeconomic Change in the American Suburbs

The American suburbs are undergoing a profound transformation. From the 1950s through the mid-1970s, suburban communities attracted middle class families, while low-income whites and blacks of all income levels were largely blocked from suburban residence. As a result, median income levels in suburban communities steadily increased relative to center cities throughout these decades (Farley 1964). In the 1980s, suburban demographics began to change. Per capita income leveled off in relation to center cities and pockets of suburban poverty proliferated (Jargowsky 2003; Madden 2003; Swanson et al. 2006). Since 2000, this process has extended from "inner-ring" suburbs in large metropolitan areas to a wider range of suburban communities (Berube et al. 2005; Berube et. al. 2006).

One of the most salient consequences of these developments is a change in the way the suburban landscape is inhabited. Homes constructed for small, middle class families are housing large families and single laborers. Streets built for the automobile are accommodating people who walk to work. And millions of homes formerly occupied by owners are lying vacant due to foreclosure. These are not the only observable effects of suburban transformation, but they have something intriguing in common; in a growing

number of suburban communities, the traditional relationship between people and the built environment is giving way.

This dissertation is predicated on an assumption: that ongoing changes in many suburban communities may have something to tell us about how the built environment figures into social order. Buildings and streetscapes are relatively permanent fixtures of a community. Partly by virtue of this permanence, the built landscape serves as a reference point for a community's social infrastructure. People attach behavioral routines, social institutions and meaning to the places they inhabit. But also because of this permanence, aspects of social life can change rapidly, sometimes overnight, whereas the built environment cannot. What happens when streets and buildings designed for a specific lifestyle are forced to accommodate new patterns of social use? And how do ideas and institutions predicated upon the *old* patterns of use affect reactions to these events?

The current changes underway in the suburbs offer a unique opportunity to answer these questions. The American suburbs are massive in demographic and geographic scale: more than half of the US population now lives in suburban neighborhoods. Changes in the way suburban spaces are inhabited are likely to be widely consequential, and suggest a pressing need for social research. In the following empirical chapters, I examine cases in which social and economic transformation has resulted in changes in the way suburban houses and streets are used. I will focus, respectively, on the physical, symbolic and institutional effects of these changes. In each case, my analysis is motivated by a single overarching research question:

- *What role does the built environment play in localized processes of social change and diversification?*

This introduction will proceed as follows. First, I will outline the central empirical problem, identifying the distinctive approach to suburban design that emerged during the decades following World War II and describing three distinct ways in which this approach anticipates specific social actors and activities. Second, I will describe the socioeconomic changes underway in suburban communities with an eye toward identifying where and why they are occurring. Third, I will formulate a set of concepts that will be used, making use of a broad range of social research.

The Suburban Scripts

The popular stereotype of physically homogenous suburban communities neglects the past and present diversity of suburban communities (Harris 1999). Depending upon their location and the era in which they were developed, suburbs display a variety of approaches to architecture and land use (Hayden 2003). Dense, working class towns settled prior to World War II are currently included, both spatially and discursively, in the area we refer to as suburbs, alongside the sprawling, middle class places more typically identified as suburban in appearance (Nicolaides 1999). If the physical uniformity of suburbia has been overstated in scholarly research and in popular culture, so has its social homogeneity, as a growing historical literature on black and working class suburbs has pointed out (Harris 1999; Kruse and Sugrue 2006, Wiese 1993). On the other hand, suburban communities have been more socially uniform during some periods than during others. Many of the generic physical elements found in present-day suburban

communities were developed during a time of relatively low suburban heterogeneity: the decades immediately following World War II. In this dissertation, the focal point is a distinctive physical landscape that developed during this period. Although not *definitive* of suburbia, it is far more likely to be encountered in suburban neighborhoods, its presence an artifact of *when* these neighborhoods were built and for *whom*.[1]

In the postwar years, a combination of push and pull factors attracted an expanding population of middle class families to the suburbs (Frey 1979). Meanwhile, discriminatory lending policies, overt social hostility and conventional market barriers discouraged integration by low-income families and racial minorities (Massey and Denton 1993). The result was not monolithic uniformity, but a general tendency toward white, middle class suburbanization. Occupational prestige and per capita income in the suburbs steadily rose during this period relative to center cities (Farley 1964, Swanstrom et al. 2006), while the black population of suburban communities rarely exceeded 5% (Hermalin and Farley 1973).

During this postwar boom in suburbanization, public officials and private developers settled upon a general mode of suburban architecture and land use that continues to be applied to many if not most new suburban developments. In contrast to the "streetcar suburbs" constructed in the prewar decades, postwar suburban communities tended to be built for travel by private motor vehicle; in contrast to dense urban development, they tended to consist of detached homes designed to accommodate the activities of a nuclear family; and in contrast to both of these landscapes, suburban communities were designed for homeowners, providing spaces for residents to maintain and modify (Cohen 2004; Jackson 1985; Hayden 2003). New suburban developments

contained a wide variety of residential and landscape architecture, but in the above respects they adhered to an emerging generic form. This form was developed to fit the domestic aspirations of new homeowners, who tended to be young, middle class families. Federal incentives paved the way for the private sector to fill this demand, gearing tax breaks and loan programs toward the mass construction of single-family detached homes (Baxandall and Ewen 2000; Checkoway 2002, Hayden 2003). Meanwhile, homebuilders had realized the value of "niche" marketing to a specific demographic, and heavily targeted young middle class families in advertising campaigns, linking suburban homes to the automobile as objects of consumption and expressions of national identity (Cohen 2004). Accordingly, the suburban landscape became associated with a *lifestyle* that developers sought to provide through physical design: new suburban homes allocated private spaces for specific family activities, and required ownership of at least one automobile.

In recent decades, suburban municipalities have increasingly experimented with an approach known as "new urbanism" which incorporates higher density, mixed-use zoning, and street design conducive to walking (Duany et al. 2001). New suburban developments, however, still overwhelmingly consist of single-family homes and contain many of the features (e.g. front lawns, carports and cul-de-sacs) that were incorporated in the postwar decades to fit a set of assumptions regarding middle class family life. More often than not, the generic social assumptions of postwar suburban designers appear to have been justified. Census counts suggest that suburban households do, in fact, tend to consist of families that own both an automobile and a single-family house. The patterns in question are far from universal, but they are, to use a statistical term, *modal*: they are

more common than any of the reasonable alternatives. In the following brief summaries, I outline three distinctly suburban ways in which the built environment has been socially "scripted" (Akrich 1992), describing the historical process through which physical elements of suburban design became functionally and symbolically associated with a specific pattern of use.

House and Family

In 2007, the census bureau's tabulations of American housing described a suburban landscape that was built to accommodate the activities of a small family:

- *Approximately 75% of suburban housing units were single-family homes* (U.S. Census Bureau 2007).
- *Slightly more than half (52%) of these detached, single-family homes had exactly three bedrooms, the number necessary to accommodate a cohabiting, romantically involved couple and two children, assuming each child has its own room* (U.S. Census Bureau 2007).
- *In contrast, in 2007, 11% of urban or suburban apartments and 43% of rural homes had a third bedroom* (U.S. Census Bureau 2007).

As these statistics suggest, suburban housing was designed to accommodate middle class families with young children. In the postwar decades, new suburban households largely consisted of young families embarking on the childrearing stage of the life course (Foote 1960; Frey 1984; Frey 1979; Michelson 1967). For these new suburbanites, the detached, single family home surrounded by a yard offered a high level of "experiential congruence" (Michelson 1976: 77-87), meshing well with a lifestyle focused upon the nuclear family unit.

Such congruence would never have occurred naturally. A preexisting cultural logic supported the efforts of both state and developer in building single-family homes.

Beginning in the late 19th century, the suburban home became popularly associated with a wholesome brand of domestic life (Fishman 1987: 33-38; Hayden 1984; Marsh 1990; Wright 1980; Wright 1981). Marsh suggests that the core moral component of this imagery remained unchanged into the postwar boom:

> By the end of the 1920s there had developed an image of suburbia that was to remain fixed in the landscape of the American mind for decades to come. The owner-occupied, single-family house, set in a community of similar houses, where children were the central focus of family life, and from which families considered 'undesirable' were excluded, had become, not the norm for all families, but very nearly the standard by which one's middle class credentials were judged (183).

Legitimized by the cultural meaning of the suburban single-family home, the state heavily subsidized their construction, and private homebuilders did their best to further associate these homes with a middle class lifestyle. As a result, the link between the ideal typical suburban home and the middle class nuclear family has to be seen as both functional and symbolic: the detached suburban housing unit is built for family life, and in television sitcoms and movies that depict a middle-class family lifestyle, the setting is inevitably a single family detached home.

Driver and Car

In the majority of suburban communities, everyday life is structured around the motor vehicle. Suburban homes, public spaces and places of work tend to be built for people who have access to a working automobile, as well as the physical ability and legal right to operate one.

- *In 2007, 86.4% of suburban homes had access to at least one car, truck, or van* (U.S. Census Bureau 2007).

- *In 2000, 90% of suburban commuting trips were taken by private motor vehicle.* (U.S. Census Bureau U.S. Census Bureau 2000).

The primary tie between the suburban landscape and the motor vehicle is functional. In the 1920s, planners first committed to the automobile as an important mode of commuter access to the city, creating a functional link between the automobile and suburban residence. Following World War II, rapid suburbanization coincided with a transition to more automobile-dependent suburban design. Automobile sales quadrupled nationally in less than ten years, fed by a consumer logic that equated the private automobile with the suburban home as symbols of national identity and upward mobility. In successive decades, suburban automobile use continued to rise steadily (Briggs et al. 1986), finally leveling off somewhat by 1990. In 2007, roughly 91% of suburban commuting trips were taken by private vehicle (U.S. Census Bureau 2007).

Like the detached, single-family home, suburban streets were designed to fit a specific vision of social behavior when compared to their urban counterparts. Dense urban communities and streetcar suburbs tend to permit a variety of possible modes of transport, while many suburban communities are only conveniently navigable by automobile. The comparative flexibility of the urban environment can be seen in commuting patterns. Less than 5% of suburban commuters walk or take public transit. The rate in center cities (15.5%) is three times as high (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). The form and quite possibly the rate of suburbanization during the twentieth century would not have been possible without the automobile. Reciprocally, the ubiquity of automobile-ownership is partially due to the fact that the majority of Americans now live in suburban areas built solely for the motor vehicle.

Home and Owner

Widespread homeownership is common to many suburban communities, and is the basis for a range of formal and informal suburban institutions, from "home improvement" to the "homeowner's association" to home rule and school districts funded by property taxes.

- *In 2007, almost three out of four (73.3%) suburban housing units were owner occupied. In contrast, a little more than half (53.4%) of urban housing units were owner occupied* (U.S. Census Bureau 2007).

Relatively high levels of owner-occupancy in the suburbs are a legacy of both state intervention and national prosperity. From the 1920s into the 1960s, the federal government took active steps to encourage the purchase of suburban homes. According to a growing consensus in interwar federal government, the effects on an individual of owning a home were crucial to collective stability. Herbert Hoover, a fervent supporter of homeownership, identified private property "not as an object in itself" but as a "useful and necessary instrument in stimulation of initiative to the individual" (Lands 2008). Home ownership, according to Hoover, led to "civic conscience and cooperative action," tying individuals to networks offering incentive and accountability, and, by extension, stabilizing society (Hutchison 1997). Through federally supported programs such as the "Own Your Own Home" movement, homeownership was presented as central to valued social roles. According to the promoters of home-ownership, the man who owned his own home was "a better Worker, Husband, Father, Citizen, and a real American" (Luken and Vaughan 2004).

Although these themes receded during the New Deal, they were picked up again by homebuilders and policymakers in the postwar period. A prominent government official suggested that homeownership was "the best guarantee against communism and socialism and the various 'bad isms' of life"; another argued that "the need to protect and guard the home is the whip that has proved, beyond all others efficacious in driving men to discharge the duties of self-government" (Baxandall and Ewen 2000: 108). According to Cohen (2004), homeownership did have attendant benefits for individual homeowners, but these did not necessarily extend to broader society. Mass homeownership made "market concerns paramount in decisions about how and where one lived" (202) and "narrowed" homeowners' conception of shared fate, highlighting property values as a rallying point (228-240). Running through this history is a view that homeownership offers a basis of accountability and opportunity that links individual homeowners with their neighbors, providing a basis for social capital, whether defined in broadly altruistic or narrowly financial terms.

In these brief discussions, I have attempted to suggest that suburban spaces anticipate patterns of social activity and organization, and that the resultant linkages have been reinforced by cultural themes evident in contemporary political and commercial discourse. Like any other landscape tied functionally and symbolically to patterns of social use, suburban communities are "scripted" (Akrich 1992). From the perspective of socioeconomic change, the important insight is that the behavioral assumptions embedded in the suburban built environment are *specific* with regard to class: suburban spaces are geared toward the middle class, home-owning, automobile-driving family. In

the following section, I summarize the ongoing socioeconomic changes resulting in a suburban population that increasingly does not fit this image.

Suburbia in Transition

In the 1980s, the economic landscape of the suburbs began to change, a process that has gained momentum as new suburban communities have lost their economic footing and old suburban neighborhoods have experienced an influx of low-income residents. The result appears to be a growing mismatch between the middle class lifestyle for which postwar suburbs have generally been designed and the new social reality taking shape in many suburban communities. Because suburban communities are ecologically diverse, this process has been far from uniform: the causes of change have varied by time period, region and community. However, a rough account of suburban socioeconomic change can be discerned from a growing literature on suburban economic decline.

The Geography of Suburban Socioeconomic Transformation

Socioeconomic change in suburban communities in recent decades has taken place within a broader context of steadily increasing income inequality and the dramatic geographic redistribution of wealth in the United States. The general trend during the second half of the twentieth century was toward higher levels of both inequality and income segregation, resulting in greater spatial concentrations of both affluence and poverty (Massey et al. 2003). This process is changing the social landscape of America's suburbs and cities. Americans increasingly live in neighborhoods where neighbors are of

the same socioeconomic status: in areas of affluence, the result is likely to be a multiplication of privilege and social structural opportunity; in areas of concentrated poverty, the costs of economic hardship are similarly magnified (Massey et al. 2003).

Meanwhile, where concentrated urban poverty increased during the postwar period, in more recent decades, an increasing number of large and small cities across the country have experienced processes of reinvestment and gentrification. Real estate investment is central to this process, as a critical mass of "place entrepreneurs" (Molotch 1976), or property owners and investors, are often at the heart of municipal regimes that broadly influence tradeoffs between private and public investment. Although often interpreted in terms of local cultural and economic trends, the gentrification of a number of American cities is actually part of a broader turn to neoliberal approaches to urban governance (Hackworth 2007). The increase in private investment in cities has been met not just with a decline in urban public sector activity, but has moved private disinvestment out of urban areas and into inner-ring suburbs (Hackworth 2007: 98-149). So at the national level, changes in suburban communities have taken place within a context of increasing income polarization and a movement of capital out of struggling suburbs and back into gentrifying cities.

In spite of this, in the 1980s and 90s, suburban housing construction continued at a furious pace, particularly on the outer fringes where open land and lax regulations encouraged large-scale development (Lucy and Phillips 2000). In the process, the supply of suburban housing in many areas overshot market demand. The result of this outward expansion from the perspective of suburban demography was twofold: it created new communities, often with high vacancy rates, on the expanding suburban frontier, while

simultaneously offering opportunities for affluent and middle class suburbanites to move further and further from urban centers.

With economically tenuous new communities on its outer edge and stagnating neighborhoods in its inner-ring, suburbia became increasingly polarized, by neighborhood and municipality. The number of middle-income suburbs dropped, while both poor and affluent suburbs multiplied (Swanstrom et al. 2006). A growing body of evidence suggests that the geography of suburban decline has been consequently bifurcated, nationally and within each region, affecting both the expanding edge of Sun Belt "boomburbs" and the aging suburban interior in the industrial Midwest and Northeast. Several studies document decline in the inner-ring suburbs of large metropolitan areas (Jargowsky 2003; Madden 2003; Puentes and Warren 2006). Others show stagnation primarily at the suburban fringe (Swanstrom et al. 2006), and still others offer evidence of simultaneous decline in both geographical zones (Bollens 1988; Orfield 1997).

The best way to summarize this research is to say that suburban decline has occurred in every region of the country, but has taken different forms. When suburban decline is measured relative to center cities or relative to other suburbs, it appears that the suburbs of the Midwest and Southeast experienced the most change in the 1980s and 90s (Swanstrom et al. 2006). The most striking evidence of relative suburban decline is provided by Lucy and Phillips (2000: 175), who identified 405 suburbs that declined faster than their center cities in the 1980s, a dramatic reversal of earlier trends.

From the standpoint of changes in absolute economic wellbeing in suburban communities, however, these studies can be misleading. An increase in center city

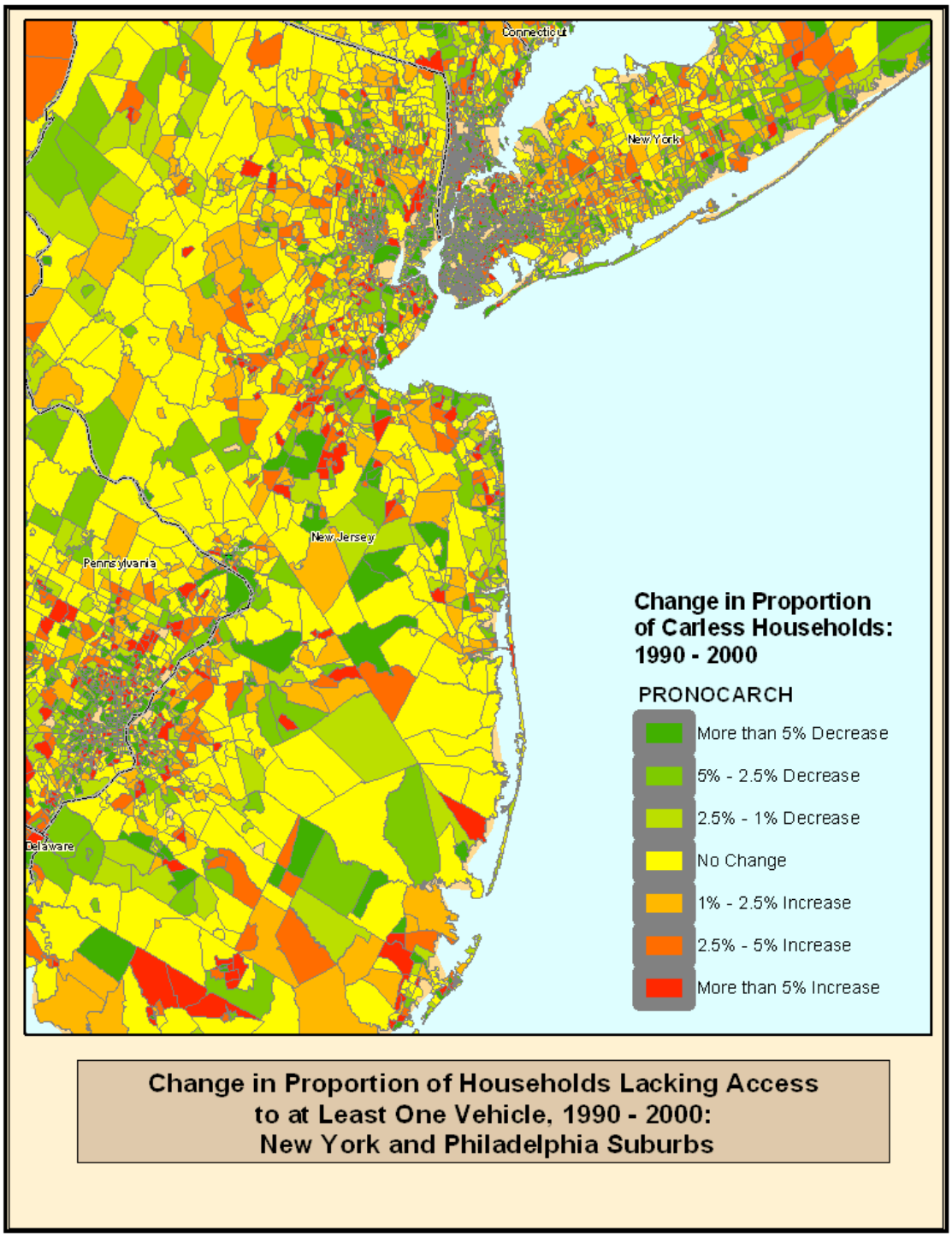


Figure 1: Spatial Trends in "Carless" Households during the 1990s

income registers as suburban decline even when suburban income levels have remained constant. In contrast, studies of suburban poverty rates show that absolute decline has been most significant in the West and Northeast (Berube and Frey 2006, Madden 2003). Of the twenty suburbs identified by Berube and Frey (2006) as having the largest increases in poverty rates during the 1990s, sixteen were located in either California, New York or New Jersey.

Because private and public sectors in suburban communities are heavily reliant on real estate as a source of income and credit, housing plays a central role in determining where suburban socioeconomic change takes place. On the suburban frontier, overdevelopment resulted in communities with expensive infrastructure requirements but without the population or the tax revenue to support such requirements (Bollens 1988; Orfield 1997). To the extent that newly built suburbs attracted affluent and middle class suburbanites, they often drew new residents from inner-ring suburbs with aging housing stock. Urban researchers have long associated old housing with economic decline (Downs 1981), but Lucy and Phillips (2000) tell a more complex story that may better explain socioeconomic changes in suburban communities. Very old suburban homes, though more expensive to maintain, carry connotations of prestige. At the other end of the spectrum, new suburban homes command high value by offering larger, more modern spaces, lower maintenance costs, and a range of amenities. In contrast, "middle-aged" suburbs bear the dual handicaps of increasing age and declining aesthetic appeal. These communities are old enough to be in poor condition, but not old enough to convey a historic charm attractive to more affluent homebuyers (Lucy and Phillips 2000: 197-244).

Accordingly, economic decline in interior suburbs appears to have been concentrated in communities constructed during the postwar suburban housing boom.

In addition to geographic location and housing stock, migration patterns help to explain the geography of suburban socioeconomic change. The decline of property values in inner-ring suburbs has been exacerbated by an outmigration of predominantly white, middle class residents. In the post-industrial urban centers of the Northeast and Midwest, a loss of manufacturing jobs and a shift of corporate workplaces away from the urban core led younger generations of upwardly mobile white families to abandon the neighborhoods in which they were raised. In metropolitan areas where center city employment opportunities remained strong, many workers chose to undertake longer commutes from new developments on the expanding suburban fringe. Others relocated to isolated "exurban centers" or "edge cities" (Garreau 1991). And still others moved into gentrifying urban neighborhoods, or, in the case of stagnating areas such as Detroit, Western Pennsylvania or Long Island, abandoned the region entirely. As a result, suburban decline is associated with aging populations and overall population loss (Lucy and Phillips 2000: 182; Orfield 1997). Outmigration of middle class suburbanites has been met by in-migration of lower-income residents. Declining suburban property values, the increased cost of urban living, and a broader shift toward a geographically decentralized service economy has made suburban residence more appealing and more attainable for working class families and single laborers.

This increasing economic diversity accompanied increasing ethnic diversity. Even after the Fair Housing Act (1968), a range of discriminatory practices have continued to exclude low and middle-income black residents from predominantly white suburban

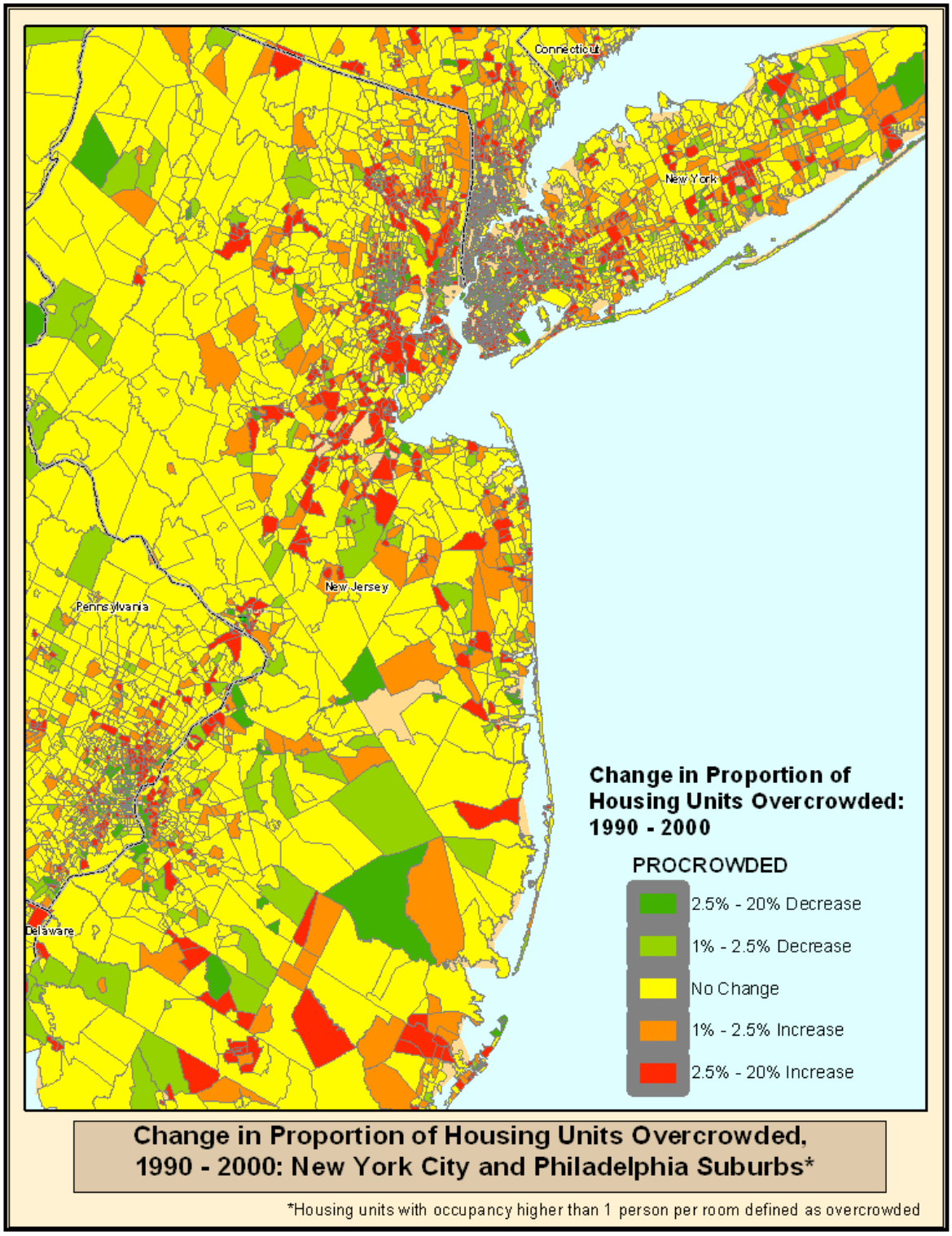


Figure 2: Spatial Trends in Overcrowding during the 1990s

neighborhoods (Massey 2005), but Hispanic and Asian immigrants appear not to have experienced the same barriers. Furthermore, although economic assimilation has been a historical prerequisite for immigrants relocating from central city to suburb (Massey and Mullan 1984), immigrants are increasingly bypassing traditional urban gateway cities, moving directly to suburban communities that offer service-sector jobs and growing networks of social ties (Alba et al. 1999; Jones-Correa 2006). The most recent analyses suggest a sea change in both the breadth and the content of immigration to the United States following the loosening of immigration restrictions in the 1960s. The immigrant population has become much more diverse during this period, as European immigration has declined, while the immigrant population from the Caribbean, Latin America, and Asia has grown. The most recent analyses suggest that the flow of immigration is no longer limited to traditional gateway cities in the Northeast and West, as interior states and small towns have experienced a dramatic increase in their immigrant populations (Massey 20102010). As a result of these processes, the population of American suburbs has become strikingly more diverse in ethnic as well as economic terms.

Finally, in more recent years, a new dimension of suburban decline has been most evident among the newest of suburban communities. Just as suburban growth created the conditions for decline in the inner-ring, a glut of suburban housing construction at the suburban periphery helped to create the conditions for rapid economic deterioration in many communities. The collapse of a housing bubble built in part on risky lending by banks, has led to a broad decline in real estate prices, escalating unemployment, and a wave of foreclosures that has hit new suburban communities the hardest (New York Times 2008). Although most severe in the sprawling new suburbs of the West and

Southwest, foreclosures have swept through urban and suburban areas across the nation. In the Northeast, older, inner-ring suburbs as well as newer suburbs have experienced a rash of foreclosures, as predominantly black or Hispanic suburban communities with relatively low income levels appear to have provided targets for predatory lending (Rugh and Massey 2010; Powell 2009).

With regard to the physical landscape of the suburbs, the linked processes described above can be seen as having analogous results. The economic profile of the suburban population is changing, producing a growing sector with needs and capabilities that can be expected to depart markedly from those of the middle class families to whom much suburban space was marketed and sold. As a result, traditional relationships between people and the suburban built environment are deteriorating. Neighborhoods designed for the automobile increasingly contain households without access to a motor vehicle, and homes built for the nuclear family increasingly house extended families or groups of unrelated laborers.

Based on the discussion above, one of the zones where one might expect to find these changes is the inner-ring suburbs of major metropolitan areas in the Northeast. Mapping change in rates of residential overcrowding and carless households drawn from the 2000 Census allows the changing uses of suburban space to be geographically visualized. In Figures 1, 2, and 3, changes in rates of residential overcrowding and private motor vehicle access in the suburbs of several major urban centers in the Northeast are mapped. The percentages in these figures do not represent "percent change" but rather raw increases or decreases in the percentage of households without access to an

automobile (i.e. "carless households") or where occupancy is higher than 1 person per room (i.e. "overcrowded households").

Figure 1 offers evidence of uneven changes in household access to a private automobile. Positive changes in the percentage of households *without* access to an automobile (i.e. "carless households") between 1990 and 2000 are shaded orange and red. In keeping with research identifying increasing suburban income polarization and segregation in the 1990s (Swanstrom et al. 2006), the map indicates clusters of green-shaded tracts where the proportion of carless households decreased, as well as orange and red shaded tracts where the proportion increased. The geographic patterning evident in the map suggests that the proportion of carless households *increased substantially* (more than 5%) in many of New York and Philadelphia's inner-ring suburbs.

In Figures 2 and 3, changes in the percentage of households with occupancy rates higher than 1 person per room are mapped for the suburbs of New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington D.C. The geographic patterning of these changes is similar to the patterning of increases in carless households, as we might expect given the correlation of both measures with income. Although increases in overcrowding are geographically uneven, the results suggest that overcrowding increased substantially (more than 2.5%) in many inner-ring suburbs of the metropolitan areas depicted.

Consistent with the discussion above, changes can be seen in inner-ring suburban census tracts surrounding major cities. But what is happening at street level in the red-shaded census tracts? Changes in the use of the built environment are only sociologically meaningful to the extent that the built environment "does something" sociologically. To analyze the social implications of a mismatch between the built environment and a local

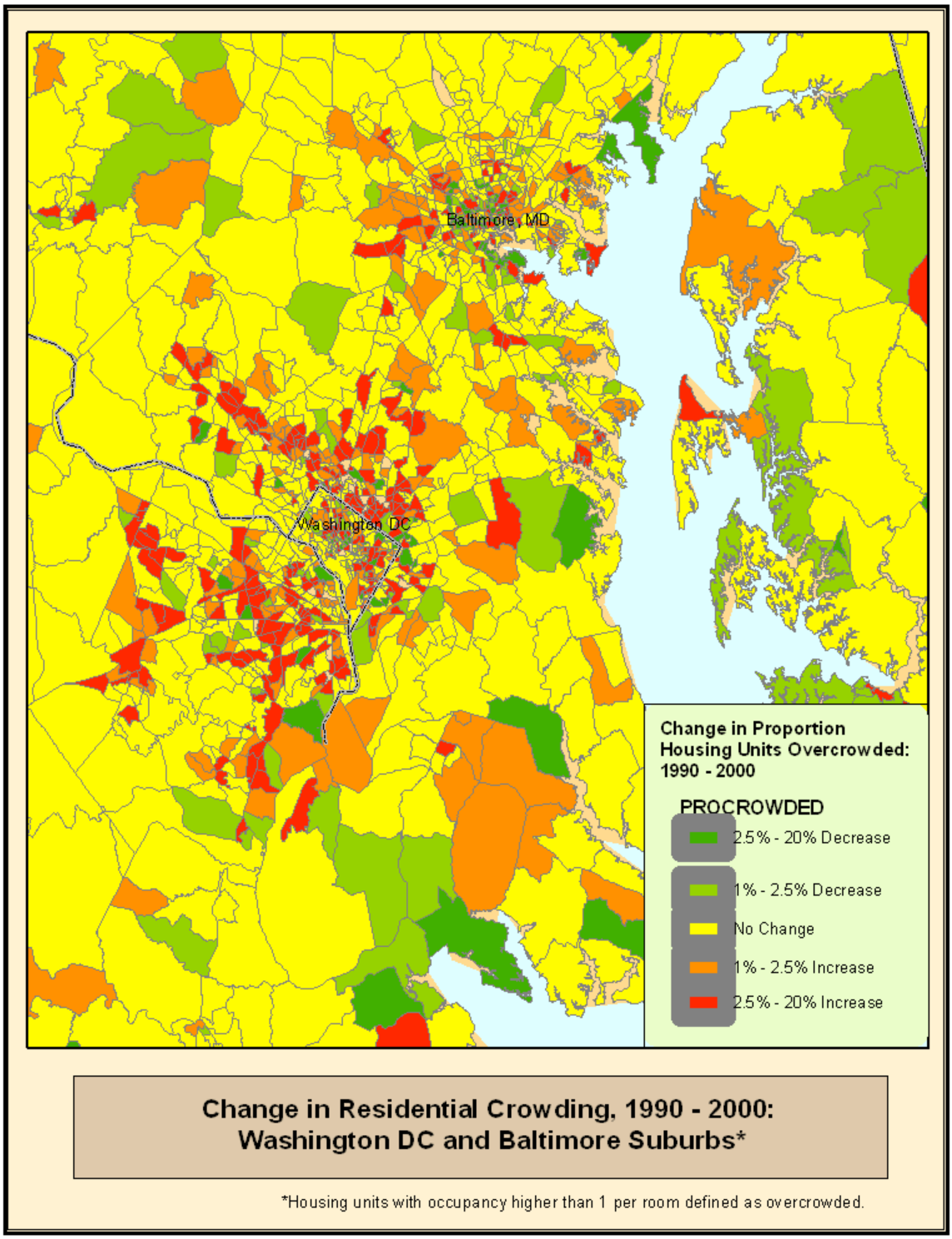


Figure 3: Spatial Trends in Overcrowding during the 1990s

population, a broad theoretical view is necessary. In order to develop a conceptual framework for my project, I surveyed a wide variety of research for clues as to how the built environment might be expected to enter into localized social stability and change. In the following section, I briefly put my substantive topic – suburban socioeconomic transformation – aside, outlining a set of concepts that will structure and inform the empirical analyses in my dissertation. The resulting framework is broad, and is more heuristic than predictive, but generates testable hypotheses at the level of my empirical chapters.

Theory

The Built Environment and Social Order: Medium and Means

Sociologically speaking, what does the built environment *do*? Taking an expansive view, theorists have suggested that the built environment lends stability and predictability to social processes. Simmel for example, described the built environment as "fixing the contents" of society (Gieryn 2002). Social activity is episodic and dynamic: characterized by constant movement even when contained by spatial and temporal boundaries. In comparison, the built environment is relatively stable, durable, immobile and encompassing. For these reasons, a number of thinkers have suggested that the built environment helps to structure social life. Churchill (1943) for example famously remarked that "[p]eople shape buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us," echoing the view of social theorists such as Mead (1927), who suggested that "[s]ocial beings are things as definitively as physical things are social." Buildings reflect a shared social

reality and help to define it, ordering social activity in time and space. In fact, archeological anthropologists operate on this assumption when they reconstruct the social organization of long-dead societies from physical ruins (Lawrence and Low 1990). Any number of quotidian social practices – for example, "home improvement" or "going to the bank" – are only understandable with reference to a building, and most buildings only make sense in light of a social function such as habitation or economic exchange. The built environment, according to this broad view, is best understood as a *medium* that reflects and reproduces social life.

However, the built environment does not always passively reflect social order. Its capacity to "fix" society makes it a particularly effective means of intentional social control. The most obvious examples are prisons, hospitals and other "total institutions" (Goffman 1961), but in a more relevant vein of research, a number of writers have suggested that the suburban built environment represents a mechanism of intentional social exclusion. Some argue that the suburban architectural form was designed to exclude (Fishman 1987). Others have shown that zoning provided a way to manage the social composition of a suburban community by adopting a physical form unaffordable for low-income buyers (Danielson 1976; Massey and Denton 1993; Massey et al. 2009; Pendall et al. 2005; Rothwell and Massey 2009).

Because users of the built environment are distanced from designers by time and space, political intentions are easily concealed in aspects of physical design. In perhaps the most well known elaboration of this insight, Winner (1980) cites a decision by New York City planner Robert Moses to build low overpasses on the Long Island Expressway, thus preventing public buses (and, by extension, poor people) from using Long Island's

public parks and beaches. Though the factual accuracy of Winner's account has recently been called into question (Joerges 1999), the case provides an illustrative parable suggesting that both the durability and the impersonality of the built environment may make it a particularly effective means with which to pursue a social agenda.

Neither of these perspectives, however, provides much traction on the question of how the built environment may or may not enter into processes of localized social change. Viewed from too great a distance, the built environment dissolves as an explanatory factor. Housing has to be built, shrubs have to be planted and roadways have to be laid, so human agents are always available. But most people are *not* architects, developers or city planners: they exert control over the built environment in a relatively limited and localized manner, generally by using structures and spaces that have already been built. Neither are they the passive recipients of architectural directives: their actions and their thoughts cannot be inferred from the intentions of physical design (Gans 1991). If the built environment affects the form that social transformation takes in the suburbs (or anywhere else for that matter) its effect is more likely to be detectable in the small scale encounters through which individual people come into contact with inanimate objects. In fact, an influential strand of contemporary social theory (Bourdieu 1977: 90; Giddens 1979) suggests that any role the built environment might have in stabilizing society is likely to lie in its ability to help actors solve discrete problems, contributing predictability and regularity to social life primarily through the patterning of thought, behavior and social institutions. An array of research in different disciplines supports this idea, suggesting that a researcher in search of the built environment's impact on local

social processes should begin by looking at the physical behavior, cognition and institutions of everyday users.

Physical Scripts

The most obvious way in which the built environment enters into social life is by physically suggesting and restricting courses of behavior. Writing about technology, Latour (1992) points out that the design of objects suggests "programs" of human action, which in many cases act to reinforce the norms of a larger social order. Following Latour, Akrich (1992) argues that physical objects contain "scripts" for use, and suggests that these scripts contain assumptions regarding users. These assumptions may range from basic physical attributes to, in the case of computer software, fairly complex mental models of a user's occupational role (Hoffman 1985).

Although Latour's paradigmatic statement focuses on small, quotidian objects such as pneumatic door-closing devices and automatic meat roasters, there is no particular reason why the concept of physical *script* cannot be more broadly applied. Architecture and urban design, for example, contain scripts: they suggest patterns of action, shaping individual behavior in an attempt (successful or not) to make collective behavior more predictable (Scott 1998). In part, the ability of physical scripts to operate in this manner is due to the fact that they can be directly coercive: speed bumps damage vehicles if drivers ignore them, and although humans evolved muscles allowing them to squat on their haunches, the invention of the chair has made these muscles atrophy (Cranz 1998). In the case of a physically scripted object, there is no recourse that does not involve altering the object or using it in an unconventional way.

Symbolic Scripts

Research in cognitive psychology offers a parallel mechanism through which the built environment may help to order social action. According to Schank and Abelson's classic formulation (1977), social actors rely upon "situational scripts": mental models linking routine events with defined locations. Anyone who has been to a restaurant, for example, might possess a "restaurant script" (Schank and Abelson 1977), which prescribes the actions involved in entering a restaurant and ordering and receiving food from a server. Without this script, the act would be impossible, or at least extremely time-consuming, as the server would have to explain "ordering" to the customer upon every visit.

As Schank and Abelson suggest, a socially defined space is a carrier of meaning, hence the "restaurant" script. Because space is differentiated functionally and symbolically, a recognizable location becomes an important component of the "bundle of expectations" that a person might draw upon in any given situation, providing information regarding the kind of activities to perform and to anticipate. These activities and the spaces with which they are linked may be associated with a broad variety of culturally specific meanings, and may have positive or negative emotional connotations (Rapoport 1977). Cognitive or symbolic scripts may act in tandem with physical scripts, reinforcing the functionality of a space's design. In other cases they may run against them. This is most obvious in situations where changes in social context have lent an object a drastically different social function than the one it was designed for. The Blarney

Stone, for example, was presumably intended to offer defense against castle invaders, but has been symbolically redefined as something to be kissed by tourists.

Institutional Scripts

A third way in which the built environment may stabilize social life is through the institutional assignment of social uses to objects. Unlike physical and symbolic scripts, institutional scripts imply a "third party" – perhaps an anonymous stranger, a neighbor or the nation state – who recognizes appropriate and inappropriate uses of the built environment and provides incentives or sanctions.

The most obvious examples of institutional scripts are those rights and responsibilities explicitly endorsed through the legal institution of private property. At its heart, private property represents an "articulation of use" – an informally or formally enforced stipulation regarding *who* can do *what* with *what* (Carruthers and Ariovich 2004, Collins 1981). An owner has the right to manipulate an object in ways that are prohibited for non-owners: it may be illegal, for example, to build a fence on another person's property. By the same token, owners may have institutionalized responsibilities with regard to objects: zoning regulations or informal expectations on the part of neighbors may *require* that an owner build such a fence. In publicly owned settings, institutional scripts may approach a relatively comprehensive legal code for the treatment of the built environment. The social use of sidewalks or public parks, for example, may be regulated in a way that one's living room may not. Within the home, however, informal norms and sanctions may take over. Many parents of young children, for example, uphold a *de facto* anti-graffiti ordinance.

In the case of explicit legal guidelines, it is fairly easy to see how institutional scripts may lend predictability to social life in the same way that other legal provisions do, condoning some patterns of behavior and discouraging others. Zoning regulations, for example, are intended to rationalize and regularize the built environment in order to uphold community-wide standards for safety or architectural aesthetics. Nevertheless, informal guidelines may be just as powerful as legal ones. The patterns of use endorsed by civic associations, adjacent property owners, or the unofficial guardians of public spaces may similarly regulate the treatment of the built environment, making social activity more regular and predictable (Duneier and Carter 1999; Smart 1985; Whyte 1980:102).

Scripts, Sanctions and Moral Order

The arguments I have briefly surveyed suggest that simplifying "scripts" for humans' use of objects may provide important links between the built environment and social order. These scripts may be embedded in institutions, cognition or in the physical design of objects themselves, and might be expected to reinforce each other, lending a certain predictability to social action. How might this mutual reinforcement occur? Several writers have noted that physical structures and social actors work interchangeably or in unison to uphold programs of moral order, reinforcing broad distinctions between appropriate and inappropriate courses of action (Costall 1995, Latour 1992, Molotch 2003: 8, 232).

A brief example illustrates how this might work. Sleeping on benches in public parks is a behavior associated with homelessness, a heavily stigmatized condition subject

to a range of negative moral associations and extensive social control. A prohibition against sleeping on benches (or conversely, in favor of sitting) may be inscribed in three ways. Sleeping on a bench can trigger a negative response anchored in the meanings cognitively associated with the act, resulting in social sanction (for example, avoidance or rebuke). Alternately, sleeping on benches can be legally prohibited, resulting in legal sanction (for example, being ticketed or arrested). Finally, the bench can be physically designed to allow sitting but prohibit sleeping. Benches in the subway stations of New York City are designed in this way, fitted with evenly spaced wooden ribs or armrests. Symbolic association, legal prohibition, and physical form may provide interchangeable and mutually reinforcing guidelines, working together to regulate a morally loaded behavior that consists of a relationship between human and environment.

To be clear, in this example, it is quite possible that the behavior might not be regulated at all if the person engaged in it does not fit the stereotype for homelessness in other respects. A man in a newly pressed business suit can be expected to nap in a public park with relative impunity. Scripts for the use of the built environment overlap any number of other attitudes and attributions. By suggesting ways in which people should relate to objects, they provide a behavioral infrastructure to moral order – in a case such as homelessness, they may help in the literal and figurative "policing" of this order – but they are never solely determinative of public morality.

The research I have attempted to integrate here provides a way to begin to think about how the built environment may act to stabilize ideas, institutions and behavior. In each case, the link between the built environment and social order is provided by what others have referred to as "scripts": embedded assumptions regarding how humans will

behave with reference to an object or an environment. The surveyed literature suggests that scripts may offer predictability, simplifying cognitive tasks and institutional arrangements, while (perhaps) reinforcing moral codes of behavior in the process. To the extent that they function in this manner, they may stabilize social action and organization.

Script Dissonance

On the other hand, as Gieryn (2002) puts it, "[b]uildings stabilize society… and yet, buildings stabilize society imperfectly." Social and moral "order" are convenient abstractions for those aspects of society that tend toward structure and regularity. In reality, ideas, social structures and practices are in a state of constant change, and the built environment interacts with these changes in interesting and unforeseeable ways. "Buildings," Brand (1994) tells us, "learn" from their occupants – some features of a building, for example furniture, may be constantly rearranged to fit the changing needs and whims of inhabitants, while other features, for example location and foundation, are fairly resistant to change. Objects have a *relative* durability, not an absolute resistance to change, thus the intentions of designers are subject to perpetual obfuscation and appropriation by users.

It is intuitively obvious that many things conspire to violate scripts all the time. Objects physically designed for one purpose can be appropriated for another. Books can be used to stabilize a wobbly desk and cobblestones can be thrown at riot police. The meanings initially attached to a physical structure can change. Abandoned factories can provide shelter for the unemployed, and jails or lighthouses can become museums. Cars

can be stolen and land trespassed upon, violating the institutional scripts of ownership. Violations of script can be extremely widespread. The Americans With Disabilities Act, for example, can be partially regarded as an attempt to redress physical scripts that fail to take into account an entire class of users. As Gans (1991) suggested, planners and architects can only envision a "potential" environment. The "effective" environment constructed by the inhabitants of buildings and neighborhoods is another thing all together.

If the built environment stabilizes society in part by providing a stable reference point for ideas, behaviors and institutions, it seems likely that incongruence between the needs of a community and its built environment should have sweeping repercussions. This kind of disjunction has not been extensively theorized, but ethnographic evidence does exist. Erikson (1972) for example, notes that temporary trailers offered to Appalachian flood victims were a factor in their inability to reconstruct their community in the wake of the disaster:

> In most of Appalachia, where life is centered on the front stoop, one's door forms a sensitive boundary between the interior and the exterior … trailer doors did not work properly at all from either a symbolic or a practical standpoint (150).

In the suburbs, demographic and economic changes may be resulting in a similar mismatch between population and built environment. In the remainder of this proposal, it will be suggested that the suburban built environment is associated with physical, symbolic and institutional programs for human use, and that these scripts are likely, for a variety of social and economic reasons, to be increasingly subject to violation or renegotiation. In other words, for a growing population of suburbanites, the suburban

environment may not "work properly at all from either a symbolic or practical standpoint." In three empirical chapters, I plan to examine this possibility, dividing my inquiry between the physical, symbolic and institutional effects of changes in the way suburban spaces are inhabited.

Empirical Chapters

In the first chapter, "Where the Sidewalks End: Poverty, Risk and Built Environment in Changing Suburbs," I analyze evidence of physical risk in suburban communities experiencing economic decline. Suburban streets tend to be designed for travel by motor vehicle rather than mass transit or pedestrian traffic. In many suburban residential neighborhoods and commercial areas, high-speed divided roadways provide the only mode of access. Meanwhile, suburban housing tends to consist of single-family detached homes built for a nuclear family with the disposable income to maintain a relatively large domestic space. How do residents without access to a private automobile negotiate sprawling suburban spaces oriented toward the motor vehicle? What are the physical costs of inhabiting a deteriorating single-family home for families with limited resources? Using a cross-sectional statistical analysis of county-level mortality rates, structural equation modeling, spatial analysis and qualitative fieldwork to explore these questions, I find evidence that neighborhoods designed for an earlier cohort of upwardly mobile homebuyers may represent a hostile physical landscape for contemporary low-income residents.

In the second chapter, "'Suburbia as We Know It': Rhetoric and Cognition in Diversifying Communities" I analyze the role of spatial cognition in political battles over

housing and use of public space. Focusing on policy debates in sixteen Long Island communities, I utilize a combination of textual analysis and experimental evidence to isolate a set of spatial and behavioral expectations that suburban officials and residents use to make assessments of broader community health, stability and prosperity.

Finally, in the third empirical chapter, "Nobody's Home: Vacant Housing and Social Order in Three Suburbs," I use in-depth qualitative interviews and participant observation to analyze reactions to increasing vacancy rates in three communities in suburban Essex County, New Jersey. Through formal and informal systems of rights and obligations, occupied housing lends stability and predictability to social interactions and institutions, but it does so in different ways in different places. My fieldwork reveals that the abandonment of single-family homes poses a discrete set of problems for residents and local officials. These problems vary by community. In a poorer, more vulnerable suburb, vacant housing appears less consequential to local residents than observable social disorder. In contrast, in an affluent suburb insulated from the effects of an economic downturn, vacant housing is similarly unproblematic, but for different reasons: the spatial and social organization of community life and the intervention of private sector actors conspire to limit the effects of temporarily vacant homes. In communities where an increase in vacant houses coincides with a sizable population of concerned and mobilized homeowners, these houses are seen to provoke a strong and concerted reaction from local residents. The mode of response in the three communities shows that local reactions to vacant houses are strongly shaped by political and economic context.

The Suburban Scripts

In the work that follows, I find that socioeconomic change in suburban communities is producing observable consequences at physical, symbolic, and institutional levels by changing the way people relate to local spaces. In examining these moments closely, I propose, we stand to learn about the social role of the built environment at times of change. In the postwar era, a new model for America's suburban landscape emerged, shaping houses and neighborhoods across the country in accordance with a set of assumptions concerning the behavior of a growing middle class. In subsequent decades, an imagined social exemplar – the automobile-driving, home-owning nuclear family – worked its way into the physical design of suburban spaces, the symbolic representations and cognitive expectations regarding how these spaces were to be used, and the broader institutions of suburban life.

As a new class of residents with a distinct set of needs and capabilities appears in suburban communities, the script described above is rendered *dissonant* with suburban life as it occurs. Assumptions concerning the uses of suburban space are violated. At no level is this violation as visceral in its consequences as at the physical level. For this reason, I begin with an investigation into the "physical scripts" implicit in suburban land use, architecture and street design, where a vision of social life is embedded in stone, asphalt and steel.

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Notes

[1] The definition of a suburb is itself problematic. At what point does a populous and relatively dense suburb become its own city? The Census Bureau uses a fairly complex formula including commuting patterns and population density to define urban, suburban and rural areas. Rather than wade into this contested territory, I focus on a pattern of land use, architecture and street design that (though found in cities, particularly newer, Western cities), is significantly more common in suburbs, *whatever* the criteria used to define these territories. This pattern developed in the postwar suburban explosion, hence I limit my discussion here to that period of development.

Chapter One:

Physical Scripts

Where the Sidewalks End:
Poverty, Risk and Built Environment in Changing Suburbs*

Objects contain behavioral assumptions about users and bring these assumptions to bear on human action. At times of rapid change, buildings and streetscapes may act as sociological constants – rigid expressions of ideas and assumptions that do not reflect current social reality. In this chapter, I examine the relationship between people and the built environment in changing suburbs, where a growing low-income population is challenging the behavioral assumptions embedded in their physical surroundings. Using a range of empirical methods, I argue that physical risk is sociospatially organized, the product of a selective *dissonance* between the lifestyle that an environment was designed to accommodate and the needs and capabilities of current residents.

In spite of accumulating demographic evidence of suburban decline, ground level accounts of economic hardship in the suburbs are virtually nonexistent. Long focused on urban poverty, social researchers have been astonishingly slow to examine the everyday lives of low-income suburbanites, who now comprise more than half of the nation's poor. This is a surprising and unfortunate omission. Although demographic studies offer birds-

* An early draft of the quantitative analysis presented in this chapter was presented at the 2010 meeting of the Urban Affairs Association, in Honolulu, Hawaii.

eye evidence of suburban decline, they beg a fundamental *micro*-sociological research question: how do low-income suburbanites negotiate physical environments designed and built for middle class residents?

Although suburban neighborhoods are far from uniform (Hayden 2003), they tend to be less dense than urban neighborhoods, with detached, single family homes the typical mode of habitation (U.S. Census Bureau 2007b). This approach to physical design, a legacy of federal and local policy, private development and market demand, reflects a set of behavioral assumptions about suburban residents. Low-density residential neighborhoods were designed for residents who have access to a private motor vehicle. Detached, single-family homes were built for nuclear families with the wealth or credit necessary to occupy and maintain a relatively large residential space.

Due to their economic limitations, low-income suburban residents are likely to violate these assumptions. Low-wage workers are less likely to own an automobile, and are less likely to possess the resources needed to maintain a single-family home. To the extent that low-income suburbanites inhabit spaces designed for a different class of users, their adaptive use of these spaces may bring them into conflict with their surroundings. Travelling by foot in sprawling communities with high-speed roadways and intermittent sidewalks may put low-income suburbanites at risk of pedestrian injury. Living in poorly maintained, deteriorating detached homes may elevate the risk of a catastrophic house fire. In short, physical risk may result from a mismatch or *dissonance* between the lifestyle that an environment was designed to accommodate and the needs and capacities of inhabitants.

In theoretical terms, the study picks up a long-neglected concern of Chicago School urban sociology – the role of the built environment at times of demographic change – and works toward a theory incorporating contemporary insights from urban sociology, urban planning and science and technology studies (STS). First Simmel (2005 [1903]) and then Wirth (1938) responded to increasing urbanization by theorizing the relationship between density and psychological distress. More recently, however, the study of the effects of the built environment has largely been ceded to the growing fields of public health and urban planning [see Jackson (2003) for a review of recent public health literature]. This is unfortunate, as sociology has unique contributions to make to the study of the relationship between physical space and wellbeing. Physical risk, even when resulting from apparently "natural" causes, tends to be organized socially and spatially [for an example of this argument, see (Klinenberg 1999)]. Popular accounts, however, tend to neglect both the social and the spatial dimensions, attributing potentially harmful events such as traffic accidents and house fires to nonsystematic factors such as random human error, moral or mental failings, technical malfunction, or simple "dumb" luck.

In contrast, more recent theoretical perspectives rooted in sociology and urban design have pointed out that physical spaces are both intentional *and* subject to ongoing processes of interpretation and adaptation by their users. By extension, "what buildings do" sociologically (Gieryn 2002) is a result of the interface between what buildings are *intended* to do and what their users *make* of them. Classical urban sociology provides no theoretical vocabulary with which to understand this process, but the sociological research of Gans (1991), Gieryn (2002), Michelson (1976) and Perin (1977), as well as

perspectives in urban planning (Lynch 1981) and science and technology studies (Akrich 1992; Latour 1992) suggest that research attentive to the social role of the built environment focus on the degree of "congruence" between designers' intentions and users' needs and capabilities. In cases where the social uses of an environment are inadequately anticipated by designers, users can suffer a range of negative physical or social consequences ranging from endangerment to embarrassment (Akrich 1992; Gieryn 2002; Latour 1992; Winner 1980).

This chapter examines the determinants of fatal injury in inner-ring suburban communities, finding that low-density suburban landscapes are associated with heightened risk for low-income suburbanites. In light of the clear tradeoffs involved in approaches to analyzing risk, I employ a variety of empirical methods. First, I conduct a large-scale ecological analysis, mapping county-level rates of pedestrian and residential fire mortality against census data to investigate the relationship between socioeconomic composition, built environment, and physical risk. I then sharpen the empirical focus of the study, examining a subset of cases in qualitative detail in order to move beyond ecological inference, revealing the places and the human narratives concealed within aggregate vital statistics.

Poverty, Risk and the Suburban Built Environment

Although both the uniqueness and the homogeneity of the suburban landscape have been routinely overemphasized in popular culture, national housing and transportation data suggest that suburban communities do tend to be physically distinct from urban

communities in several important respects. Most notably, suburban residential patterns tend to be significantly less dense. According to data from the American Housing Survey (U.S. Census Bureau 2007b) approximately two of three suburban housing units (68%) are detached, single-family homes, versus roughly half (49%) of urban housing units. Low-density development favors travel by private motor vehicle, and this emphasis is reflected at street level, where suburban communities are more likely to exhibit design characteristics such as divided arterial roadways with infrequent intersections or crosswalks (Cervero 1989). Similarly, suburban patterns in zoning and land use (stipulating, for example, the size of residential lots and the configuration of residentially and commercially zoned areas) tend to privilege private motor vehicle traffic, in many cases precluding mass transit altogether (Cervero 1996). Only 56% of suburban housing units are located near public transportation, versus 85% of occupied housing units in the central cities (U.S. Census Bureau 2007b). Although these figures represent general tendencies rather than categorical differences, they suggest that a low-density, automobile-centered mode of development is considerably more common in suburbs than in urban areas.

The physical form of suburban communities reflects the predominant socioeconomic class of suburban homebuyers in the decades following World War II. The market for suburban homes during this period consisted overwhelmingly of white, middle-class families entering the child-rearing stage (Foote 1960, Frey 1984). Black and working class residents were largely blocked from suburban migration by a combination of federal and local policy and discriminatory practices in the private real estate market (Massey and Denton 1993). For households that met the economic and social criteria for

suburban homeownership, migration became popularly associated with a lifestyle, and by extension, a program of material consumption centered around ownership of a detached, single-family home and an automobile (Cohen 2004). The resulting residential patterns consisted of large-scale residential subdivisions that typically excluded multifamily housing, offering physical separation from dense town centers and commercial areas. Both in its cultural associations and the economic barriers to entry, the resulting landscape can be regarded as a physical manifestation of socioeconomic class.

In recent decades, low-income residents have increasingly surmounted economic barriers to suburban residence, integrating many inner-ring suburban communities (Berube and Frey 2006; Hanlon 2008; Jargowsky 2003). There is evidence to suggest, however, that the built environment in these cases continues to impose *physical* costs upon low-income residents who violate the assumptions embedded in suburban architecture, zoning and design. Public health research can be enlisted to link these theoretical insights with empirical hypotheses.

Pedestrian Risk

In recent years, a trend of continuing low-density suburban development has generated a growing interest in the health costs of suburban "sprawl." Sprawl in this context can be defined as a low-density pattern of land use consistent with an emphasis on the motor vehicle as a mode of transport (Frumkin 2002; Sturm and Cohen 2004). In sprawling communities, intersections, sidewalks and crosswalks are relatively rare, vehicle speeds are typically high, and retail tends to be distributed in linear fashion along divided roadways rather in dense, walkable commercial centers (Duany et al. 2000).

There is a strong disincentive to walking in such communities, as studies suggest that pedestrians in sprawling suburbs may be placed at significantly higher risk of injury or death (Beck et al. 2007). Pedestrian risk appears to be high in areas of high sprawl because traffic moves at faster speeds, with fewer traffic signals and relatively few checks on driving behavior (Lucy 2003). For pedestrians, these factors are often exacerbated by a lack of crosswalks, sidewalks and other infrastructure designed to protect them from automobile traffic (Frumkin 2002). The most rigorous nationwide examination of the relationship between sprawl and pedestrian risk was conducted by Ewing, Schieber et. al. (2003), who created a sprawl index measuring environmental factors such as population density and average block size. After controlling for county median income and adjusting for the percentage of trips to work taken on foot, Ewing and colleagues found that high levels of sprawl were associated with high pedestrian fatality rates at the county level.

The implications of these findings are that people forced to travel on foot will be at higher risk in sprawling suburbs. Frank, Engelke, et. al. (2003) acknowledge the social dimension of these insights. Noting that the poor are disproportionately represented among pedestrian fatalities, they draw a link to the assumptions of road designers: "As many streets tend to be engineered with the motorist in mind, those who rely upon nonmotorized modes of travel often have no choice but to follow very dangerous routes in order to get to school, shopping, or work." As Frank and colleagues suggest, pedestrian risk may be expected to be highest where a relatively large population of low-income residents inhabit an environment designed for the motor vehicle. Out of this literature, a first hypothesis can be developed:

H1: Pedestrian risk will be highest in communities exhibiting relatively low levels of income and high levels of suburban sprawl.

Residential Fire Risk

A parallel public health literature has examined the role of housing in residential fire injury and mortality, finding that aging, detached homes pose particularly high risk. Although fire incident rates in multifamily apartment buildings are comparable to those in one or two-family homes, fires in detached structures are more likely to be lethal (Ahrens 2007; Istre et al. 2001; U.S. Fire Administration 2009). A range of features such as fire escapes, standpipes and flame resistant construction materials are typically incorporated into the physical design of multifamily housing; in contrast, detached, single-family homes have seen little in the way of legally required design modifications intended to mitigate the risk posed by fires. Wolski (2000) attributes the lack of built-in fire safety measures in detached homes to the distorted perceptions of risk and "control" on the part of designers and regulators, who perceive residents of single-family homes as being in command of their surroundings, while apartment dwellers are regarded as passive and potentially vulnerable to catastrophic fire.

Indeed, "perceived control" – the ability to order, maintain and improve one's domicile – has long been one of the appeals of suburban homeownership. Control of a detached structure, however, carries high costs. Multifamily housing diffuses the burden of maintaining vital infrastructure across multiple households, while the design of detached homes imposes the entire burden upon one household, presuming that inhabitants will have the economic resources to pay for basic tasks such as maintaining

roofing, electrical and gas systems. As structures age, these systems increasingly fail, leading to higher risk of fatal fire. Old electrical systems are more likely to be overburdened by household appliances, and aging building materials are more prone to ignition and quicker to collapse. A plethora of relative risk studies support this finding, showing more injuries and deaths in older housing (Istre et al. 2001; Shai 2006; Warda et al. 1999).

Researchers have separately examined the role of socioeconomic status in residential fire injury and fatality, repeatedly finding evidence that risk is highest in places with sizable low-income populations (Shai 2006; Warda et al. 1999). An important link between poverty and risk is the reliance of low-income residents on substandard equipment and crowded living conditions (Federal Emergency Management Agency 1997). One of the most common causes of fatal residential fires is the malfunction or misuse of electrical systems and appliances.[1] The use of high-risk equipment is linked to income: kerosene or electric space heaters, for example, are used by poor households to defray heating costs, and such heating units are far more dangerous than central heating systems, causing approximately one in every five fatal fires (Ahrens 2007; Mierley and Baker 1983; Runyan et al. 1993). A second income-related factor is overcrowding, an adaptation to the mismatch between economic resources and local property costs (Federal Emergency Management Agency 1997). Ecological studies of fire risk have found higher mortality in crowded communities and census tracts, and case studies of multiple fatality fires corroborate these findings (Jennings 1999).[2]

Again, there is something to be gained by integrating environmental and social insights. The improvised arrangements through which low-income residents balance

domestic needs with economic constraint – substandard appliances, improvised heating sources and crowded living conditions – are less of a risk factor in urban dwellings, which for some time have been designed and regulated to mitigate the danger of fires occurring in high-density, low-income communities. But when these conditions occur in detached suburban homes designed for working and middle class homebuyers, the risk of fire mortality is likely to be multiplied.

> *H2: Fatal residential fires are concentrated in communities with relatively low levels of income and high percentages of detached, single-family homes.*

Ecological Analysis: County Level Patterns of Risk

Ecological analysis has one primary advantage over case studies or analysis of relative risk, allowing the characteristics of a place or a population to be linked to rates of an occurrence. County level mortality rates, for example, can be compared in order to investigate the relationship between built environment, socioeconomic composition and physical risk at a broad level of analysis. The theoretical discussion and empirical findings discussed above suggest that pedestrian and residential fire mortality are likely to be highest in places where motor-vehicle oriented roadways and single-family detached homes are occupied by relatively large low-income populations. Conceiving of risk in the way outlined above, as the result of a *coincidence* of physical and social conditions, strongly suggests interaction terms as the theoretically appropriate statistical tool to examine this relationship. In a first stage of analysis, risk was modeled as the

result of an interaction between the socioeconomic composition and physical characteristics of suburban counties.

Sample:

An inclusive definition of inner-ring suburban counties was adopted, as the analysis incorporated all 1,253 counties categorized as "central" in the 2000 census.[3] Central counties are those that include or immediately surround the core of a metropolitan or micropolitan area. Non-metropolitan counties and counties categorized as "outlying" primarily contain residents living at very low ("rural") population densities, and were excluded. For the central counties, all pedestrian and residential fire fatalities occurring during a ten-year period (1999-2008), were drawn from two datasets administered by the federal government: the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) and the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS). FARS offers a national census of pedestrian deaths, as all traffic fatalities are required by law to be reported by local officials to the federal government. Although NFIRS does not provide a complete census of fatalities, the database contains incidents reported by more than half of the fire departments in the country and has excellent geographical coverage for the purposes of the study, including data on every county designated as central by the census. These considerations make the dataset appropriate for the present analysis once a measure of exposure (the number of fire departments reporting to NFIRS) was included (see below).[4] Using the FARS dataset, all pedestrian fatalities (person code = 5) occurring during the period of study were identified. Using NFIRS, all civilian fatalities occurring due to structure fire (incident type: 100 series) in residential structures (property use: 400 series)

were identified. For each type of incident, the year and the county in which each incident occurred was identified, allowing for each incident to be matched with county-level economic and demographic indicators drawn from the 2000 census and the Census Bureau's annual population estimates program.

Dependent Variables:

The two dependent variables, log pedestrian and residential fire mortality rates (per 100,000 persons per year) were derived by calculating the mortality rates for each of the ten years in the period of analysis and averaging across years. The natural log of these rates were calculated to ensure a linear relationship with independent variables. In order to include counties in the analysis that experienced no fatalities during the period of study, a small constant (equivalent to less than one fatality over the ten-year period) was added before calculating the mortality rates.[5]

Independent Variables:

The analysis includes several control variables thought to increase both pedestrian and residential fire mortality. The log proportion of the population above 64 years old and below 18 years old, respectively, were included in the analysis, as children and seniors are at higher risk of death due to physical injury and are, furthermore, less likely to travel by automobile than individuals who fall between these age parameters. The average age (years) of housing stock was added in the case of residential fire mortality for reasons discussed above. An indicator representing the log average household size in the county was incorporated, following Ewing, Schrieber et. al. (2003), who find that

average household size to be correlated with higher levels of risk. An important control variable, the number of fire departments reporting fire incidents to NFIRS (per every 10,000 residents, per year) was added to the fire mortality analysis to account for heterogeneity in the dependent variable due to uneven reporting. Finally, the log proportion Hispanic was added to both analyses. A range of studies have linked both pedestrian risk (Agran et al. 1998; Campos-Outcalt et al. 2002) and house fire risk (Warda et al. 1999) with large Hispanic populations, speculating in some cases that language and other cultural differences (for example, the inability to read traffic signs) may account for higher mortality rates.

To measure sprawl, I chose a county-level indicator that incorporates low density and street design. This index of suburban sprawl was replicated from Ewing et. al. (2003), whose substantive concerns parallel those of this study. The crucial advantage of this specific index for the present analysis is that it contains two county-level measures of the walkability or "street accessibility" of local neighborhoods, in addition to measures capturing low population densities consistent with sprawling residential development.

More specifically, the index as adapted for the present study is composed of two indicators of street accessibility (average block size in square miles and percentage of blocks less than .01 square mile in size, roughly the size of a traditional urban block), as well as three indicators of population density, all drawn from the geographic information files of the US Census: (1) persons per square mile; (2) percentage living at low suburban densities (between 101 and 1499 persons per square mile); and (3) percentage of the county population living at high urban densities (more than 12,500 persons per square mile). Principal component analysis (PCA) was used to extract the principle component

of these five variables; this component accounted for 56.5% of the common variation among the variables. The extracted component (factor) was first logarithmically transformed, then reversed and centered on zero to make it more intuitively interpretable. Rescaled in this way, counties dominated by low-density suburban development receive high, positive scores on the sprawl index; counties dominated by high-density urban development receive low, negative scores.

For the analysis of fire risk, a simpler indicator was available to capture the degree to which local housing was constructed for small, working and middle-class families. The proportion of housing units consisting of single-family detached homes (drawn from the 2000 US Census) was calculated and centered on zero.[6]

It was assumed that risk might exhibit a "threshold" effect at the level of the individual or the household, with higher risk levels affecting individuals or households that fall below a given cut-off in income (for example, the level of income necessary to own or lease a private automobile). Accordingly, three different measures of socioeconomic composition were utilized. First, the proportion of households in the county that fell within the lowest national household income quintile (i.e., those making less than $19,000 per year) at the approximate mid-point of the time of study was calculated. Second, the natural log of the median per capita income in the county in the year 2000 was calculated and reversed, in order to create a continuous indicator measuring low per capita income. Finally, a dichotomous indicator was created to identify "high poverty counties" by assigning a 0 to counties whose poverty rates were *lower* than the average (12%) among the counties in the study and a 1 to counties whose median per capita incomes were *higher* than this figure. Although somewhat crude, this

dichotomous measure is in many respects preferable from a statistical standpoint, allowing more confidence in the interaction terms and also permitting a more straightforward interpretation of results.[7]

Several other indicators were created to test more detailed hypotheses concerning the effects of income. The proportion of households lacking a private motor vehicle was drawn from the 2000 Census, in order to test the hypothesis that the effect of income on pedestrian mortality rates is mediated by lack of access to a private automobile or truck, forcing residents to travel on foot or via public transit. The proportion of housing units that were overcrowded (containing more than one inhabitant per room) and the proportion of housing units heated by electricity were similarly drawn from the 2000 Census to test the hypothesis that the effect of income on residential fire mortality rates is mediated by risky modes of habitation and reliance upon dangerous or substandard equipment.

Analysis and Results

First, six interaction terms were created by calculating the product of the two indicators of physical conditions described above (sprawl and proportion single-family detached homes, respectively) and the three separate county-level income and poverty measures. Then OLS regression models with robust standard errors were fit. The results for pedestrian mortality and house fire mortality rates are presented in Tables 1 and 2. In each table, Models 1, 3, and 5 include all variables except the interaction terms. Models 2, 4 and 6 include the interaction terms. The coefficients for all interaction terms in both

Table 1. OLS Regression Coefficients: Effects of Physical and Socioeconomic Composition on Pedestrian Mortality, Central Counties, 1999-2008.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Constant	-.009	-.240	.914	.590	1.095	1.026
	(.714)	(.707)	(.700)	(.695)	(.685)	(.686)
Log Average Household Size	.708*	.790*	-.148	-.013	.446	.482
	(.343)	(.342)	(.337)	(.335)	(.326)	(.327)
Log Proportion Age 65 and Older	.179**	.172**	.216***	.216**	.321***	.316***
	(.070)	(.070)	(.072)	(.072)	(.064)	(.064)
Log Proportion Age 17 and Younger	.135	.113	.196	.175	.178	.161
	(.153)	(.151)	(.155)	(.152)	(.155)	(.155)
Log Proportion Hispanic	.104***	.099***	.108***	.103***	.092***	.090***
	(.015)	(.015)	(.016)	(.016)	(.016)	(.015)
Suburban Sprawl Index	-.012**	-.055***	-.020***	-.072***		
	(.004)	(.013)	(.005)	(.018)		
High Sprawl (>0)					.003	-.050
					(.031)	(.041)
Proportion Low-Income Households[a]	2.548***	2.775***				
	(.218)	(.236)				
Log Per Capita Income (Reversed)			.786***	.908***		
			(.081)	(.092)		
High Poverty Rate (>12%)					.346***	.285***
					(.031)	(.039)
Sprawl Index * Proportion Low Income Households		.168*** (.045)				
Sprawl Index * Log Per Capita Income (Reversed)				.060*** (.019)		
High Sprawl * High Poverty Rate						.117* (.060)
R2	.19	.20	.16	.17	.17	.18

N = 1,253 Central Metropolitan and Micropolitan Counties.
Dependent variable represents log mortality rates per 100,000 residents per year.
* P < .05; ** P<.01; ***P<.001. One-tailed tests for hypothesized effects; otherwise two-tailed tests.
a: Low-income households defined as households earning in the lowest quintile of household income nationally (i.e. < $19000 per year).

tables are positive and significant within a 95% Confidence Interval. The results in Model 6 in each table offer both the most conservative test of the hypotheses of interest and the most intuitive interpretation. Exponentiating the coefficient in Model 6 in Table 1 indicates that pedestrian mortality rates are approximately 12% higher in counties with above average poverty rates *and* above average levels of sprawl than in counties that lack either relatively high poverty or relatively high sprawl. Interpreting the coefficient in Model 6 in Table 2 in a similar manner indicates that residential fire mortality is 42% higher in counties with above average poverty rates and above average proportions of single-family detached homes than in counties that lack one or both of these conditions. Because continuous indicators are used as the constituent terms for interactions in Models 1 through 4 in both tables, these models include more information, but they must be interpreted more cautiously. The positive coefficients for the interaction terms in Models 2 and 4 in Tables 1 and 2 suggest that at higher levels of sprawl (or a higher proportion of single family detached homes), an increase in the low income population *or* a decrease in per capita income has a greater marginal effect in increasing the pedestrian (residential fire) mortality rate.

Although these results suggest that relatively low-income counties with high levels of suburban sprawl and detached single-family housing experience higher rates of physical risk, they leave many questions unanswered. First, contrary to expectations, the main effect of the sprawl index is either negative or insignificant when an interaction term is not included, while the interaction term for low-income, high sprawl counties is strongly and significantly positive.[8] Public health literature provides a plausible explanation for this tendency, and it cuts to the heart of the issues addressed in this study:

Table 2. OLS Regression Coefficients: Effects of Physical and Socioeconomic Composition on Fire Mortality, Central Counties, 1999-2008.

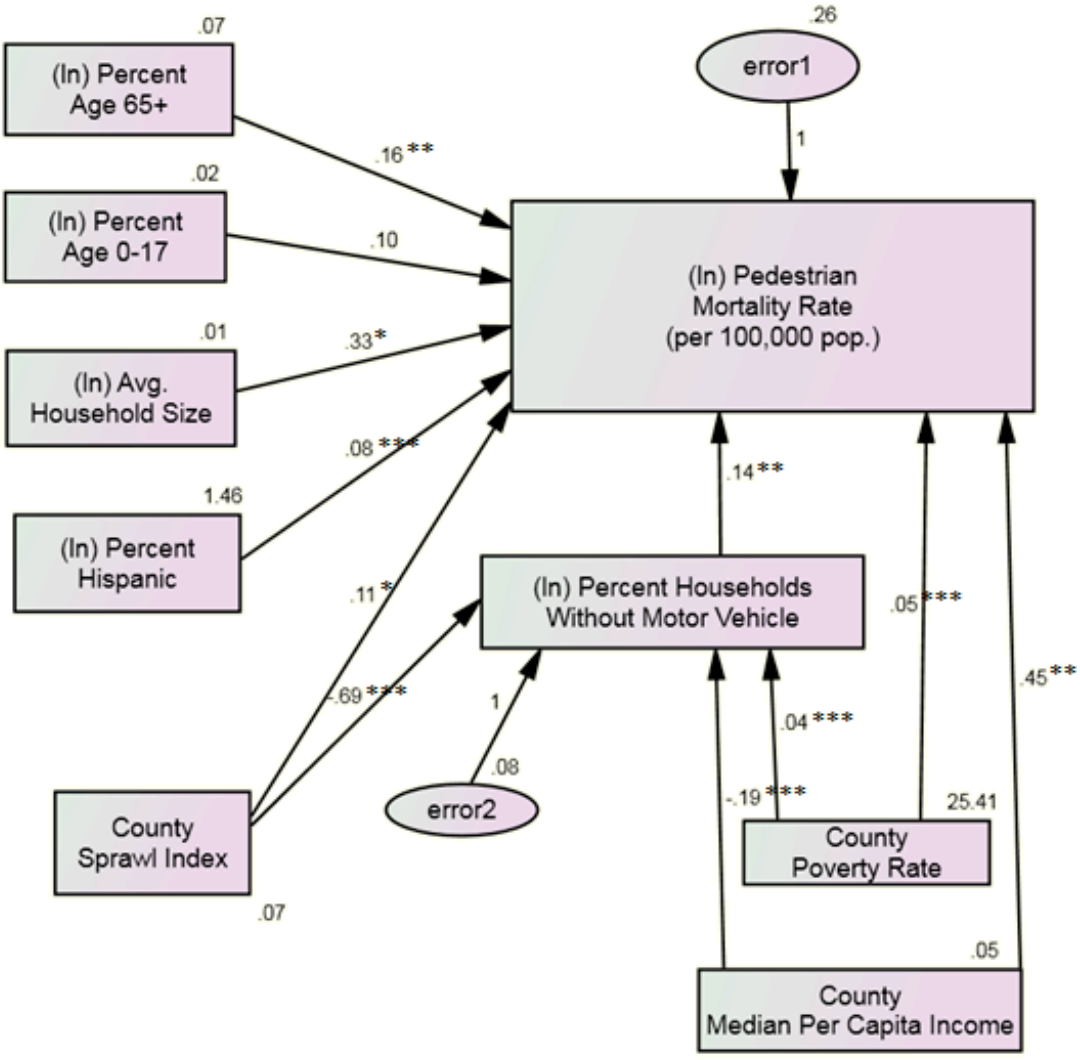
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Constant	-.917	-1.046	-1.546	.000	.883	.888
	(.728)	(.722)	(.837)	(1.039)	(.702)	(.702)
Log Rate Fire Departments Reporting	.546***	.540***	.521***	.518***	.586***	.586***
	(.030)	(.030)	(.030)	(.030)	(.031)	(.030)
Log Proportion Age 65 and Older	.061	.040	.272**	.238*	.377**	.367**
	(.121)	(.118)	(.113)	(.116)	(.112)	(.112)
Log Proportion Age 17 and Younger	.390*	.385***	.235	.230*	.668**	.671**
	(.204)	(.203)	(.212)	(.211)	(.199)	(.199)
Log Proportion Hispanic	-.048*	-.055**	-.071**	-.079***	-.109***	-.114***
	(.023)	(.023)	(.023)	(.022)	(.021)	(.021)
Avg. Age of Housing (Yrs)	.001	.000	.001	-.001	.002	.002
	(.003)	(.002)	(.003)	(.003)	(.003)	(.003)
Proportion Detached Single-Family	1.160***	-.570	.559*	-2.012*		
	(.301)	(.749)	(.294)	(1.008)		
High Proportion Detached Single-Family (> 75%)					.103*	.013
					(.062)	(.067)
Proportion Low-Income Households[a]	3.869***	4.173***				
	(.330)	(.395)				
Log Per Capita Income (Reversed)			1.176***	-.683		
			(.118)	(.715)		
High Poverty Rate (>12%)					.515***	.470***
					(.046)	(.048)
Proportion Detached Single-Family * Proportion Low Income HouseHlds		7.205*				
		(3.187)				
Proportion Detached Single-Family * Log Per Capita Income (Reversed)				2.957***		
				(1.124)		
High Detached Single-Family * High Poverty Rate						.352***
						(.141)
R2	.44	.45	.42	.43	.42	.43

N = 1,253 Central Metropolitan and Micropolitan Counties.
Dependent variable represents log mortality rates per 100,000 residents per year.
* P < .05; ** P<.01; ***P<.001. One-tailed tests for hypothesized effects; otherwise two-tailed tests.
a: Low-income households defined as households earning in the lowest national quintile of household income (i.e. < $19,000 per year).

sprawling suburban communities are hostile to pedestrians, discouraging people from travelling on foot except in relatively low-income communities where they have no choice. Holding income levels constant, communities with higher levels of sprawl have fewer pedestrians, and thus lower pedestrian mortality rates. However, when income is taken into account, the effect of sprawl changes: low-income counties contain more residents forced to travel by foot; in these socioeconomic contexts, sprawl becomes lethal, exposing pedestrians to high-speed traffic.[9]

A second issue with the analysis thus far is that it is necessarily crude, testing broad interactions between socioeconomic composition and physical conditions, but providing no insight into the causal mechanisms by which low income might produce higher risk in suburban communities. The first third of this chapter suggests that the way low income residents are forced to inhabit an environment increases risk, but a range of other conditions commonly found in low income communities are associated with higher rates of injury and mortality, including fewer hospitals, accordingly longer EMS response times, and a range of health factors such as obesity and heart disease that increase physical vulnerability.

These issues can be addressed through Structural Equation Modeling, which allows for the testing of complex causal hypotheses that include intervening variables. In a secondary quantitative analysis of the data using SEM software (the AMOS module of SPSS) cause-specific mortality rates were modeled as outcomes of all the variables included in the previous OLS models, with the inclusion of three intervening variables directly measuring behaviors that are linked to socioeconomic status and that are hypothesized to increase risk in a low-density suburban environment: the proportion of



Note: *N* = 1,253 Central Metropolitan and Micropolitan Counties.
* P < .05; ** P < .01; *** P < .001.
One-tailed tests of significance for hypothesized effects; otherwise two-tailed tests.
Chi-Square/DF = 147.47 P=.000 RMSEA=.0378

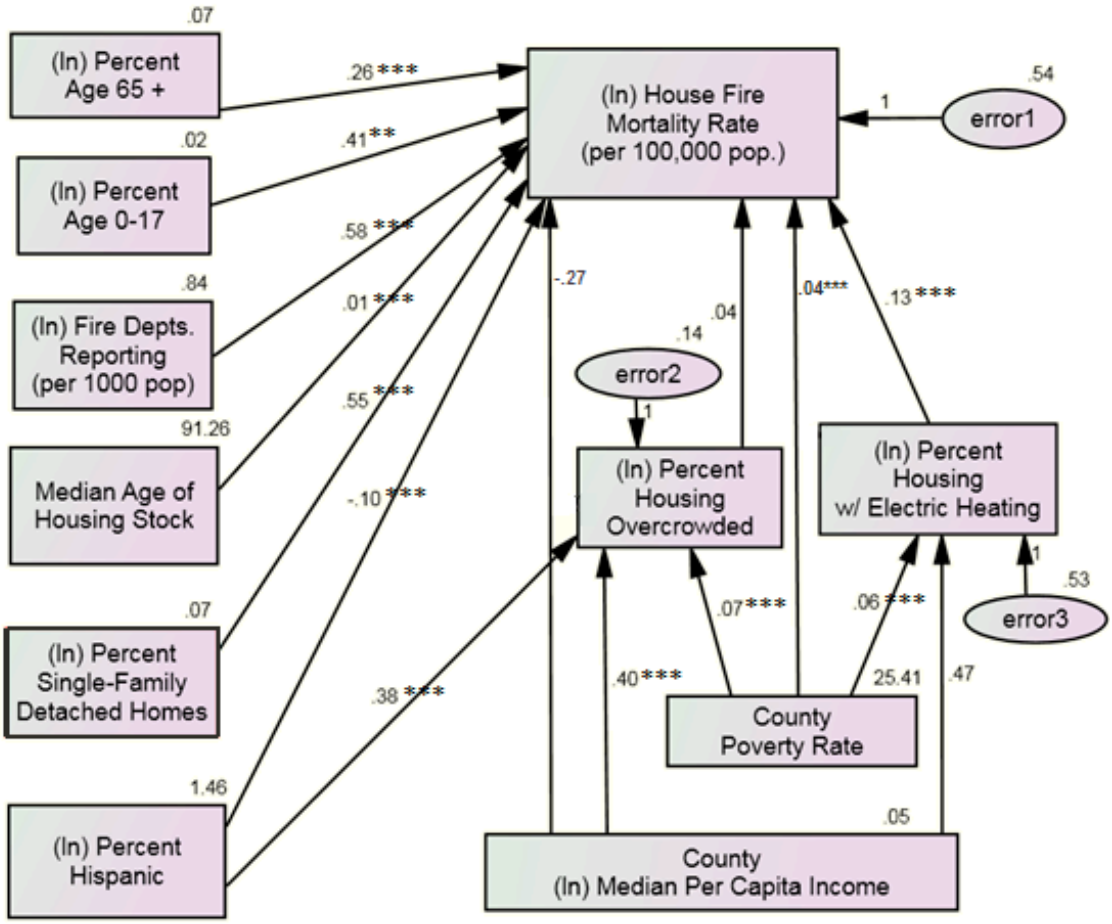
Figure 1: Structural Equation Model Predicting Log Pedestrian Mortality

county households having access to a private automobile; the proportion of occupied housing units that are overcrowded (more than one inhabitant per room); and the proportion of housing units utilizing electric heating.

The results are presented in Figures 1 and 2. Two indicators of socioeconomic composition were included: county per capita income and county poverty rate. Figure 1 presents results for pedestrian mortality. When the proportion of households without access to a private motor vehicle is modeled as a result of both median income and level of suburban sprawl, the causal connections between these variables become clearer. Low median income levels and high levels of sprawl produce high proportions of carless households, which lead, unsurprisingly, to higher pedestrian mortality rates. Net of their effect on the proportion of carless households, both variables behave as expected: higher sprawl produces higher pedestrian mortality. Higher median income levels produce lower pedestrian mortality.

Figure 4 presents results for residential fire mortality, adding two intervening variables (crowding and heating equipment) to the model. Both variables have a significant effect on residential fire mortality that is separate from the effect of income generally. This suggests, once again, that financial constraints affect how residents inhabit the suburban built environment, which in turn leads to higher levels of risk. When this causal relationship is taken into account, income and housing still play a role. In the case of income, it can be assumed that the direct effect in the model captures mechanisms such as high smoking rates and long EMS response times – factors that are tied to income but otherwise uncorrelated with crowding and the use of electric heating equipment.

The ecological analysis presented thus far supports the argument that physical and socioeconomic conditions interact in changing suburban communities, producing higher



Note: *N* = 1,253 Central Metropolitan and Micropolitan Counties.
* P < .05; ** P < .01; *** P < .001.
One-tailed tests of significance for hypothesized effects; otherwise two-tailed tests.
Chi-Square/DF = 106.55 P = .000 RMSEA = .0298

Figure 2: Structural Equation Model Predicting Log House Fire Mortality

levels of risk for low-income suburbanites. But ecological analysis has its limits. How do financial constraints affect the behavioral routines of low-income suburbanites? What kinds of neighborhoods, homes and street corners are concealed within the high-risk

counties identified in this analysis? Who are the people hidden by the aggregate mortality statistics analyzed thus far? In order to answer these questions, a different set of methods is necessary. The remainder of this study delves into these issues by looking in detail at four counties in suburban New Jersey, using a combination of spatial analysis, qualitative interviewing and archival research to identify and analyze the circumstances of fatal incidents in changing suburbs.

Landscapes of Risk: Four New Jersey Counties

Four counties – Atlantic, Cumberland, Morris and Sussex – were selected for the second stage of analysis. The location of these counties, New Jersey, was inspired by a combination of preexisting literature and convenience. Studies of suburban decline have found that New Jersey is among the three states with the highest levels of suburban decline, measured in absolute terms (by an increase in suburban poverty rates). It is also the home state of the author and his current place of study, offering a level of familiarity and proximity to all four counties and making possible repeated field visits. Beyond their location, the selection was analytically strategic, motivated by the need for meaningful comparison. The four counties offer a variety of income levels and levels of risk. Table 3 summarizes relevant variables for the four counties, comparing county-level statistics to the national average among central counties.

Narrowing the focus to the four counties in question, I investigated the people, places and events involved in every pedestrian death over a three-year period (2005 – 2007) and every residential fire death over a nine-year period (1999 – 2007).[10] The

Table 3. Pedestrian and House Fire Mortality: Four New Jersey Counties, 1999-2007[a]

County	Poverty Rate[a]	Per Capita Income[b]	House Fire Fatalities	Pedestrian Fatalities	House Fire Mortality Rate[c]	Pedestrian Mortality Rate[c]
Atlantic	9.5	$21,034	15	34	0.62	3.76
Cumberland	13.7	$17,376	17	7	1.29	1.20
Morris	3.2	$36,964	19	10	0.47	0.64
Sussex	3.8	$26,992	1	1	0.31	0.17
State Avg.	7.5	$17,484	8.67	26.5	0.28	1.48

a. Pedestrian Fatalities, 2005-2007; House Fire Fatalities, 1999-2007.
b. Census Bureau, 2000
c. Per 100,000 residents per year.

census of fatalities was generated through archival research and interviews with law enforcement personnel in the four counties, which were then compared to the raw statistics gathered by federal and state agencies. In several instances, detectives or sergeants covering injury-related deaths went case-by-case through their log books to help ensure all fatal incidents were included. These sources helped the author supplement the FARS and NFIRS data, generating a comprehensive list of 104 deaths occurring during the period of study.[11] The precise location, date and time for every incident were identified, and locations were plotted using GIS software. Additional data consisted of photos and field notes from site visits to the locations of 43 of the cases and local newspaper articles, which provided generally brief accounts of more than 80 of the incidents and biographical detail on victims. Through a combination of archival research and interviews with staff from the county prosecutors offices and medical examiners offices, 84 of the 104 victims were identified by name, age and sex. Immediate causes of death were preliminarily determined for nearly all of the 104 cases. The autopsy reports

were requested and obtained from the county medical examiners' offices for a subset of 44 cases in which the author had doubts. Review of these documents left only 9 cases out of 104 in which the circumstances surround a fatal incident were entirely unclear. From all of the data described above, the author developed short narrative accounts of the incidents, including biographical information on the victims whenever possible. The data were examined inductively, drawing upon a range of qualitative, quantitative and spatial analysis in order to identify patterns consistent with or contradictory to the argument thus far. The remainder of the chapter reports the results of this analysis.

Atlantic and Cumberland Counties: Where the Sidewalks End

A factor in choosing the four counties in question was the variety they offered. As can be seen in Table 3, the four counties straddle the national average in nearly every indicator of income and risk. Atlantic and Cumberland counties are poorer than either Sussex or Morris counties, and have higher levels of pedestrian and residential fire risk, mirroring the pattern uncovered by the quantitative analysis above. At ground level, the two sets of counties differ drastically, both in appearance and in urban ecology. Atlantic and Cumberland counties are located in the southernmost quarter of New Jersey, a flat, sandy triangle bordered by the Atlantic Ocean on one side and the Delaware Bay on the other. Atlantic County includes Atlantic City, a regional Mecca for gambling that, like many sites on the Jersey Shore, has lost the glamour of its early-twentieth century heyday, and now endures high rates of poverty and crime. The county itself stretches to the northwest, covering much of the diagonal corridor between Atlantic City and the outskirts of

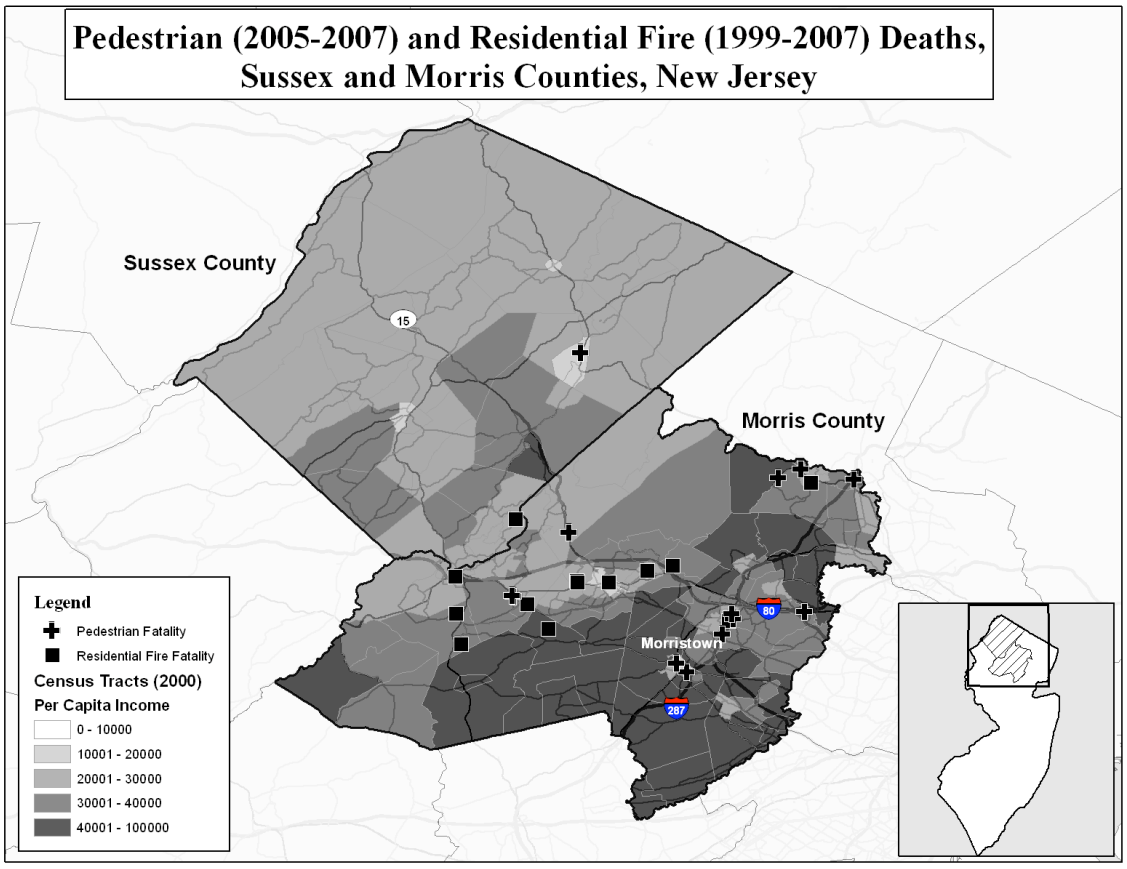


Figure 3: Pedestrian and Residential Fire Deaths, Sussex and Morris Counties

Philadelphia. Along this corridor run the Atlantic City Expressway and several parallel arterial roads lined with miles of retail establishments and sporadic residential areas. Among these residential areas are new developments of large modern homes as well as deteriorating, blue-collar communities and sprawling trailer parks. Cumberland County is more rural in feeling, and unlike its neighbor to the east, does not revolve around a large urban hub, consisting primarily of farms and a loose network of two-lane country roads that connect quiet, medium-sized towns such as Vineland and Bridgeton. Lacking either a strong industrial base or the wealthy suburban enclaves found in many counties in the

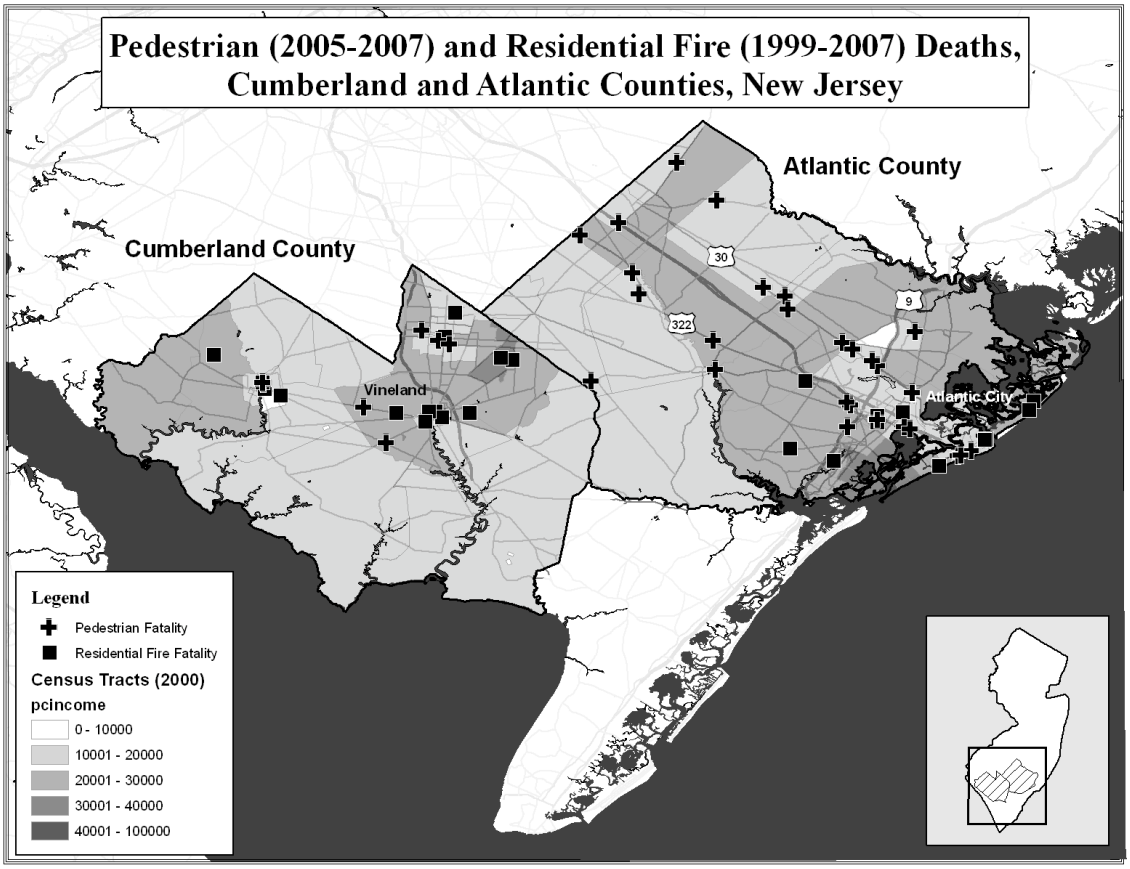


Figure 4: Pedestrian and Residential Fire Deaths, Cumberland and Atlantic Counties

northern half of the state, Cumberland has the third lowest population density in the state and its highest poverty rate.

Morris and Sussex counties, on the other hand, lie in the northwest corner of the state, a gently rolling, heavily wooded region, dotted with corporate campuses and recently created developments of large single-family homes on reclaimed farmland. Like Atlantic County, Morris County revolves around a small city, but the city, Morristown, is old and geographically dense, with an extensive colonial history and a large collection of 18th and 19th century homes. Unlike Atlantic County, neither Sussex nor Morris County contains major arterial roadways running through low-income census tracts. Unlike

Cumberland County, neither northern county contains a large population of poor residents living at low residential densities. Morristown contains pockets of poverty, but they are confined to the urban center. The surrounding suburbs present a landscape of sustained affluence, as several major corporate bases in the pharmaceutical and communications industries provide employment to a large white-collar population. In the next two sections, I zero in on fatal incidents in Atlantic and Cumberland counties, focusing a more detailed lens on both physical and social landscape of these counties.

Vectors of Risk: The Black Horse Pike and the White Horse Pike

Averaging 9.5 pedestrian deaths per year, Atlantic County has by far the highest pedestrian mortality rate of the four counties. Like Cumberland County, Atlantic County is home to a relatively large population of low-income residents (see Table 3). But Atlantic County's pedestrian mortality rate is far higher than Cumberland County's rate. What explains the elevated risk in Atlantic County? In spite of Atlantic City's reputation as a center for gambling and nightlife, these activities are confined to the casinos at the city's core, and drunk driving appeared not to explain Atlantic County's outlier status: in roughly 40% of the fatal crashes, police records indicate that the driver tested above the legal limit for blood alcohol content, a figure close to the 38% national average (calculated using the FARS national dataset).

Mapping pedestrian risk and examining incident narratives suggested a more compelling reason for Atlantic County's high pedestrian risk. In spatial terms, the deaths in the county were linearly distributed along several major roadways. Figures 3 and 4



Figure 5: Black Horse Pike, Atlantic County

present maps of the income distribution and pedestrian and residential fire fatalities in the four study counties. Of the fatal incidents in the four counties, nearly half (47%) occurred on only two roads: the Black Horse Pike (U.S. Route 40/322) and the White Horse Pike (U.S. Route 30). Further examination shows that fatal incidents occurred in locations where these large arterial roads crossed through low-income census tracts. This spatial patterning of deaths suggests the *roadway* as an important unit of analysis in a detailed examination of pedestrian risk.

The two roads that account for more than half of Atlantic County's recent pedestrian fatalities are legacies of the first automobile-fed wave of suburban expansion, which hit its peak during the 1920s. At first a private toll road serving local communities, the White Horse Pike was bought in the 1900s by the state, and tolls were dropped to encourage the expansion of Philadelphia's suburbs into Camden County, New Jersey. In

1922, it was extended to Atlantic City in order to provide improved access to the city's boardwalks and casinos from Philadelphia and its suburbs, leading to an explosion of residential and commercial development along the pike. Seeking to replicate their successes along this roadway, private developers extended a second arterial road to Atlantic City in 1925, changing its name from "Blackwood Pike" to "Black Horse Pike" and promoting it as "the second 'White Horse Pike' to the shore" (Maser 2008). Following the opening of the Atlantic City Expressway in 1965, which provided a high-traffic route from city to shore, commercial development continued to intensify along the two roads. They now offer a string of retail establishments, primarily chain stores and strip malls, which are frequented by residents of the county.

As this brief historical discussion suggests, the three roads were expanded and promoted as conduits for relatively long distance travel by automobile – first, from Philadelphia to its outer suburbs, and later, from these suburbs to Atlantic City, a popular weekend destination. When the Atlantic City Expressway opened, the two pikes were made redundant in this capacity, and their nature shifted, becoming more commercial. At no point in the last hundred years were they envisioned as accommodating extensive pedestrian traffic or public transit. The physical and economic development of the White Horse Pike and Black Horse Pike is typical of sprawling roadways in the first half of the twentieth century. During this period, government planners sought to encourage commercial and residential development, which largely took place on inexpensive, undeveloped land. As the predominant mode of transportation was the automobile, development tended to occur in linear fashion, with arterial roadways connecting new developments and providing access. In the case of the White Horse and Black Horse

Pikes, the physical vestige of these development decisions is a long stretch of high-speed, divided road surrounded by intermittent residential clusters of aging single-family homes and lined with shopping centers, hotels and restaurants.

Following the pattern evident in aging, inner-ring suburbs in the Northeast, this landscape has accommodated a growing population of low-income suburbanites in recent decades. According to American Community Survey estimates for 2007 and Decennial Census estimates for 1990, the census tracts surrounding two particularly risky stretches of the White Horse and Black Horse Pikes (where these roadways pass through the towns of Pleasantville and Mays Landing) saw poverty rates increase three-fold and five-fold, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau 2007a; U.S. Census Bureau 1990). As in many other inner-ring suburbs in the Northeast, the low-income population in these census tracts includes aging, predominantly white American-born residents and a growing foreign-born population predominantly consisting of Hispanic and Asian immigrants. Transportation patterns have changed accordingly, as a growing population of residents in these neighborhoods rely on means other than private motor vehicle (U.S. Census U.S. Census Bureau 2007a; U.S. Census U.S. Census Bureau 1990).

Analysis of the biographical and demographic characteristics of pedestrians who were killed in the four counties suggested that the groups described above were overwhelmingly represented among aggregate mortality statistics. Hispanic pedestrians appeared to constitute a disproportionate share of fatalities. Official records inconsistently report ethnicity, but 28.3% of the identified victims had Hispanic surnames, a larger percentage than expected, given 2006-2008 American Community Survey estimates, which placed the percentage of county residents who were Hispanic at



Figure 6: White Horse Pike, Atlantic County

14.6%. Biographical accounts suggested that foreign-born immigrants of Central American and Mexican origin comprised the majority of these Hispanic fatalities.

Moving deeper, past demographic patterns to biographical detail, the analysis supported a model linking pedestrian risk with economic constraint and a hostile physical environment. By journalistic convention, newspaper accounts of fatal accidents mention the town of residence of accident victims. With only a handful of exceptions, the victims lived *nearby*, and were struck by automobiles while commuting to work or while making use of the retail centers and businesses arrayed along Atlantic County's arterial roadways. Only six of the 34 pedestrians killed in Atlantic County during the period of study lived in Atlantic City or outside of the county. The remainder lived in the city's suburbs,

generally in the township where the accident occurred or in a bordering township. Although it was not always possible to discern the activity that victims were engaged in when killed, close inspection of the geographic patterning of fatal accidents suggested areas directly adjacent to shopping centers as particularly dangerous places, and bus stops as focal points of violence. Given the data at my disposal, it could be confirmed that at least 25% of the 34 pedestrians killed in Atlantic County during the period of study were killed while walking to a bus stop or immediately after exiting a bus close to a shopping center. The details above offer strong support for the inference that victims lacked automobiles, and were killed while engaged in everyday activities close to home.

In terms of occupation, service workers were disproportionately represented. At least eight construction workers were killed in the four counties (none while working), making construction laborers the most common occupational category among male victims. The occupations of the female victims were more heterogeneous, but service workers again to be heavily represented, as victims included casino workers, waitresses, department store cashiers, nursing students, and a post office clerk. In addition to these victims, who were currently employed when they died, medical records and statements to the media by friends and family members revealed a number of the pedestrians to be unemployed at the time of their death. In general, however, medical examiners' records, obituaries and newspaper accounts devoted to accident coverage painted a consistent picture of the pedestrians as "working poor" residents employed in low-wage occupations that provided enough income to sustain a residential arrangement in private suburban housing, but not enough to afford a private automobile.

Investigating the circumstances surrounding specific fatal incidents during the period of analysis offered a more detailed picture of these workers and the physical environment they inhabit. These narrative portraits opened a window onto the interface between individual biography and built environment that leads to moments of "physical script dissonance" and consequently, death.

Carol West and Jorge Abel Duarte Hernandez

During a two-month period in late 2005 and early 2006, two pedestrians were killed in the same short stretch of the Black Horse Pike – a location where, according to a local police officer, four other fatal accidents had occurred between 1998 and 2005. The Black Horse Pike in this location consists of four lanes separated by a wide cement and dirt median. A dimly lit bus stop sits on the eastbound side of the road, which leads to Atlantic City. Directly across the street is the Pleasantville Shopping Center, a medium-sized shopping mall containing a Kmart, a Family Dollar discount store, a Dunkin Donuts and the Asia Supermarket, a grocery store specializing in Chinese and Korean products.

At 7:30 pm on Saturday, November 26, 2005, Carol West, a 47 year-old cashier at the Kmart, got off work. West lived approximately 10 miles away, in Galloway Township, a quiet, working class community consisting of low-slung ranch homes surrounded by miles of undeveloped swamp and pine forest. By crossing the Black Horse Pike and waiting at the public bus stop across from the shopping center, West could catch a public bus into Pleasantville, where she could connect to another bus to Galloway Township. Leaving work on the early winter night, West was wearing dark clothes as she attempted to cross the westbound lanes to get to the bus stop. The driver of an SUV with

New York plates apparently did not see West and knocked her 100 feet down the road where, according to police reports, she was hit by at least two more vehicles. West was pronounced dead at the scene.

At 6:45 pm on a Tuesday evening approximately 40 days later, Jorge Abel Duarte Hernandez was crossing the same stretch of road after eating dinner at a Mexican restaurant. Hernandez, 43, was a Mexican immigrant and a construction worker who had moved to Atlantic City with his wife, from whom he was separated. Vinh Ngoc Dang, a 62 year-old man from nearby Egg Harbor Township, had just passed a green light when Hernandez attempted to cross the road. Dang knocked Hernandez to the ground and then swerved to avoid hitting him a second time, but according to the police report Hernandez was likely to have died upon impact.

The disparate biographies of the two victims above are telling. More than any other factor, West and Hernandez appear to have had in common their use of a place – a stretch of pavement separating retail outlets and restaurants (spaces of employment and consumption) from a public bus stop. The closest crosswalks to the bus stop are several hundred yards in either direction. The speed limit is 45 mph in this stretch of roadway, and street lamps are infrequent. Repeated field visits to the location of these accidents revealed pedestrians either waiting to cross, or hurriedly making their way across the four-lane road at different times of day and in a wide range of weather conditions. The physical design of the space complicates this task, making a routine action for low-income service workers a potentially risky adventure. West, Hernandez, and other pedestrian users of the Blackhorse Pike inhabit a landscape that, in its focus on motorized travel, embeds behavioral assumptions related to socioeconomic class in concrete and

steel. For low-income residents of surrounding areas, the roadways are dangerous by design.

Foci of Risk: Aging Detached Homes

There were 52 residential fire fatalities in the four counties during the period of analysis. 17 of these occurred in Cumberland County, whose residential fire mortality rate was more than four times the state average during the period of study. What explains the high rate in Cumberland County? Again, spatial analysis of the occurrence of fatal residential fires produced insights. Fatal house fires in Morris County showed little clustering, and were scattered among a heterogeneous group of communities across the county. In Cumberland County, however, fatal fires were clustered in discreet neighborhoods, primarily in the towns of Buena, Millville and Vineland. These patterns are visibly evident in figures 3 and 4. At street level, the neighborhoods in question consist primarily of detached, wood-frame houses dating to the decades between 1950 and 1979, a period during which 47% of the county's current housing was constructed, according to American Community Survey housing data (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). On the census blocks where fatal fires occurred, poverty rates averaged 27.2% during the time of the study and residents routinely paid in excess of 50% of their monthly income on rent, which suggests the high financial burden that housing imposes on low-income residents in these communities (U.S. Census Bureau 2009).

No generalizations can safely be made about the physical condition of housing in these neighborhoods, as it varies widely from house to house. Analysis of the details surrounding specific cases, however, suggested that the condition of housing is an

important factor in the county's residential fires. In Millville, in August 2001, in one of the few fatal fires in the county that occurred in an attached home, a fire of undetermined origin started on the second floor of the aging structure, igniting cedar shingles that had long been covered by vinyl siding. Firefighters fought the blaze for hours and were eventually forced to remove the roof in order to extinguish the blaze, which killed a 31 year-old man who lived alone. In February of the same year, just five blocks away, a fire was sparked by faulty wiring in the corner of the basement of a single-family home where eight residents occupied two rooms. The fire killed two young boys who were sleeping in the basement. Fire department investigators noted the wood construction as a factor complicating their attempts to extinguish the fire.

The deteriorated condition of aging, wood-frame homes exacerbates risk, and is likely to be related to residents' socioeconomic status, but the living patterns of current residents also appeared to be an important factor. In the census tracts where Cumberland County's residential fire fatalities are clustered, American Community Survey and Decennial Census data show that the percentage of the population more than 65 years old has increased, the percentage of non-family households has increased and median household size has decreased in the seventeen years prior to the study (U.S. Census Bureau 2007a; U.S. Census Bureau 1990), suggesting a shift toward an aging population that increasingly lives alone. Six of the 17 residential fire deaths in Cumberland County were residents over the age of 65 who were alone at the time of the fire. When a house fire is ignited, having assistance is crucial for any resident attempting to escape, but all the more so for the elderly and infirm. By the same token, families with small children were heavily represented among Cumberland County's fire fatalities.

Ultimately, however, both geographical and biographical analysis suggested that it was the match between physical conditions and social capabilities and needs that resulted in fatal fires. The detached homes along Millville and Vineland's streets were built to accommodate the growing families of workers in the county's agricultural and industrial sectors following World War II, including the personnel of a large decommissioned air base, which closed its barracks as part of the transition to civilian use. If the automobile-oriented landscape of the Black Horse and White Horse Pikes is increasingly inhabited by immigrants who lack the financial resources to own automobiles, the deteriorating single-family homes of Cumberland County accommodate a relatively large population of residents incapable of maintaining and safely inhabiting these living spaces. Analysis of the details of the fatal fires in the period of analysis suggested that in wood-frame single-family houses prone to fire risk, residents' adaptations to economic constraint placed them in danger. Crowding, often identified as a fire risk in both the literature and the rhetoric surrounding suburban housing codes, was identified as a factor in only *one* of the incidents in Cumberland County (indeed, in all four counties). Instead, unconventional or damaged electrical, lighting and heating systems – clear adaptations to both economic necessity and the mode of housing – appeared to play a crucial role. In approximately 53% of the incidents in Cumberland County, ignition of the fire could be traced to these systems. Once again, detailed narratives describing individual incidents helps to humanize this analysis, illustrating the origins of risk in the interface between economic constraint and material context, or more plainly, between people and things.

Melissa Langley and Edward Bragg

Melissa Langley, a 28 year-old grocery store cashier, lived with her mother and two sons, aged ten and two, at a ranch style home on North Eighth Street in the town of Millville. Langley's mother, Sandra, was an employee at the Veterans' Memorial Home in Vineland. On a Thursday in mid-July, 2006, the power in Langley's home was disconnected by Atlantic City Electric due to unpaid electric bills. That evening, she lit several candles to provide light in lieu of electricity. Langley accidentally left a candle burning near the couch in the living room, which ignited a fire after the family had gone to sleep. At 2:08 am, after being awoken by Sandra Langley's cries, a neighbor called 9-1-1 to report the fire at the house. When police arrived less than one minute later, the house was already engulfed in flames – Sandra Langley had managed to escape, but her daughter and grandchildren were trapped inside and perished in the blaze. In newspaper reports, a local firefighter blamed the lack of a functioning smoke detector system and the home's construction for the deaths, explaining that the speed with which the house burned was attributable to its wood-frame construction.

In late January 2007, in nearby Bridgeton, Edward Bragg, an 87-year old retired oysterman, died in a fire similarly caused by the use of unconventional equipment, in this case, kerosene and electric space heaters. According to an account in the Bridgeton News, a problem with the home's oil heating system prompted Bragg to use electric space heaters. When the home's electric system failed on Tuesday, January 30, Bragg resorted to kerosene heaters, which, according to a subsequent investigation, are likely to have caused the blaze. In the case of this incident, like the fire that killed Melissa Langley and her children, detached wood-frame housing appears likely to have contributed to the

ferocity of the fire. The conflagration was brought under control relatively quickly, but required 50 firefighters from five different companies, and killed a firefighter in the process.

These brief narrative descriptions highlight the mechanisms linking economic vulnerability to elevated risk. Unpaid electrical bills, lit candles and kerosene space heaters are likely to be found wherever a local population is struggles to make ends meet. In a multifamily apartment building containing smoke detection and sprinkler systems and an internal or external fire escape, or, for that matter, in a well-maintained single-family home equipped with working smoke detectors, these artifacts of a low-wage existence are less likely to prove fatal when they ignite a fire. But for an elderly retiree or a single mother occupying an aging detached wood-frame house, the risk is higher – elevated by dissonance between the built environment and the capabilities and needs of the residents in question.

Conclusion: The Sociospatial Organization of Physical Risk

The research presented in this chapter suggests that the effects of the built environment on social outcomes are likely to depend upon the degree of match between designers' social intentions and the needs and desires of users. Buildings, streetscapes and, for that matter, all manners of everyday objects convey assumptions regarding human behavior. As relatively durable features of the environment, they transmit these assumptions and bring them to bear on human action. Viewing the built environment in this way has clear ramifications for how we understand the determinants of risk. In

theoretical terms, the findings presented here suggests that in the case of physical injury, risk is not inherent in people or in places, but in the interaction between specific kinds of people and specific kinds of places. More to the point, the built environment may discriminate against low-income residents. Following Winner (1980), the "politics" of everyday objects – their ability to unequally distribute opportunities and constraints - appear to be at work here. Neighborhoods constructed for middle-class residents can present higher levels of risk to low-income residents in much the same way that environmental pollutants emitted by a cement manufacturing plant, a stockyard, or a power station serving an urban community tend to be borne by the politically or economically disempowered (Bullard 1990; Pastor et al. 2001; Schnaiberg and Gould 1994). This insight, in turn, suggests a possible expansion of the environment justice paradigm to include not just unambiguously negative environmental externalities such as air or water pollution, but more subtle behavioral imperatives embedded in physical design.

Although these imperatives resist observation under "normal" circumstances, at moments when conflict arises due to the nonconforming needs and behaviors of some class of residents, they emerge clearly into sight. The lack of sidewalks on White Horse Pike, a readily visible physical fact, only becomes visible as a *social fact* when somebody is walking in the shoulder. This kind of empirical exercise is well-traveled ground for scholars who study aging or physical disability. The needs of the elderly, the blind and the physically disabled have often been ignored in the planning of public spaces (Butler and Bowlby 1997; Hahn 1986). Indeed, the recognition that much of the urban built environment presented hardships to physically disabled residents prompted both the

Americans with Disabilities Act and the growing interest in "universal" design principles. But rarely, if ever, has this insight been applied to socioeconomic class, and never has it been applied at the regional or national level.

In pragmatic terms, the results presented here suggest that suburban design, architecture and zoning regulations need to be conceived with an eye toward flexibility and universality of access and use. For suburban officials, invoking physical risk in order to prohibit the living arrangements pursued by low-income residents to adapt to their suburban surroundings – and thus criminalize or exclude the people in question – seems likely to simply *displace* risk to another block or perhaps another municipality. The extreme tightening of occupancy limits, for example, in order to lessen the risk of house fire, or the escalation of jaywalking fines to reduce the risk of pedestrian injury criminalize suburban poverty while addressing its physical consequences in only a superficial manner. Safe, affordable housing and pedestrian overpasses would ameliorate these consequences, but may prove too politically and economically lofty as policy goals for economically struggling suburban communities. Free smoke detector installation and testing programs, conducted in many suburban areas, are less costly and more efficacious, as are painted crosswalks and "push button" activated pedestrian signals. These incremental modifications of the built environment do not require a broad and impossibly expensive reenvisioning and rehabilitation of suburban space - they alter the physical script in small, but meaningful ways, without penalizing or marginalizing an already vulnerable population.

Finally, in empirical terms, the results shed light on a basic form of everyday hardship being borne by a growing population of low-income suburban residents. Urban

sociology has long been focused on the urban poor and the thriving social life of "sidewalks" and other "small urban spaces" (Whyte 1980). As the majority of the country's poor now live in suburban areas, it will be increasingly important to examine the constraints facing low-income residents of the suburbs. Analysts will have to turn their gaze from the social life of the urban sidewalk to places where there are no sidewalks: a land of strip malls and divided highways, where poverty imposes an entirely different set of issues.

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Notes

[1] In studies of fire risk, these factors are often disaggregated. As a result, smoking is typically identified as the leading cause of fatal fires, followed by several subcategories that appear to be related, such as "electrical malfunction," "heating," "equipment misoperation/failure," "appliances," etc. In assessing the relationship between income and risk, these factors are meaningfully linked, as they may indicate a reliance on aging and overburdened household equipment, including electrical wiring. Taken together, they cause far more fatal fires than tobacco consumption.

[2] Rather than incorporating safer modes of multifamily housing, a politically radioactive proposition in many suburban communities, officials in changing suburban communities have instead tended to address the behavioral determinants of risk through occupancy limits.

[3] I also ran all analysis using on an alternate sample of counties (n = 1,206) derived by defining inner-ring counties as those where the majority of the population lives in an "urban" area or cluster, as defined by the 2000 census. Counties where the majority of the population is "rural" were excluded by this definition. The results of this analysis (available upon request) were quite similar to those presented, with no differences suggesting an alternate interpretation of results.

[4] An alternate, commonly used sampling frame for residential fire mortality is federal mortality records available through the CDC. Although these data have the advantage of offering a census of fatal incidents, information on the incident itself is extremely limited, making it difficult to accurately identify deaths that resulted from residential fires. The best approximation that the data offer are deaths due to "uncontrolled structure fires" in which "residence" is listed as the place of death, but this category excludes deaths due to "contact with heat and hot substances" as well as deaths that occur after admission to a hospital or another care facility, particularly common in the case of fatal fires.

[5] The ensuing analysis was conducted separately without adding this constant, and the results did not differ in either the relative magnitude of effects or the variables highlighted by tests of significance. The constant was kept because it allows for more counties to be represented in the analysis, increasing its representativeness.

[6] Centering both the sprawl index variable and the indicator of single-family detached housing was advantageous because, along with the dichotomization of measures of socioeconomic composition (discussed later), it minimized colinearity when interaction terms were added to the regression analysis.

[7] A dichotomous measure, though less precise than a continuous measure, provided a more conservative and rigorous test of the hypotheses through the construction of interaction terms. Interacting two continuous variables can reduce cell counts, making a model overly sensitive to outliers and increasing the risk of multicolinearity. Using a continuous measure of income drastically increased the significance of interaction terms but upon inspection of variance inflation factors, I decided to go with the more conservative dichotomous measure, which has the additional benefit of far easier interpretation. Other dichotomous measures were also tested, including those indicating higher than average poverty rates, lower than average poverty rates, and a higher than average percentage of households in the bottom two national income quintiles of household income. None of these alternate measures substantially altered results.

[8] When two continuous variables are used to construct an interaction term, the effects of constituent terms become virtually meaningless when the interaction is included. For this reason, the lower order effect of sprawl is only of interest when the interaction term is omitted, and even then, its effect is only of passing interest, given the clear significance of the interaction term. Put differently, the interaction term suggests that it is only possible to accurately interpret the effect of sprawl by interacting sprawl with income. (See Brambor, Clark et. al. 2006 for an insightful discussion of the interpretation of interactions effects.)

[9] However, when the log proportion of carless households was substituted for income in the model (and the interaction term) both main effect and interaction term proved positive and significant, though the overall model lost explanatory power.

[10] The decision to only investigate three years of pedestrian fatalities was pragmatically motivated: first, locational data were only provided by FARS beginning in 2005; second, including more years would have made it difficult to gather the detailed information desired regarding each case.

[11] In the case of pedestrian fatalities, no new incidents were included as a result of this process, as FARS offers a census. In the case of residential fire fatalities, NFIRS contained approximately 60% of the final list.

Chapter Two

Symbolic Scripts

"Suburbia As We Know It":*
Rhetoric and Cognition in Diversifying Communities

In many suburban communities in the northeastern United States, socioeconomic transformation has accompanied broader changes in the suburban population. Over the last decade and a half, in the inner-ring suburbs of New York, Boston and Washington D.C., a shrinking population of aging, white, non-Hispanic middle and working class residents has given way to a growing population of low-wage service workers, a high percentage of whom are Hispanic immigrants. Media accounts, along with a growing body of research, suggest that in many of the communities in question, these social changes have been marked by local political battles over standards for housing and public behavior (Jones 2006; Jones-Correa and Hall 2005; Price and Singer 2008; Vitello 2005). Affordable housing proposals and laws permitting "accessory" apartments in single-family homes have been hotly debated (Whitely 2008; Winzelberg 2011) and a variety of attempts to illegalize, regulate or conceal day labor markets have been pursued (New York Times 2007; Santos 2006). In practically all of these cases, vocal groups of local

* The Long Island survey data analyzed in this chapter was gathered with the help of Charles Varner, whose assistance in designing and distributing the survey is gratefully acknowledged.

officials and community residents have shown a reluctance to reconfigure the suburban built environment in order to reflect the needs of a growing class of new residents.

In a number of well-publicized instances, the citizenship status of immigrant newcomers has become the focus of debate, as suburban law enforcement officers have attempted to enforce immigration laws (Vitello 2006). Far more common, however, have been political measures apparently intended to regulate housing and use of public space. Writing in the editorial pages of a prominent Long Island newspaper, sociologist John Logan (2005) alluded to these battles, offering a nuanced account of the objections harbored by longtime suburban residents to the measures in question. In part, Logan argued, debates are provoked by a factor separate from citizenship status: the manner in which the behavior of some immigrants violates an "image of suburbia" held by longtime suburban residents. Logan used the example of day laborers standing on public street corners:

> Some suburbanites also are offended by the way some immigrants look for work, congregating on street corners hoping to earn a day's wages. This is acceptable when it happens around lettuce or strawberry fields in the countryside, but it conflicts with the usual image of suburbia. It's easy to say that the objection is to the day laborers' undocumented status, but if they were citizens – perhaps crowds of visibly minority men and women, Puerto Ricans or African-Americans, lining the streets waiting for work – the offense would be the same (Logan 2005).

The "image" to which Logan refers is a "symbolic script," as defined in the introduction to this dissertation – a mental representation of how local spaces are to be used. Underlying Logan's comments is a somewhat sophisticated model of suburbanites' environmental psychology: rather than expressing internalized attitudes concerning immigration, longtime suburban residents may be reacting to a categorical violation of their expectations for how suburban spaces should look, which, in turn, implies a

program of expected behavior on the part of the cohabitants of suburban street corners and other public spaces.

Logan's comments resonate with ethnographic work on diverse communities undergoing demographic change, where racial or economic barriers have proven either insufficient or undesirable. In these newly heterogeneous communities, analysts have found that conflict centers less on defining membership than on setting internal standards for behavior. Pattillo (2007) observes that loitering, public drinking and other "quality of life" issues became particular flashpoints in a newly mixed-income community. Exclusion of the poor gave way to "exclusion of the *poorly behaved*," and safety efforts went "beyond prohibiting illegal behaviors to policing moral selves" through the regulation of public behavior and use of housing (283-285). In a similar vein, Gans (1967) responded to claims of suburban conformity by arguing that forms of social control (for example, stringent standards for lawn care and parking) were actually byproducts of local heterogeneity. Debates over housing and public behavior, Gans suggested, may in fact become more important in the *absence* of overt social exclusion, when a diverse population results in a lack of consensus concerning acceptable norms for resident behavior.

The broader theoretical framework of this project suggests that sets of spatial and behavioral expectations (symbolic scripts) accrue around the built environment during times of social persistence and stability. At times of localized social change, violations of these expectations (script dissonance) are likely to serve as catalysts for public debate or formal or informal sanction. The ethnographic insights above support this perspective, suggesting that attempts to "police moral selves" tend to arise when increasing diversity

leads to observable changes in physical conditions and public behavior. However, the discussion thus far also raises a potential counterargument – that spatial expectations are merely proxies for a resistance to diversity rooted in attitudes regarding dimensions of social difference such as race, ethnicity, class or nationality. This brief discussion suggests two empirical research questions that will be explored in this chapter: What role do attitudes toward space and public behavior play in a suburban community undergoing socioeconomic change? Are these attitudes mere proxies for anxiety concerning ethnicity and citizenship status, or do they have their own rhetorical and cognitive efficacy?

I investigated these questions using a mixed-method case study of sixteen communities in Long Island, New York, a predominantly suburban area that has experienced increasing ethnic and economic diversity in recent years. My empirical analysis is divided into two sections. After a summary of relevant literature, I present the results of a qualitative, inductive analysis of recent policy and discourse in the sample communities. In this section, I investigate modes of action and justification: I examine what the municipalities in question have done to protect standards for housing and public behavior in a context of increasing localized diversity, and analyze the public statements that officials have used to legitimize the policy actions in question. I then spend the remainder of the chapter presenting quantitative evidence from a survey of residents in the sample communities. In this second half of the chapter, I test the possibility that cognitive expectations regarding modes of acceptable behavior may inform judgments of community health and stability at the level of social cognition, lending popular resonance to official rhetoric.

Racial Bias and Spatial Categorization

In assessing the factors that explain neighborhood preferences, researchers have identified racial and ethnic attitudes as crucial. Racial prejudice strongly influences attitudes toward racial integration (Charles 2009), and the racial composition of a community appears to influence the likelihood that respondents will consider moving into that community, independent of conceivably related factors such as crime rates, property values or the quality of the local school district (Emerson 2001). In cases where a suburban community becomes more ethnically and economically diverse, these attitudes are likely to trigger stereotypes linking social composition with prospective physical and behavioral changes. On the other hand, an array of evidence suggests that a concern for the quality of residential space may also be an important component of attitudinal resistance to integration. Survey research (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996; Charles 2000; Ellen 2000; Farley et. al. 1994; Harris 2001; Shlay and DiGregorio 1985; St. John and Bates 1990), ethnographic evidence (Rieder 1985), and analysis of real estate markets (Harris 1999), taken together, show that opposition to integration is associated with concern for property values and fear of neighborhood deterioration, in addition to racial or ethnic stereotypes. [See Charles (2003) for a thorough discussion of survey evidence on neighborhood preferences.] Although *social* attitudes are likely to be central to residents' perceptions of socioeconomic, ethnic and racial changes in a community, attitudes toward local *spaces* are bound to be implicated as well, acting alongside or in interaction with these attitudes.

In survey-based studies, when researchers do measure attitudes toward the residential spaces, they tend not to fully disentangle these attitudes from racial sentiment, regarding them as "racial-proxy" variables or as "race-related neighborhood projections" (Ellen 2000). Harris (2001) alludes to a "pure race theory" that assumes racial prejudice to be the driving factor behind neighborhood satisfaction. The findings of Harris's research, however, suggest that a set of environmental and behavioral assumptions appears to be central to respondents' preferences. When surveys ask respondents about signs of physical disorder ("litter scattered in streets and yards") or community members' inability to adhere to residential norms ("landlords or residents who don't take care of their property"), these factors rank ahead of racial composition, second only to concerns about crime in predicting dissatisfaction with a neighborhood (Harris 2001; St. John and Bates 1990). Even when explaining overt opposition to racial integration, white respondents mention environmental features and behaviors stereotypically associated with a dystopian urban environment, for example, "hanging out in the street," broken windows, "crack houses" and run-down neighborhoods (Farley et. al. 1994). Although these comments can be taken as evidence of racial stereotyping (as they doubtless are), they also conjure a mental image of a specific type of place. Respondents may (not unlike early Chicago school urban sociologists) see heterogeneity as a precipitant of community decline, associating diverse urban neighborhoods with forms of aesthetic, economic, or moral disorder unexplained by simple racial stereotypes. In other words, they may draw upon a mental typology of *places* in addition to a typology of *people*. Two separate literatures provide guidance here, helping me to build this speculation into a set of testable propositions.

Environmental Psychology

Research on spatial cognition helps us to interpret the findings summarized above, suggesting that space is categorized not solely in terms of the characteristics of its inhabitants, but in terms of the behaviors and social practices with which places are associated, and by extension, with moral meaning and emotional affect. Environmental psychology suggests that places are, first and foremost, locations in which designated patterns of action can be expected to occur: "behavior settings" (Barker 1963) that are tied to "situational scripts" (Schank and Abelson 1977), or mental models of the behavioral routines associated with a location (in Schank and Abelson's archetypal example, a restaurant). The functional meaning of a location is part of a larger set of meanings that people use to make sense of their surroundings, drawing "explicit connections of settlement form to nonspatial concepts and values." (Lynch 1981: 141). A place is "legible" if it is readily associated with a set of behaviors, and "congruence" exists if these expectations are met (Lynch 1981). By extension, a change in observable behavior is associated with a categorical change in community type. As Russell and Ward (1982) explain:

> General place categories such as city, town, office and restaurant probably have an internal structure (Mervis and Rosch 1981). Central to each category is a prototypical example. Other instances then resemble the prototype to varying degrees. Thus, there would not be rigid boundaries separating, say, cities from towns, offices from nonoffices. Rather, specific places are more or less city-like.

If the distinction between place categories is continuous, the mental process of categorization is nevertheless drawn toward categorical prototypes or exemplars, which may be associated with positive or negative affect; places that are uncategorizable tend to

be perceived negatively (Herzog, Kaplan et. al. 1982; Kaplan and Kaplan 1987). The significance of these insights is that basic categories of public behavior and physical space may lead to drastically different categorizations of an environment, triggering broader attributions and sentiments that are not strictly contingent upon salient dimensions of social difference (e.g. race or citizenship).[1]

Suburban Ethnography

Historical and ethnographic research helps us apply these cognitive insights to suburban communities. Suburban space, some analysts argue, is associated with specific programs of social behavior, and has acquired positive moral valence by virtue of these associations. Architectural historians, for example, have noted that the suburban built environment has long been associated with a lifestyle of respectable middle class domesticity (Hayden 2003, Marsh 1990, Wright 1983). Although a cultural critique of the perceived anomic or homogenizing capacities of suburban life has been sustained since the 1950s in academic research and popular discourse, ethnographic studies suggest that the concerns of this critique do not rank highly in suburban residents perceptions of their environment (Baumgartner 1998; Gans 1967). Instead, suburban residents [perhaps no different than urban residents in this regard (see Anderson 1990 on "street etiquette")] appear to draw upon a set of spatial and behavioral expectations in assessing their surroundings, preferring categorical consistency over new or unexpected elements or behaviors.

Ethnographic studies of suburban communities have highlighted the importance of "symbolic boundaries" (Lamont 2001) between suburban and urban environments,

which may act to reinforce social boundaries of race or class. Following Douglas (1966), Perin (1977) argues that unidentifiable mixtures of categories are easily associated with impurity and immorality. She finds that urban elements (small-lot development, commercial zones, bus-stops) acquire particularly negative associations when located in the suburbs. Suburbanites who arrived socio-economically in the suburbs as part of an intergenerational process of upward mobility are especially sensitive to the distinction between 'suburban' and 'urban' as cognitive categories. As one of her informants puts it:

> Crowding is an urban condition and that's what many people have escaped and the results of crowding by analogy are crime, disease, and all of the urban problems which they have just recently been able to afford to escape, so if it is not dense then those things of course can't happen (87).

Along the same lines, Lofland (1998) argues that elements of urban public space such as street corners and park benches have become culturally linked with poverty, disease and moral iniquity, associations that register at a deep-seated cognitive level. She cites a classroom experiment in which students are asked to write down words that they associate with cities:

> [T]he qualities they attribute to the city … seem only applicable to public space: to streets, sidewalks, parks, plazas, alleyways, buses, and—to a lesser degree—bars, stores and restaurants. Cities, my students tell me, are frenetic, crowded, loud, smelly, dangerous, indifferent, anonymous, dirty, filled with hostile strangers, and littered with the unsightly homeless and the unsightly poor (113).

Baumgartner (1998) helps to make sense of these findings, pointing out that most of suburban life takes place in enclosed private spaces. Public spaces such as streets, sidewalks and parks are usually relatively empty. In this socio-spatial context, a certain level of physical isolation from strangers becomes a "moral expectation." The result is that "individuals who use the streets or other public places more than is customary,

especially for socializing, are seen as deviants" and "simply being in a public place at all can be offensive…If outsiders appear in such locations, they are likely to arouse uneasiness or even alarm" (103-104). These behavioral norms result in a moralization of space and a heightened awareness of people who use public spaces more than they should. Halle's ethnographic work (1993) echoes Baumgartner's findings, noting a reluctance by suburban residents to informally occupy public space or even the visible private space in front of their own homes (1996:45).

This small but compelling body of research suggests that engrained mental representations concerning how spaces should look and be occupied – symbolic scripts – may play an important role in influencing how residents think about suburban communities undergoing social change. First, taken as a whole, the studies suggest that spatial classification is a morally loaded affair, and that the spatial and behavioral norms of suburban neighborhoods are likely to be implicitly associated with cleanliness, health, safety and stability. Secondly, they suggest that suburban residents may be sensitive to inconsistencies in their environment, looking to a set of generic expectations for the appearance of local spaces and modes of behavior. In these respects, they support two general propositions concerning policy, discourse and cognition in changing communities:

> *P1: Modes of behavior and housing that conflict with suburban norms are likely to be associated with broader forms of community decline.*
>
> *P2: These place-related associations are to some degree independent of dimensions of social difference: they are not strictly reducible to racial or ethnic stereotypes.*

In the remainder of the chapter, I evaluate these propositions against the results of a mixed-method case study of suburban Long Island. Studies of residential attitudes conventionally focus on one metropolitan area because this prevents unobserved metropolitan-level factors from introducing bias (Harris 2001). Long Island was chosen as a research site because it allowed me the ability to sample communities subject to similar geographic, political and legal conditions (the area typically referred to as Long Island comprises two counties of New York State), while offering enough variety that I could achieve substantial variation in terms of the socioeconomic status and demographic composition of the communities under study. First, I present the results of a qualitative analysis of policy and discourse in sixteen Long Island communities. Then I report the results of a quantitative analysis of data drawn from a survey conducted in the sixteen communities.

Methodology: Case Study of Suburban Long Island

I drew a purposive sample of Long Island communities in order to insure variation on two parameters: ethnic composition (percent Hispanic) and socioeconomic status (median income). Using 2000 census data, I selected four communities from each quartile on these variables, producing a sample of sixteen communities varying on both parameters. In doing so, I gained potentially interesting heterogeneity in the sample of communities, but lost the generalizability that would have been afforded by a random cluster sample of communities in Long Island (or for that matter, the US as a whole). Although this sampling method effectively limits the external validity of the present study to the sixteen

communities in question, my sample approximates the population of Long Island in terms of median income. In ethnic composition, the result of my sampling method was an over-sampling of communities with relatively large population percentages (10% - 20%) of Hispanic residents. Because the objective of the study is to analyze orientations toward space and public behavior in heterogeneous suburban communities, this over-sampling is justified. The possibility remains that the discursive tropes and cognitive orientations identified in the study are unique to heterogeneous communities on Long Island, or perhaps the suburbs of large Northeastern cities. In this sense, the research design is truly a "case study," which seeks insights in the internal dynamics of a given social setting. Given my intent to link municipal policy with both official discourse and resident attitudes, a limited sample of communities in a geographically and politically confined space was appropriate.

My research methodology was mixed, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis of data from several distinct sources. The list of policy actions (Table 1) was drawn from comprehensive lists of official press releases posted on town and county government websites, and was supplemented with official announcements quoted in the 14 local newspapers that serve the individual communities in the sample, as well as *Newsday* and the *New York Times*, both of which provide regional news coverage. I confined my sample of policy actions and official rhetoric to ordinances enacted between January 1, 1997 and June 1, 2007. The sample of official rhetoric was drawn from the same 16 newspapers. I sampled all identifiable statements by public officials referring to one or more of the ordinances in question. The result is a textual dataset containing 102 statements by 44 different officials, ranging in length from a few words to complete

transcripts of public speeches. My analysis of this dataset was inductive and largely unsystematic, with coding intended only to identify dominant forms of rationalization used in defense of the ordinances described in Table 1. The examples presented in the text are illustrative examples, chosen because they succinctly represent the dominant forms of rationalization identified inductively: a concern for the integrity of suburban space; and the linkage of disruptions of spatial order with themes of broader moral decline.

Based on this inductive analysis of policy and rhetoric, I designed a short mail survey that was distributed to a random sample of residents of the sixteen communities in our sample. The survey was conducted in summer 2007, and resulted in a dataset of 210 completes, representing a 34% response rate, which is typical for mail surveys, but does raise questions concerning sample bias. I tested for bias on key variables (ethnicity, immigration status, age and income) by comparing the sample parameters to the populations of Suffolk and Nassau Counties. The largest discrepancy I found was for income, and was relatively small: 36% of the sample drew an income between $75,000 and $125,000 vs. 28% of the Long Island population. (Differences at the lower end of the income distribution were smaller than this.) In spite of the clear drawbacks of mail surveys (chiefly, low response rate), delivering the survey by mail allowed me to reach respondents in the sample communities relatively quickly, receiving responses as close to the timeframe of the ordinances and public statements as possible.

In the mail survey, experimental versions of two vignette questions were assigned to half of the sample using a random number generator. Even if the data contain some degree of sample bias undetectable by the methods described above, the random

assignment of control and experimental versions (if executed properly) insures a degree of internal validity. In order to be certain that there was no differential response bias between the experimental conditions, I ran t-tests comparing the means of the control and experimental groups over the same key variables mentioned above (ethnicity, immigration status, age and income). These t-tests failed to produce statistically significant differences ($p<.05$). Based on these tests, I am confident that I have randomly drawn experimental samples which, although small by the standards of large-scale survey projects, are still large when compared to many lab-based experiments, and are comparable to the samples in other survey-bedded experiments using vignettes (Schuman and Bobo 1988; St. John and Bates 1990).

Policy Actions: Crowded Homes and Street Corners

In suburban Long Island, several unsuccessful attempts have been made to pass legislation intended to drive undocumented workers out of local communities. Most notably, Suffolk County officials sought in 2004 to have local police officers deputized to enforce national immigration laws (Healy 2005). At the time of the study, all such direct measures had failed, defeated by legal rulings or suffering from lack of political backing. In contrast, officials encountered broad public support for two modes of policy action: attempts to remove or relocate "shape-ups" or groups of day laborers looking for work; and crackdowns on the crowded dwellings and illegal apartments that provide a mode of housing for some immigrant laborers and their families. Actions that fall in these two categories and that were undertaken in the sixteen communities during the previous ten years are summarized in Table 1.

Official Rhetoric: Protecting the Integrity of Suburban Space

A primary rationale for housing ordinances and traffic laws is public safety. Particularly in the case of occupancy limits, the health and wellbeing of residents would seem to provide a readily "retrievable" explanation for changes to existing code (Schudson 1989). Six years before the present study was conducted, a raging gasoline fire killed four Salvadoran immigrants in a crowded home in one of the communities (Healy 2003). Somewhat surprisingly, however, in my textual sample of public statements (*N*=102), there were only three references to safety or health hazards. Similarly, Long Island officials made few overt references to citizenship status. In only two instances did officials mention a connection between undocumented immigration and residential overcrowding without being prompted to do so by a newspaper reporter.

Instead of highlighting public health risks or the presumed citizenship status of offenders, official discourse emphasized a need to protect suburban norms for the wellbeing of local residents who presumably did not create the conditions in question. In roughly 40% (40) of the statements I analyzed, officials use the phrase "quality of life," which appears to serve (in the present context at least) as shorthand for the enjoyment of a specifically suburban environment. As one official explained to a *Newsday* reporter: "People that come to Long Island, to Nassau County, come here for a suburban way of life, not an urban way of life … Quality of life is ... about making sure the people who live here have the type of life they desire" (Daniels 2004). By taking up residence in crowded suburban homes, immigrant laborers violate the suburban ideal of spacious, low-density living conditions. By gathering on publicly visible street corners to find

Table 1. Institutional Responses to Overcrowding, Illegal Housing and Shape-Ups in Sixteen Long Island Communities, with Selected Community Characteristics, 1998-2007

Community	Pop.	% Hispanic[a]	Median Income ($)	Township / Village Actions:[b]
Commack	36,367	2.9	84,009	-
Farmingdale	8,401	12.6	58,411	• Multi-family housing task force (2000). • Creation of Illegal Housing Division (2003). • Increased housing code enforcement (2007). • "Public nuisance" chapter in town code (2007). • **Traffic penalties directed at contractors** (1999, 2004). • **Hiring hall (2000, closed down in** 2001). • **Mass-eviction under eminent domain** (2006).
Farmingville	16,489	8.1	69,148	• Informal code violation task force (1999). • Neighborhood Preservation Act (1999, 2004) • Tightening of housing code enforcement (2007). • Code crackdowns, several mass evictions (2005, 2006).
Franklin Square	29,342	6.9	60,998	• Quality of life law fining unsightly properties (2007).
Freeport	43,783	33.5	55,948	• New law fining unsightly properties (2007). • **Increased housing code enforcement** (1990s). • **Authorized inspections without consent** (1990s). • **Hiring hall** (2002).
Garden City	21,672	2.8	104,176	• Quality of life law fining unsightly properties (2007).
Glen Cove	26,622	20.3	55,503	• Accessory apartment registration law (1998). • Increased housing code enforcement (1999, 2002, 2007). • Hiring hall (2001).
Hauppauge	20,127	4.4	78,178	-
Huntington Station	29,910	22.7	61,760	• "Neighborhood Preservation Program" (2002). • Operation HAIL Storm (2002). • Operation HEAT (2005). • Hiring Hall (1999).
Islip	20,644	10.1	65,657	• Increased housing code enforcement (2007).
Levittown	53,063	6.8	69,923	• Quality of life law fining unsightly properties (2007).
Manorville	11,131	4.1	62,895	• Informal code violation task force (1999). • Neighborhood Preservation Act (1999). • Tightening of housing code enforcement (2007).
Massapequa	22,652	2.6	83,806	• Creation of Illegal Housing Division (2003). • Increased housing code enforcement (2007). • "Public nusicance" chapter to town code (2007).
Oyster Bay	6,826	12.2	57,993	• Creation of Illegal Housing Division (2003). • Increased housing code enforcement (2007). • "Public nuisance" chapter in town code (2007).
Roslyn Heights	6,295	6.4	84,705	• Crackdown on illegal housing (2006).
West Islip	28,907	3.5	75,914	• Increased housing code enforcement (2007).

a. 2000 Decennial Census.
b. Village actions in bolded text, township actions in unbolded text.

construction and landscaping jobs, they violate suburban norms regarding use of public space.

As the above quote suggests, an implicit model of suburban lifestyle figures centrally in the official discourse I analyzed. In a statement promising to weed out illegal apartments from Nassau County communities, a county official described it explicitly, associating the lifestyle with an exemplar of the suburban landscape: "Right now the suburban model is a single-family home with a lawn around it and a baseball field down the street…I don't want to change that" (Miller 2005). In a rhetorical context that relies upon idealized representations of residential categories, excessive breaches of categorical expectations appear to make an area less suburban and more urban. When Babylon township officials attempted to reduce the number of illegal apartments by targeting homes with multiple front doors, a town officer made this clear:

> One front door says single-family home, suburban community… Two front doors is a more urban look. That's not what this community is about. We have a suburban image and what I'm going to do is make sure that is not eroded… The fact is this is a single-family suburban community and it will always be one. And we're going to protect that (Reddy 2002).

Protecting the suburban-ness of a community appears to involve policing the architectural and aesthetic boundaries that distinguish a suburban landscape from its urban counterpart. This insight helps to make sense of a Nassau County Democrat's criticism that local Republicans were "creating a sixth borough [of New York City] by their failure to do code enforcement," and "taking away the suburban quality of life" (Brand 2005). Similarly, it explains a Suffolk County official's defense of Babylon's quality-of-life court: "The day that municipalities are barred from enforcing housing codes will mark the end of suburbia as we know it" (Harrell 2005). The court, created in order to process

minor code violations such as improper garbage disposal and parking rusty automobiles on lawns, allowed the town to defend a symbolic boundary between suburban and urban environments. The defense of this boundary, according to the official, is what permitted suburbia to persist.

Official Rhetoric: Dreams and Nightmares in a Heterogeneous Suburb

Perhaps by virtue of the positive moral connotations of suburban domesticity, a vocal subset of Long Island officials were able to associate violations of suburban spatial order rhetorically with broad moral deterioration. For example, in a Long Island town where developers have responded to an increasing population by dividing lots in half, the town supervisor promised to block subdivisions, depicting density in terms of a stark moral dualism.

> It's time to re-examine the face of suburbia ... People have moved to Hempstead to enjoy the dream of suburban life. I am going to do everything in my power to ensure that overdevelopment does not turn the suburban dream into the urban nightmare (Hempstead Township 2007).

When officials invoke "the suburban dream," the formulation serves dual purposes, giving suburban life a utopian cast and alluding to processes of upward mobility in which suburban residence represents a cherished point of arrival. Violations of a new homeowner's expectations of suburbia effectively reverse the direction of this mobility, transforming neighborhoods from "suburban dream to urban nightmare." During a public address delivered after Brookhaven evicted a number of immigrant residents from an overcrowded house, a town official explained the plight of the non-immigrants who lived next door:

> The hard working people of Brookhaven, especially Farmingville, should not have to live with this plague of overcrowded housing. I will fight for the residents of Farmingville who worked hard for their American Dream and now find themselves living next door to a home containing 20, 30, or even 40 men. It's horrible (Brookhaven Township 2006).

As demonstrated in this example, officials occasionally suggested that breaches of suburban housing norms threaten the very moral health of the community. Metaphors of disease ["plague" (Brookhaven Township 2006)] or war ["under siege" (Brookhaven Township 2007)] were used to characterize the threat posed by overcrowding. In other cases, associations of urban squalor were invoked: homeowners who flout the rules were referred to as "slumlords" (Brookhaven 2007), and neighborhoods where there were too many crowded homes were referred to as "slums" (Brown 2005). In a more complete example, a county official, responding to the evictions mentioned above, compared the "American dream" to the specter of overcrowded suburban homes, embellishing his comparison with strongly symbolic wording.

> They bought a house with a white picket fence, so their kids could have good schools and enjoy the American dream… Having 30 people in a flophouse next door was not part of the arrangement. They didn't sign up for this." (Vitello 2005)

In these remarks, a violation of the single-family norm for suburban housing is cast in tragic terms. An acceptable way of inhabiting a suburban home (buying a house with a "white picket fence") is contrasted with an unacceptable way ("[h]aving 30 people in a flophouse"), but just as importantly, this violation of suburban order is conflated with a moral violation ("American dream" vs. "flophouse"). The word flophouse is particularly noteworthy, suggesting transience and ill repute: "rooming house" or "boardinghouse" would have been just as accurate, but would have failed to convey these meanings. On

two separate occasions, the same Suffolk County official used similar rhetorical contrasts:

> I was a kid who grew up in a ... regular Long Island middle class neighborhood. You go to school. You come back with your buddies. You play baseball and football out in the street. You ride your bikes to the store and that was suburban life ... I have a deep affinity to protecting people's neighborhoods for the suburban lifestyle for which they moved here in the first place. Young couples of all races save up money so they can get their dream house, so they can have their 2.4 kids and have them play safely on the front lawns. They don't want 20 trucks coming down their road. They don't want 60 people next door. They don't want people defecating in the backyard. And they are not unreasonable or cold-hearted. (Brown 2005)

> People who play by the rules work hard to achieve the suburban dream of the white picket fence. Whether you are black or white or Hispanic, if you live in the suburbs, you do not want to live across the street from a house where 60 men live. You do not want trucks riding up and down the block at 5 a.m., picking up workers. (Vitello 2007)

Again the "white picket fence" serves as linguistic shorthand for a morally loaded spatial and social order, which is clearly violated by overcrowded houses and shape-ups. Taken as a whole, the symbolic logic at work in these examples contrasts two prototypical worlds: An ideal suburbia in which clean, spacious, single-family homes are inhabited by "people who play by the rules" and pursue "the American dream"; and an alternate world of "flophouses" and trucks "riding up and down the block" at ungodly hours presumably filled with immigrants. A simultaneous "lumping" and "splitting" (Zerubavel 1999) is at work in the construction of these two worlds: all the positive meanings of suburbia are lumped together and are contrasted with the negative connotations of an urban dystopia. The worst possible examples of overcrowding documented on Long Island (30 or 60 men in one house) are described as an endemic condition facing Long Island suburbanites, and

are contrasted with an imaginary ideal. Through this maneuver, the officials cited above are able to tie relatively minor breaches of suburban housing expectations to broad themes of social and moral decline, ostensibly generating public support for code enforcement.

Resident Cognition: Categorical Expectations and Moralized Space

If officials link spatial order with moral order in their arguments for local ordinances, one might well ask: "So what?" Colorful political oratory is one thing, but why should it be assumed that the rhetoric of Long Island policy makers has any leverage in the minds of individual suburbanites? I now turn my attention to the possibility that the symbolic boundaries drawn by Long Island officials might "resonate" (Griswold 1987, Schudson 1989) with members of the suburban public. The rhetoric I have surveyed suggests that suburban standards for housing and behavior are not mere proxies for anxiety concerning race, ethnicity or citizenship status. Presumably, by reorienting public policy and discourse onto the need to protect suburban housing standards, officials are able to draw support from constituents who would be alienated by explicitly socially targeted measures. If this is the case, then suburban categorical expectations must carry a moral weight that is relatively independent of prejudicial attitudes toward race, ethnicity or citizenship.

Survey-embedded experiments permitted me to test this hypothesis directly. Survey questions, particularly those about race or ethnicity, are prone to social desirability effects and post-hoc rationalization. In order to dodge this methodological

pitfall, analysts of neighborhood preferences (Schuman and Bobo 1988; Shlay and DiGregorio 1982; St. John and Bates 1990) have used experimental vignette questions randomly embedded in a survey to analyze the effect of racially neutral attitudes on respondents' levels of support for integration. The empirical test that follows is roughly modeled after Schuman and Bobo's (1998) example: in vignette questions, race, ethnicity and citizenship status were held constant, while suburban categorical expectations were systematically violated in the wording of the questions. In this way, I sought to test whether cognitive schemata conveying spatial and behavioral expectations play an independent role in suburbanites' assessment of neighborhood affluence, health and stability.

Admittedly, "violating categorical expectations" in a survey is a tricky business. I sought to isolate the specific violations of suburban order that I believe to be represented by shape-ups and overcrowded houses: *conspicuous use of public space* and *cramped, high-density living conditions*. I then chose two characteristics of the residential environment – typical mode of transport and typical dwelling – and systematically varied the wording of two vignette questions to violate the terms of the suburban ideal in each case:

Experiment #1

In the first experimental vignette, a hypothetical scenario is described in which local police stop a group of Hispanic men and ask them for proof of citizenship. In the control version, the men are passing through the respondent's neighborhood in a *vehicle*. In the experimental version, they are traveling *on foot*, thus violating informal proscriptions against visibly occupying public space.

Experiment #2

In the second experimental vignette, a hypothetical scenario is described in which local authorities inspect a dwelling inhabited by twelve illegal immigrant men and evict the residents, citing overcrowded conditions. In the control version of the question, the dwelling is a small *house*. In the experimental version, the dwelling is an *apartment*, representing a breach of the low-density spatial order of the suburbs.

The vignette questions containing these experimental wordings were located toward the beginning of the survey. I then tested the effects of these wordings on responses to a battery of questions on community decline placed toward the end of the survey. In the ordering, the wording, and the layout of the survey, no connection was drawn between the experimental vignettes and the questions on community decline. The vignettes were framed as "hypothetical scenarios," so there was no indication given that apartments or pedestrians actually exist in the respondent's neighborhood with any frequency. The community decline questions asked for assessments of *real* community conditions in the respondents' town. More importantly, twenty-five unrelated survey questions were interposed between the experimental vignettes and the community decline questions.[1] By ordering the vignettes before the community decline questions, I produced a "priming" effect (Collins and Loftus 1975), demonstrating the relevance of mental assumptions concerning suburban space to judgments of neighborhood health and stability, even when there is no logical relationship between assumption and judgment.

Table 2: Priming Experiment: Effects of Breaching Suburban Categorical Expectations on Perceived Community Decline

Experiment #1:	Wording of prior vignette question in survey:	
	Suppose that a *vehicle* passing through your neighborhood is carrying a group of Hispanic men…	Suppose that a group of Hispanic men is *walking* through your neighborhood…
	N=120	*N*=100
Aspect of Decline:	Mean[a]	Difference (T-Test)[b]
Local property values declining	3.20	+ 0.38* (0.17)
Town's reputation declining	3.27	+ 0.38* (0.18)
Living conditions getting worse	3.47	+ 0.14 (0.20)
Have thought about moving	3.71	+ 0.51* (0.22)
Experiment #2:		
	Suppose that a *small house* in your neighborhood is inhabited by twelve illegal immigrant men, who live three to a room…	Suppose that an *apartmen*t in your neighborhood is inhabited by twelve illegal immigrant men, who live three to a room…
	N=105	*N*=115
Aspect of Decline:	Mean	Difference (T-Test)
Local property values declining	3.17	+ 0.39* (0.17)
Town's reputation declining	3.24	+ 0.40* (0.18)
Living conditions getting worse	3.33	+ 0.38* (0.20)
Have thought about moving	3.77	+ 0.24† (0.22)

† $p<.10$ * $p<.05$ ** $p<.01$ Two-tailed tests. Standard errors in parentheses.
a: All variables measured on five-point Likert scale: 1 = strong disagreement; 5 = strong agreement.
b: T-Test for independent samples of equal variance.

Outcome #1: Perception of Community Decline

In order to measure respondents' perception of community decline, I included four survey items, each capturing a different dimension of decline. Three of the items ask for the respondent's level of agreement with statements claiming, respectively, that their community's property values, reputation and living conditions are declining. The fourth statement is meant to gauge whether the respondent has considered moving. Responses to these statements were measured on a 5-point Likert scale representing the respondent's level of agreement. The statements were worded as follows: "Living conditions in my town are getting worse"; "The local reputation of my town is getting worse"; "Real estate values in my town are not as high as they should be," and "I have considered moving to a new town or state in recent years."[2]

Results: Perception of Community Decline

Results for the first set of outcome variables are presented in Table 2. It is notable, first of all, that the direction of the differences in means between the control and experimental groups are consistent with our predictions in every case. All but two of the differences are statistically significant at a confidence level of 95%. The analysis demonstrates that even suggesting a hypothetical breach of suburban order clearly does affect the way respondents evaluate their neighborhoods. The priming effect is somewhat stronger for the second experiment, which makes intuitive sense: apartments and high-density housing generally are relatively permanent factors of the built environment.

Table 3: Priming Experiments: Effects of Breaching Suburban Categorical Expectations on Community Description Choices

	Wording of prior vignette question in survey:	
Experiment #1:	Suppose that a *vehicle* passing through your neighborhood is carrying a group of Hispanic men… *N*=120	Suppose that a group of Hispanic men is *walking* through your neighborhood… *N*=100
Neighborhood is:	Mean[a]	Difference (T-Test)[b]
"Healthy"	0.35	- 0.27**
		(0.05)
"Clean"	0.59	- 0.02
		(0.03)
"Safe"	0.64	- 0.04
		(0.06)
"Attractive"	0.53	- 0.11†
		(0.07)
"Affluent"	0.23	- 0.02
		(0.06)
"Orderly"	0.27	+ 0.07
		(0.06)
Experiment #2:	Suppose that a *small house* in your neighborhood is inhabited by twelve illegal immigrant men, who live three to a room… *N*=105	Suppose that an *apartment* in your neighborhood is inhabited by twelve illegal immigrant men, who live three to a room… *N*=115
Neighborhood is:	Mean	Difference (T-Test)
"Healthy"	0.31	- 0.08†
		(0.06)
"Clean"	0.66	- 0.14*
		(0.07)
"Safe"	0.74	- 0.16**
		(0.06)
"Attractive"	0.50	- 0.05
		(0.07)
"Affluent"	0.28	- 0.10*
		(0.05)
"Orderly"	0.34	- 0.09†
		(0.06)

†p<.10 * p<.05 ** p<.01; Two-tailed tests. Standard errors in parentheses.
a: All neighborhood description variables coded as binary: 0 = not indicated by respondent; 1 = indicated.
b: T-Tests for independent samples of equal variance.

Perhaps for this reason, imagining them in one's own suburban neighborhood is more likely to change a resident's impression of decline than is the suggestion that a group of Hispanic men might travel their local sidewalks on foot – a relatively temporary breach of suburban order. But we shouldn't take this kind of reasoning too far: the priming effect demonstrated here is presumed to be entirely unreflexive. As previously mentioned, the vignette questions were introduced as "hypothetical scenarios" and twenty-five unrelated survey items were interposed between the vignette questions and the first of the community decline questions. Perhaps most strikingly, there was no difference in effect when the wording of the second experiment was randomly varied to apply to "a nearby town" instead of the respondent's own neighborhood, suggesting that the effect captured is that of violating the terms of a mental category, rather than a conscious and rational process in which respondents adjust their impression of their neighborhood based on the new information provided in the vignette questions.

Outcome #2: Community Description

I was interested not simply in subjective perceptions of community decline, but in the way that suburbanites would respond if asked to describe their communities. In order to facilitate quantitative analysis of the results, I opted for a closed-ended design in which I provided a list of ten positive and ten negative descriptors and asked respondents to indicate how they would describe their town by checking those that applied.

Results: Community Description

By including a list of environmental descriptors, I hoped to measure the moral meanings that respondents attached to their community. If positive moral meanings are associated with the prototypical suburban order, they should be observable in the stereotypes activated by breaching that order. For each positive descriptor provided on the questionnaire (e.g. clean, orderly), an antonym was offered as well (e.g. dirty, disorderly). Six of the terms provided (clean, safe, attractive, affluent and orderly) are assumed to be stereotypically associated with an idealized suburban environment. Other terms provided were either those associated with idealized urban environments (e.g. diverse) or were too general to be associated with either suburban or urban environments (e.g. happy). Table 3 presents the results for the six positive terms stereotypically associated with suburban communities. The evidence is provocative, but mixed. Although all but one of the effects are in the direction expected, only one of the effects is statistically significant for the first experiment. The results are somewhat stronger for the second experiment, which produced statistically significant changes ($p<.05$) in respondents' use of three of the six descriptors.

One More Test: Multivariate Regression

The argument could reasonably be made that the effects of the experimental vignettes is actually capturing respondents' underlying sentiments regarding Hispanic ethnicity or undocumented immigration. I sought to test this alternate hypothesis through multivariate analysis. A scale measuring perceived community decline (Cronbach's Alpha = .73) was created out of the four community decline questions described above.

In Table 4, the results of an OLS regression using this scale as an outcome are presented. If the effects of the experiments are merely capturing either respondents' stereotypes about Hispanics or their belief that illegal immigration is negatively affecting their community, then the effects should disappear when measures of these attitudes are included. In order to test this possibility, two additional scales were included as independent variables: a stereotype scale composed of respondents' answers to four questions asking them to express their level of agreement with statements regarding Hispanics' intelligence, their level of welfare-dependence, how easy they are to live with, and the level of comfort (or discomfort) the respondent would feel in a community where over half of the population was Hispanic (Cronbach's Alpha = .79); and a second scale measuring the respondent's level of agreement with three statements regarding undocumented immigrants' effect on local schools and hospitals, labor market, and real estate values (Cronbach's Alpha = .79). The authors also included the respondent's age, ethnicity (Hispanic or non-Hispanic) and income, but none of these control variables proved even marginally significant, nor did they significantly alter the coefficients or the significance levels for the theoretically motivated variables. Confident that they add nothing to the models, they were omitted in the present analysis.

Model 1 controls for three variables that might be intuitively expected to affect a respondent's perception of community decline: the number of years the respondent's family has lived in the town, the median town income, and a variable capturing local ethnic diversity: the percentage of the respondent's town which was Hispanic at the time of the 2000 census. In Model 2, the ethnic stereotype scale is added. In Model 3, the scale

Table 4: OLS Estimates: Effect of Breaching Suburban Categorical Expectations on Perceived Neighborhood Decline ($N = 210$)

Variable	**(1)**	**(2)**	(3)	**(4)**	**(5)**
Family in Town (Years)	0.00	0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Town: Median Income (Logged)	-0.00	-0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Town: % Hispanic	0.01	0.02	0.03*	0.03*	0.02*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Scale: Hispanic Stereotypes		0.08**	0.01	0.01	0.01
		(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Scale: Attitudes Toward			0.44***	0.44***	0.44***
Undocumented Immigrants			(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Experiment #1[a]				0.28*	-
				(0.13)	-
Experiment #2[b]					0.34**
					(0.12)
R^2	0.07	0.12	0.27	0.30	0.31

*P<.05, **P<.01, *** P<.001. One-tailed tests. Standard errors in parentheses.
a: Binary variable: Respondents scored a 0 if they received the control wording ("vehicle"); Respondents scored a 1 if they received the experimental wording (men "walking").
b: Binary variable: Respondents scored a 0 if they received the control wording ("small house"); Respondents scored a 1 if they received the experimental wording ("apartment").

measuring the respondent's concern about the local effects of undocumented immigration is added. In Model 4, a dummy variable is included indicating whether the respondent received the experimental wording in Experiment #1 (vehicle vs. men "walking"). And in

Model 5, a similar dummy variable is included for the Experiment #2 (small house vs. apartment).

The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4. A first observation is that the general stereotypes regarding Hispanics, although significant predictors of perception of community decline when on their own, lose their significance when specific measures pertaining to undocumented immigration are included in the analysis. A second interesting point is that anxiety over the effect of undocumented immigration is a strong predictor of perceived community decline across the sixteen communities. This may suggest that even in Long Island communities with relatively small populations of undocumented immigrants, some residents fear the impact of undocumented immigration on local property values and living conditions. Finally, the most important results for the present discussion are shown in the fifth and sixth columns, where tests of significance indicate that both experiments continue to have strong effects when controlling for attitudes regarding Hispanics generally as well as the specific effects of undocumented immigrants on the local community. The evidence suggests that the effect of violating suburban expectations is robust.

A final counterargument is that both experimental vignettes, by explicitly referring to "Hispanic" and "illegal immigrant" men, prime latent stereotypes that are then triggered by the experimental versions of the questions, which, by mentioning walking on foot and crowded apartment housing, offer "stereotype-consistent" images, thus triggering these latent stereotypes. In order to test this possibility, interaction terms measuring the interaction of anti-immigrant attitudes and treatment with the two experimental vignettes were included in a sixth and seventh model. In both cases, the

interaction terms fell well short of conventional measures of statistical significance and decreased model fit. Although the social content of the vignettes still might influence the effects of the experimental versions in some unobservable way (unfortunately, versions referring to non-Hispanic men and citizens, respectively, were not included in the survey, prohibiting me from testing this possibility definitively), the multivariate analysis, particularly with the inclusion of interaction variables, suggests that violating behavioral and spatial expectations appears to exert an independent influence on assessments of community health and stability. The adherence to or violation of symbolic scripts, in other words, appear central to residents' broader attributions regarding their community.

Conclusion

The evidence marshaled here supports two conclusions. First, it suggests that a set of assumptions regarding appropriate uses and configurations of residential space have an important role to play in the political culture of suburban communities experiencing demographic change. Although the present study is limited to the suburbs of Long Island, media reports suggest that similar debates are occurring in a range of other communities throughout the Northeast (Jones 2006; Vitello 2005).

Second, the present study suggests that political debates over housing and use of public space rely upon the existence of cognitive assumptions concerning the behaviors and the built forms that are appropriate to suburban communities. Suburban residents appear to draw upon these scripts to evaluate the health and stability of their residential surroundings. Often, analysts conclude a study such as this by arguing that a variable or a

phenomenon "matters" for explaining empirical outcomes. It would incorrect, based on the evidence presented here, to attempt to weigh the importance of cognitive orientations toward modes of space and behavior against other (perhaps racial or political) attitudes. It would be even more ill-advised to conclude that these orientations play a causal role in producing political resistance to the ethnic integration of suburban communities. Instead, I make the more modest descriptive claim that morally loaded sets of expectations for local space and behavior are likely to be part of the cultural and cognitive "tool boxes" (Swidler 1986) of public officials and constituents, and that they are thus available to be drawn upon in a context in which these expectations are breached.

Building upon this insight, an interesting direction for future research would be to examine the rhetorical conditions under which attitudes toward suburban space come into play. Our analysis of official discourse suggests that claims to "protect suburbia" may be politically effective in part because they express concern for the aesthetic or spatial integrity of an inert environment, and are thus at least nominally *asocial* in their intent. Living arrangements and standards for public behavior offer a canvas for the drawing of symbolic boundaries: in a divisive political atmosphere, the relevance of race, class, or citizenship can be explicitly minimized and an alternate basis of adjudication, between acceptable and unacceptable uses of suburban space, can be substituted in their place. As one of the officials cited above remarked, "[w]hether you are black or white or Hispanic, if you live in the suburbs, you do not want to live across the street from a house where 60 men live" (Vitello 2007).

If statements such as this provide any indication of the conditions under which suburban norms for housing and behavior will take center stage in political discourse,

then we might expect to see unconventional uses of residential space highlighted when the overt drawing of social boundaries becomes, for one reason or another, politically untenable. By the same token, debates over virtuous ways of using space may represent a sublimation of social tensions that have not yet been publicly realized. In either case, the evidence presented here suggests that in the practice of everyday life, expectations for configurations of space and modes of public behavior offer devices for categorizing and interpreting one's surroundings in broad terms. In rhetoric and in cognition, they are interpreted as cues to the moral health and stability of a community. As such, they are likely to play a role whenever a community experiences rapid demographic or physical change.

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Chapter Three:

Institutional Scripts

Nobody's Home:
Vacant Housing and Social Order in Three Suburbs

An occupied home is a sign of stability and prosperity – an indication that both the suppliers and consumers of housing have faith in the value of local residential spaces. Historically high occupancy rates in the American suburbs suggest a strong vote of confidence from housing markets. Suburban communities have rarely contended with the abandoned homes and blighted blocks that have plagued many struggling inner city neighborhoods. In spite of the feverish pace at which suburban homes have been constructed, supply has rarely exceeded demand, resulting in a chronic lack of affordable housing (Baldassare 1992). This is not surprising in historical context. Contemporary American suburbia was born of a nationwide housing shortage, which quickly gave way to a prolonged period of urban outmigration by the members of a growing middle class (Farley 1964; Frey 1984). Only recently has suburbanization shown any signs of slowing down (Frey 2009).

In the last ten years, the American suburbs appear to have entered a new era. Fed by a speculative bubble in real estate investment, suburban communities have been overbuilt at the expanding fringe. An increasing number of suburban homes have been repossessed due to unsustainable practices in mortgage markets and a collapse of the

inflated housing prices on which this lending was based (Immergluck 2009; Newman 2009). Finally, a broad economic downturn precipitated by the collapse in real estate markets has resulted in escalating unemployment, leading to widespread financial insecurity and placing more homes at risk of foreclosure (Martin 2011). As a result, the assumption of near-universal occupancy in many suburban communities has been sharply violated, as growing inventories of homes lie vacant.

What are the consequences of vacant housing for suburban neighborhoods? Empirical research suggests that vacant homes lower surrounding property values and place high demands on public services (Immergluck and Smith 2006a, 2006b; Lin et al. 2009; Schuetz et al. 2008). These insights, largely derived from research on urban neighborhoods, seem equally likely to apply to suburban communities currently experiencing unprecedented levels of vacancy. But beyond the long-term economic impact of vacancies, existing research tells us little about the effects that individual vacant homes may have on block-level social interaction and organization. The immediate social mechanisms that link vacant housing with broader decline are often inferred in the literature, and are rarely directly observed. As a result, we know very little about the microsociology of vacant housing *anywhere* it occurs.

In this chapter, I conduct a qualitative analysis of three communities in northeastern New Jersey that are immersed in the processes of economic and physical transformation described above. Following the methodological strategy of the previous chapters, I focus on observable changes in physical and social conditions in order to investigate breaches of the *scripts* that apply to the use of suburban space. Specifically, I examine local reactions to increases in vacant housing, identifying both the *block-level*

social interactions and *municipal-level* plans and programs through which vacant housing is defined as problematic and (if applicable) a solution formulated. If the first chapter investigated behavioral assumptions embedded in physical design and the second chapter examined assumptions embedded in rhetoric and cognition, in this chapter I am interested in *institutional* scripts: assumptions concerning the use of suburban spaces that are institutionalized through (tacit or explicit) agreement among members of a community and that are potentially enforceable by a "third party" (Carruthers and Ariovich 2004; Collins 1981). Vacant houses seem likely to violate both informal and formal rules for how spaces should appear and be used. Overgrown grass and broken widows may breach neighborhood norms and violate housing codes. By examining reactions to these breaches, I hope to construct a detailed portrait of the articulation between the informal expectations and the formal rules and laws that govern uses of space.

Who enforces such rules? The third party in question may represent a municipality, a private investor, a civic association or simply an informal network of concerned neighbors. As Collins (1981) notes, property rights are merely crystallizations of informal rules concerning *who* is permitted to do *what* with *what*. Because these rules are both often implicitly understood and variably enforced, "people can rigidly avoid stepping on someone else's front lawn or they may take the office stationary home, in both cases without consciously thinking about it" (997). The variability of rules and the mode of their enforcement is explained not simply by different cultural "norms" but by the organization of authority in the community where they apply. Property rights are typically enforced by the state, but the third party in question may represent *any* actor with a known interest in the treatment of an object and the ability to enforce this interest:

airplane seats, park benches and church pews all carry different rules in part because private corporations are different from municipal governments, and both are different from the clergy.

Institutional scripts regulating the use of residential housing appear to hold a privileged place in suburban social organization. The political economy of suburban society represents a densely populated landscape, in which a variety of third parties – public, private, and civic – possess a clear interest in the treatment of residential space. Homeownership is typically high in suburban communities, and the fiscal health of suburban municipalities is closely tied to the value of local residential real estate (Hendrick 2004). As a result, a generous portion of the municipal code in suburban communities tends to be devoted to rights and restrictions that apply to homeowners' use of their homes. Indeed, the very structure of the state in American suburbia can be seen as an institutional outgrowth of these rules: in many cases, homeowners pursued incorporation – the political creation of a new municipality – as a way of placing the built environment under local control, with the broader objective of stabilizing physical conditions and managing property values (Teaford 1979).

Vacancy stands to lead to broad violations of these scripts, and, in many cases, to confound the very coercive mechanism by which they operate. At a most basic level, the vacating of a house represents a temporary loss of control over the built environment. Vacancy ruptures the link between a physical structure and an identifiable (and potentially accountable) social actor, the resident, and can thus have a range of negative consequences for a community, including physical deterioration, declining property values, vandalism, crime and other forms of social disorder (Immergluck and Smith

2006a, 2006b; Lin et al. 2009; Schuetz et al. 2008; LaGrange 1999; Ley and Cybriwsky 1996; Greenberg and Rohe). When a suburban house is vacated, and a resident is no longer physically present, the most direct mode of social control over the built environment is lost. For concerned parties, ownership must be ascertained through institutional channels, and may remain in question.

At the time of this study, the foreclosure crisis was producing an increase in suburban vacant homes through a variety of pathways, problematizing control over suburban housing. Foreclosure, a legal action mediated by the state, involves the repossession or sale of a home whose owner has defaulted on payments. Often, particularly in the context of widespread foreclosure, repeated attempts to sell the property are made over a prolonged period during which time the property remains vacant. In the case of repossession by a lender, a property goes into "REO" (real estate owned) status, sitting vacant unless rented out. But the mere *risk* of foreclosure also often produces vacancy, through homeowner abandonment prior to default or a "short sale," a time-consuming process that permits a homeowner to avoid foreclosure but that typically involves a financial loss for both lender and borrower. *All* of these pathways often lead to either short or long periods of vacancy. Temporary vacancies, in which the identity of the absentee owner is known to neighbors and the state, may not prove problematic, but longer vacancies due to abandonment or repossession by a lending institution were increasingly common in a wide range of suburban communities in the years preceding this study. When this happens, ownership is rendered ambiguous. Following Collins, it is no longer clear whose front lawn one is walking on. (Or, for that matter, who should mow the grass).

In this context, institutional scripts such as informal norms and housing codes are prone to fail. The enforcement of both informal norms and municipal codes concerning the condition of housing is likely to be rendered problematic when a resident is missing and an owner unidentifiable. How is this loss of control perceived by suburban residents and organizations? Do they seek to reestablish control? If so, how? What is the mode of their response? And how do they assign accountability for the vacant house in question? In this chapter, I conduct an in-depth qualitative analysis of responses to vacant housing in three suburban communities, seeking, first, to identify the social mechanisms that explain local reactions to empty suburban homes, and second, to place these responses in a larger political and economic context that varies by community and that helps to make sense of these ground-level reactions.

Methodology: Comparative Qualitative Research

Prior literature (summarized below) suggested a comparative research design examining communities that vary in terms of income and rates of owner-occupancy. First, two suburban communities in northeastern New Jersey were chosen as field sites for qualitative fieldwork. Partway through the research, a third community was added, following a logic of case selection whereby additional cases are chosen during the research process in order to test hypotheses generated through initial stages of research (Small 2009). All three communities had experienced a rash of foreclosures in the previous two years, suggesting a rise in vacancy rates. The three communities are described in Table 1. Research took place over a 15-month period beginning in early

March 2010. Data consisted of transcripts, notes and recordings from more than 60 interviews, attendance of public meetings, archival research, and unsystematic participant observation focused primarily on three blocks that were studied intensively.

In each of the three communities that were studied, analysis was conducted at two levels. At an organizational level, analysis focused on the role of private sector actors (e.g. realtors and developers), civic organizations, and municipal government in managing the social and economic consequences of vacant properties. Concretely, I conducted eight interviews with six city planners and code enforcement officers of the three communities under study, four interviews with directors of local non-profit organizations dealing with housing, and seven interviews with realtors who conduct business in the communities in question.

A second level of analysis investigated the street-level consequences of individual vacant houses in detail, documenting the experiences and opinions of residents of blocks with a relatively large number of newly vacated houses. Three blocks were chosen, two in one of the communities and one in another. Following Grannis's (1998) findings, which show block-level social interaction to be organized "down the street" rather than within city blocks bounded by several intersecting streets, a "block" was defined as *both sides of one street* for one block-length. On all three blocks, interviews were later extended down the street for an additional block-length during the course of the study, as a larger sample appeared both advisable and feasible. Two block lengths also provided a natural sampling frame: in two of the three cases (Cheswick and Woodrun), the street along which interviews were conducted is only two blocks long. Attempts were made to interview a member of every household on each of these blocks, thus defined. These

attempts, which required approximately 36 visits to the neighborhoods under study, resulted in 50 interviews with residents of the three blocks in question, as well as an extensive amount of unstructured interaction with block residents, who occasionally invited me into their home or invited me to neighborhood events.

All interviews were loosely structured, consisting primarily of open-ended questions that increased in specificity as the interviews proceeded. Block residents, for example, were asked a series of open-ended questions beginning with their general assessment of whether they enjoy living in their neighborhood. At the end of the interview, they were asked several closed-ended questions (age, duration of residence, tenure, etc.). Because most of the time during interviews was occupied with follow-up questions and back-and-forth on various topics, the overall interactional tone was that of casual, but thematically focused conversation. The length of interviews varied greatly, from 10 minutes to, in some cases, between two and three hours, with an estimated average duration of approximately 25 minutes. Finally, in addition to the interview-based research outlined above, an extensive body of newspaper and blog articles relating to housing or real estate in one or more of the communities was reviewed, along with property records for more than 100 houses listed by various real estate companies specializing in foreclosure (e.g. Realtytrac, Trulia, etc.).

The Research Setting: Orange, West Orange and Montclair

In the initial stage of research, two towns in Essex County – Orange and Montclair – were chosen as research sites. Later, the town of West Orange was added.

The three towns are adjacent to each other, forming a 10-mile wide segment of the densely populated suburbs that radiate outward to the northwest of the city of Newark.

The contiguity of the towns presented an unforeseen benefit to the research in this chapter, as the communities share a rough location in relation to the urban centers of New York and Newark while offering a graduated range of economic conditions: neighborhoods in the three communities rise in affluence from the densely packed public housing projects on the eastern edge of Orange to the sprawling mansions along the northwest edge of Montclair. By studying the three townships, I was able to examine communities experiencing similar geographic conditions, while differing in density and socioeconomic and racial composition. The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 show the townships to be roughly similar in size, but to be separated by income levels, crime rates and racial makeup. These statistical differences hint at deeper differences in the physiognomy, demographics and history of the three communities, and these factors are related, in turn, to how each community has fared during the ongoing foreclosure crisis.

Orange, the poorest of the three towns, was a thriving industrial center in the early twentieth century, counting a Stetson hat factory among a number of successful manufacturing operations located in the town's Valley district (Mappen 2004). Long since hollowed out as a manufacturing center, Orange is still predominantly inhabited by working class residents, including a large African-American majority and a growing, diverse population of recent immigrants. Like many communities in the northeast containing large, economically vulnerable populations of racial minorities (Rugh and Massey 2010), Orange was heavily targeted by predatory lending during the real estate

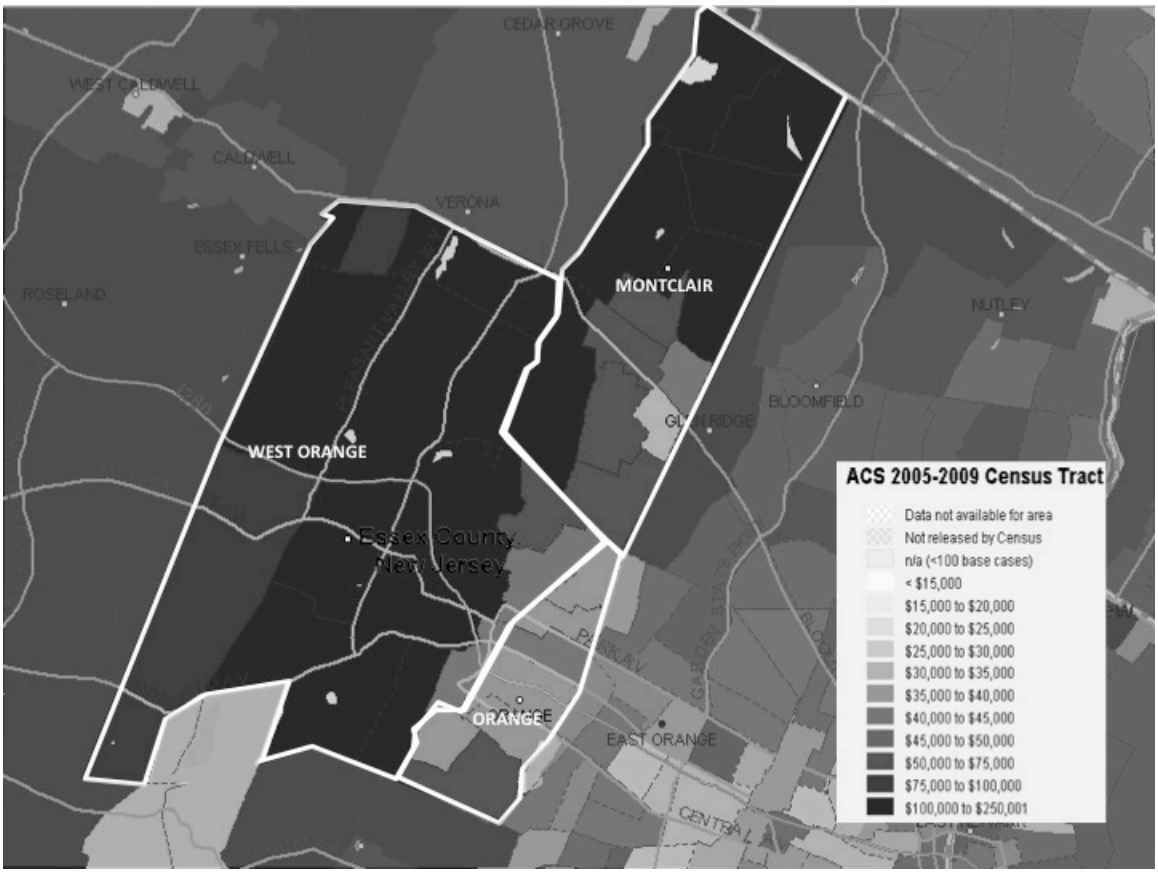


Figure 1: Orange, West Orange, and Montclair, NJ

boom of the mid-2000s. As a result, the town was the earliest of the three communities to register the results of the bursting real estate bubble, as foreclosed properties dotted the landscape moving from southeast to northwest, with the highest concentrations in the poorest sectors bordering East Orange and Newark (RealtyTrac 2011).

Moving to the northwest and up in elevation from Orange, West Orange picks up economically and demographically where Orange leaves off. A narrow strip of poor and working-class avenues along the town's southeastern border quickly gives way to a heterogeneous collection of neighborhoods straddling a high ridge overlooking New York City. Sharing this ridge with a dense, working-class neighborhood is Llewellyn

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Communities Included in Study[a]

	Orange	West Orange	Montclair
Population	31,556	42,782	36,945
Foreclosures (2008)[b]	298	266	140
Foreclosures (2009)[b]	303	362	163
Vacancy Rate	11.5	5.7	6.0
Per Capita Income ($)	19,789	44,957	59,754
Poverty Rate (% Households)	14.1	6.1	4.7
Violent Crime Rate[c]	1,148.2	199.7	245.8
Property Crime Rate[c]	4,136.4	1,761.9	1,813.1
% Black (non-Hispanic)	70.0	22.2	26.5
% White (non-Hispanic)	5.7	52.4	59.4
% Asian (non-Hispanic)	0.8	8.1	4.1
% Hispanic	20.9	15.7	6.4

a: Except where indicated, demographic and economic data drawn from American Community Survey estimates for Census Designated Places (2006-2008), downloaded from www.socialexplorer.com. b: Foreclosure data based on tabulations of Essex County Foreclosure Task Force data, courtesy of Kathe Newman and the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University. c: Per 100,000 population. Figures represent three-year averages (2007-2009) drawn from the Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics database maintained by the Federal Bureau of Investigations.

Park, the oldest gated community in the country, a fortified rectangle of quiet, winding roads, towering oaks, and multimillion dollar mansions built in the late 19th century out of red brick, limestone and granite (Mappen 2004). Down the hill on both sides are racially mixed working- and middle-class neighborhoods composed of split-level homes and "Cape Cod" bungalows built during the postwar decades. Initially insulated by their

stable, if modest, economic base, these communities at first resisted widespread foreclosure. However, in early 2010, as high local and national unemployment dragged on, the foreclosure rates in these communities were sharply on the rise.

Finally, Montclair runs several miles to the north from the border it shares with Orange and West Orange. Along Montclair's southern border lies the township's fourth ward or its "South End," a neighborhood containing a small, low-income core of narrow streets surrounded by long, racially diverse blocks housing a mixture of working and middle-class residents. On the northern third of Montclair lies "Upper Montclair" an area of extreme affluence that includes the town's "estate section," a neighborhood of palatial homes arrayed on a hillside overlooking Manhattan. At the base of this hill is a small commercial center consisting of expensive shops clustered next to a train station and a large green public park where lacrosse goals are a permanent fixture in the spring. Covering a staggering range of income levels, Montclair prizes its economic and racial diversity as well as its much heralded public school system. A recent spate of gentrification has cemented Montclair's status as the "Upper West Side of Suburbia," drawing a growing number of gourmet restaurants and expensive boutiques to the town's two commercial centers while imperiling the town's diversity, as high real estate prices and high taxes appear to be driving away low income residents (Read 2005).

As this brief description suggests, although the three townships exhibit three quite distinct levels of economic prosperity, each town is internally diverse. As is the case throughout New Jersey's dense, northeastern suburbs, informally designated neighborhoods cross municipal boundaries and are tightly contained, exhibiting a high level of income segregation from one block to the next. Foreclosure counts in 2008 and

2009 suggested a wave traversing this landscape, emanating from the economically vulnerable heart of Orange and rapidly approaching the wealthiest reaches of Upper Montclair (see Table 1). In early 2010, at the inception of the study, this wave appeared to be cresting in the racially and economically mixed neighborhoods of West Orange and Montclair's South End. Initially, two suburban blocks with relatively high vacancy rates were chosen for resident interviews – a working class block in Orange's Valley area and an affluent block in Upper Montclair. Partly in response to the findings generated by these interviews, a third block (Woodrun Avenue, Montclair) and a third township (West Orange) were added. Descriptive statistics for these three blocks are presented in Table 2 and 3.

Literature Review: Disorderly Spaces in Cities and Suburbs

Spatial Characteristics and the Roots of Informal Control

Throughout the twentieth century, urbanists probed the roots of localized social disorder, constructing a more-or-less cohesive account concerning the value of informal social control. The often unstated assumption behind this work is that public and private sector control has proven either inadequate *or* contingent upon concerted action taking place in the civic sphere, for example complaints to municipal officials (Carr 2003; Sampson et al. 1997). In these cases, when formal controls fail, the informal controls that residents enact over neighborhood conditions take on a particularly high degree of importance.[1]

Jacobs provided an archetype (1961) for much subsequent theorizing along these lines, highlighting the role of informal monitoring in discouraging crime. Jacobs argued that neighborhood safety could be seen as a function of the degree to which factors such as physical design, social composition and land use produced an adequate number of "eyes on the street," or residents actively engaged in monitoring public and private space. Newman (1972), while disagreeing with Jacobs about the value of territoriality (or, as Jacobs put it, "turf"), came to a parallel conclusion concerning the value of informal monitoring, describing the crime deterring potential of "defensible spaces" – environments whose design maximizes the stabilizing potential of organic processes of social control. In Newman's schema (1995), occupied single-family homes – the suburban norm – maximize both "natural surveillance" and a benevolent territorial instinct on the part of residents. In these spaces, unambiguous boundaries are drawn around private property and this property is assigned to a relatively small community of actors (a household) for guardianship and accountability.

In both theories, vacant housing holds a problematic role, inviting broader social disorder precisely because it is unmonitored and is ambiguously assigned territory – neither "public" in the sense of a street corner, nor "private" in the sense of an occupied house. Furthermore, as a third influential theory (Wilson and Kelling 1982) has proposed, vacant houses, like "broken windows," may exacerbate crime and other forms of social disorder by serving as an indication of a community's indifference and neglect. Following these theoretical perspectives, empirical research has largely supported a connection between vacant property and various forms of disorder, from minor vandalism to theft or aggravated assault (Greenberg and Rohe 1984; Immergluck and Smith 2006b;

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Blocks Included in Study[a]

	Cheswick Street	Woodrun Avenue	Highview Terrace
Median Household Income ($)	38,686	74,573	165,586
Poverty Rate (% Households)	19.5	4.4	0.0
Population Density (people per square mile)	19,479	6,929	4,009
Block Group Vacancy Rate	8.4	7.1	5.5
2000 Tract Vacancy Rate[b]	6.3	5.8	2.7
2010 Tract Vacancy Rate[b]	10.1	9.9	3.5
Owner-Occupancy Rate	43.3	50.1	91.3
% Black (non-Hispanic)	85.9	55.8	14.2
% White (non-Hispanic)	4.3	40.4	77.8
% Asian (non-Hispanic)	1.0	0.0	0.0
% Hispanic	8.7	3.0	8.0

a: Unless otherwise noted, demographic and economic data drawn from American Community Survey block group estimates (2006-2009), downloaded from www.socialexplorer.com. In cases where the block included in the study straddled a border between two or more block groups, the average of the block groups is represented.
b: Decennial census estimates for surrounding census tract(s).

LaGrange 1999; Ley and Cybriwsky 1996; Greenberg and Rohe;).[2] In the most directly relevant empirical study conducted to date, Immergluck and Smith (2006b) found that foreclosure rates (and by inference, vacant housing) interact with income levels in predicting rates of violent crime in Chicago census tracts.[3] In low-income communities, the authors suggest, foreclosed properties are likely to stay vacant longer, becoming attractive sites for opportunistic law-breakers.

Attachment, Cohesiveness and Longevity

A second, loosely grouped body of research has identified a range of community-level characteristics that seem likely to help encourage local civic participation focused on improving or maintaining the condition of neighborhood housing. A number of scholars have followed Firey's (1945) suggestion that the constructed symbolic identity of a place (and the affective attachment that this identity conjures) may act alongside other characteristics of place to explain broader social and economic processes (Molotch et al. 2000; Suttles 1984). Once established, attributions of "character" can be seen to motivate efforts to protect and enshrine the physical attributes and cultural symbols of a community, including local residences, and there is no reason to assume that this process is limited to large cities and lacking on suburban blocks.

At the level of individual subjectivity, however, attachment to a place is inevitably intertwined with attachment to the community that inhabits it. The density and quality of one's social ties to a community have been theorized to influence the latter form of attachment, as well as longevity of residence (Kasarda and Janowitz 1974), and both have been linked to the strength of informal social control in a community. In perhaps the most rigorously empirical attempt to measure and explain informal social control, Sampson et. al. (1997) found both individual longevity and neighborhood residential stability to be important factors in driving "collective efficacy," suggesting that an enduring personal experience in a community and a stable population increase the likelihood that residents will act on behalf of social and physical order, intervening, for example, if "a fight broke out in front of their house," or if "children were spray-painting graffiti on a local building" (919-920).

Formalism, Civic Associations, and Dealing with Uncertainty

Perhaps due to the fact that vacant housing has not been extensively documented in middle-class suburbs to date, theoretical models explaining responses to physical disorder in these communities are lacking. Instead, historical and social researchers have focused on the apparent orderliness of suburban spaces, tracing social and physical order to institutions that regulate behavior at street level, and attributing these in turn to a specific type of occupancy: owner-occupancy (or, with reference to a resident population, homeownership). Where urban research has tended to focus on observable signs of disorder, research on suburbs has highlighted the regularity and predictability of suburban landscapes, and have identified a different causal force at work: economic self-interest.

Historical research on suburban development before and after World War II suggests that widespread homeownership played a crucial role in the organization of suburban social life. According to Cohen (2004), mass homeownership made "market concerns paramount in decisions about how and where one lived" (202) and "narrowed" homeowners' conception of shared fate, highlighting property values as a rallying point (228-240). Detailed ethnographic work on suburban communities adds microsociological depth to this insight, suggesting that, in enforcing community standards, formality prevails. If membership in a community is understood principally through property ownership, this may lend neighborly relations a legal and institutional cast. Accordingly, informal mechanisms of social control may be replaced by formal mechanisms, leading suburban ethnographers to observe that local disputes are resolved through official mediation or legal action (Baumgartner 1988; Perin 1977).

Molotch's (1976) work in urban political economy helps to make sense out of this aspect of suburban society. In suburbs with high rates of homeownership, residents are also "place entrepreneurs" whose interest in local spaces are more likely to be based on "exchange values" than in communities of renters, where "use values" should prevail. Regarded in this light, quintessentially suburban institutions such as homeowner's associations, common interest developments and gated communities can be seen as the institutional efflorescence of informal relations devoted to the ordering of the physical environment. Researchers have documented a wide range of mechanisms – e.g. deed restrictions, covenants and exclusionary zoning – used to simultaneously stabilize physical conditions and exclude undesirables, all ostensibly to realize a shared stake in property values and aesthetic conditions (Fishman 1987; Jackson 1985). In these cases, communities of homeowners develop forms of "private government" – civic associations and social networks that operate below the level of the municipality or the county, exerting a combination of formal and informal constraint (McKenzie 1994). In some cases, these bodies may take a more preemptive approach to regulating local social and aesthetic order. Scholars of "gated" suburban communities have suggested that protection against crime is secondary in such communities to "wall[ing] out uncertainty" (Lang, Lang and Danielsen 1997). In place of the informal controls that may prevail outside of gated communities, "[n]ow a representative from the community association comes by to precisely measure grass and, for a fee, will mow lawns that have grown unruly. The whole process formalizes a social exchange that has historically been informal."

Taken as whole, the research summarized above suggests that the consequences of vacant housing are likely to vary depending upon community income levels and the

prevalence of homeownership. Specifically, it suggests that in poorer, denser communities with higher proportions of renters, vacant properties are more likely to exacerbate local social disorder, while in more affluent, less dense communities with high rates of owner-occupancy, local responses are likely to focus on physical and aesthetic disruption. Furthermore, the research suggests that, in the theoretical parlance of this dissertation, responses to script dissonance may become the basis for broader forms of social organization which *also* vary, from informal monitoring and sanctioning to formal intervention on the part of highly developed civic organizations.

Findings: Orange Township and Cheswick Street

"We're Way Downstream On This."

In contrast to the other two municipalities in the study, Orange has a vacant housing problem that has afflicted the municipality for decades; the effect of the foreclosure crisis has been to rapidly expand a preexisting problem. On Orange's economically struggling blocks, vacant houses languish in a limbo perpetuated by private sector indifference. In these cases, the social consequences of vacant housing fall squarely on civil society and the state.

Organizational actors in both sectors have responded by strategically targeting their interventions in vacant housing. Housing and Development Services, Inc. (HANDS), a non-profit active in Orange, purchases, renovates and rents properties that, in director Patrick Morrissey's words, "won't get turned around by the market." Similarly, municipal officials in Orange target high-profile vacant properties that appear

to pose hazards to economic stability and public safety. Under a new code enforcement regime initiated in 2008 at the start of the foreclosure crisis, twenty-five vacant properties had been demolished by the conclusion of my research. The decision to raze a visibly deteriorating structure associated with criminal activity or other documented social disorder is politically advantageous, offering a tangible public relations payoff. When the city demolishes a house, the process is accompanied by photos of the demolition and press releases on the municipal website publicizing the administration's efforts to clean up deteriorating neighborhoods and describing any criminal activity that helped to prompt the municipality's decision.

In cases where a property has been more recently vacated, municipal interventions are both legally and politically more difficult, as the town is constrained by the rights of absentee property owners, while a decision to "board up" the property may draw fire from local residents concerned about the perception of blight that accompanies boarded up homes. These decisions are "more art than science" in Jackson's words, and rely upon informal indices of local opinion, for example, the number of complaints about the house that city officials have fielded from local residents. When asked specifically whether the city gets many calls complaining about vacant properties, Jackson ceded "[n]o, in general, we don't get a lot of those calls." Jackson alluded to a hypothetical scenario in which local residents took responsibility for vacant homes and expressed disappointment at the lack of civic engagement of this sort:

> *I'm one who pushes back off people, [I'm one] that says government cannot fix everything. And if I know my neighbors, and I know what's around me… you don't have to have a gardener, you and your family could clean up the lot next to you… I meet this stuff all the time - don't just send me your complaints about what's going on in your neighborhood -*

> *what are you doing about it? It goes back to a very old-fashioned model of why we look after one another.*

For lack of this kind of informal control, the city has attempted to compel absentee property owners to physically maintain vacant homes. City officials admit that these efforts have not met much success. At the time of the study, the city was contemplating a new arrangement in which a landscaping company would be contracted by the city to perform fee-based maintenance of vacant properties on behalf of absentee owners. "Are there any institutions that have done a good job of that on their own?" I asked Jackson in an April 2010 interview. "Not really," Jackson replied. "I wish I could say yeah, but no, not really." Absentee owners have been largely content to continue paying property taxes and code violation fines while letting a house sit vacant for years and fall into physical disrepair, a particularly common scenario when the owners in question are out-of-state lending institutions. "We're way downstream on this," remarked Jackson, describing cases in which the city issued citation after citation to no avail.

"Up and Coming" or "Down and Sliding"

Situated in Orange's Valley neighborhood, Cheswick Street is a dense, two-block stretch of predominantly detached, one and two-family residences with a rail overpass servicing the Northeast Corridor at one end and a large parochial school at the other.[4] Due in part to its proximity to a railroad station and a cluster of small convenience stores and self-service laundries along nearby Ireland Road, the street is characterized by frequent pedestrian traffic. The immediate area is economically diverse, with a high poverty rate (19.5%) as well as a sizable, stable population of working-class families. Although predominantly black, the area contains a high degree of ethnic diversity, as

Table 3. Observed Informant and Housing Characteristics

	Cheswick Street	Woodrun Avenue	Highview Terrace
N	20	20	12
Household Response Rate	54.1	55.6	42.9
% Homeowners	40.0	66.7	100.0
% Black (non-Hispanic)[a]	75.0	60.0	0.0
% White (non-Hispanic)[a]	5.0	35.0	91.7
% Asian (non-Hispanic)[a]	5.0	0.0	0.0
% Hispanic[a]	15.0	5.0	8.3
Observed Vacancy Rate	16.2	12.9	10.7
Modal Response: Network Size[b]	3-4	7-10	1-2
Average Duration in House (Years)	7.2	10.1	5.2
Average Duration in Neighborhood (Years)	11.3	14.7	6.3
Modal Response: Neighborhood Downside[c]	Social Disorder	Vacant Housing	Traffic Speed
Modal Response: Community Downside[c]	Poor Public Services	High Taxes	High Taxes

a: Racial and ethnic characteristics of informants imputed by the author. b: Interview question asked informants how many neighbors they regularly spoke with for five minutes or more. c: Interview question asked informants if there were any "negative characteristics" or "downsides" to living on their block and their community, respectively. If multiple factors were named, I asked a follow-up question asking which factor was most significant.

residents include sizable populations of West Indian and Hispanic immigrants mixed in with African-Americans and a small but visible population of older white residents representing the neighborhood's mid-20th century status as an Italian and Irish immigrant enclave. Somewhat surprisingly however, this diversity never came up in my interviews.

Instead the most salient cleavages for people in the community appeared to be those pertaining to socioeconomic class and public conduct. In an interview, Jackson described this neighborhood as "sort of transitional in various directions. It could be kind of up and coming or it could be sort of down and sliding." Block-level demographic and economic data are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

At the time of the study, there were six vacant houses on Cheswick's two blocks, including a decrepit mixed-use building that formerly housed a storefront bar and, immediately next to it, a newer single-family house (which I will refer to as "the yellow house") that for the entire duration of the study had two large sheets of plywood haphazardly hung across the front door, with one sheet hanging ajar, leaving plenty of space for a person to squeeze through, if so inclined. Other vacant houses on the block were only revealed to be empty upon close inspection over repeated visits. Telltale signs included accumulating mail, overgrown grass, and accumulated dust and debris in entranceways that would have been disturbed by human activity. Of the six vacant houses, property records indicated that three had been subject to foreclosure actions in the two years preceding the study.

In the case of Cheswick, an increase in vacant housing roughly coincided with a spike in violent crime. In 2009, two shootings and a stabbing occurred on the block, including a drive-by shooting in which a block resident was hit eight times, miraculously surviving. More common and less severe forms of criminal deviance, however, predated



Figure 2: Vacant House in Orange's Valley District

the recent increase in vacant housing. Halfway down the two-block stretch sit two houses in front of which marijuana was openly sold and smoked in plain daylight at the time of the study.[5] Both the shooting and the block-level marijuana trade were widely considered by residents to be gang-related. According to many residents of the block, more conventional forms of disorder – littering, loud parties and fights – were commonplace.

The vacant houses on the block appeared, in many residents' view, to bear an established, but causally vague, relationship to these forms of social disorder. Anecdotal reports from several residents as well as two city police officers indicated that the houses were used by the drug dealers on the block, although the precise nature of this use remained unspecified. Three residents reported seeing signs that people were entering the house with the plywood opening – indeed, a local police officer noted that the plywood

had been secured several times by city employees, only to be broken into again. A man who lives directly across from the yellow house reported that a homeless man had lived there for a short period, a report independently corroborated by two other residents, including a teenaged boy who admitted to having entered the house on a dare. Although the Orange police department does not publish geographically specific crime statistics that would allow these accounts to be confirmed and compared to previous criminal activity on the block, the reports suggest that the case of Cheswick supports a theoretical model linking vacant housing with social disorder and criminal opportunism.

"It's the Houses with People in *Them That's the Problem."*

Given the incidents summarized above, the single most surprising finding that emerged from my research on Cheswick was how little the vacant houses appeared to enter into residents' assessments of life on the block. Early in every interview, residents were asked what, if anything, they disliked about the neighborhood. Quite surprisingly, only one of twenty informants on the block independently brought up the vacant houses in response to this question – a 23-year old woman whose apartment sits immediately adjacent to an abandoned house and who was interviewed while sitting on her porch next to a free-swinging tangle of exposed wires dangling from the side of the vacant house in question.

Far more common than concerns over vacant housing were concerns about crime and disorderly conduct occurring in the block's easily observable public spaces, such as the street and the sidewalk, as well as in observable private spaces such as front porches and driveways. Sixteen of twenty informants raised issues related to public safety, drug

dealing, noise and littering, all of which were directly and explicitly linked by residents to a group of young men inhabiting a house on the block, or as a young woman described them, "the bad guys up on Cheswick." Five residents described direct experience with violence on the block. A soft-spoken 26 year-old man with cornrow braids showed me three bullet holes in the stucco wall of his apartment building and took me upstairs to see a lead slug still lodged in the wall of a bedroom cabinet – material reminders of one of the shootings from the year before. Others described incidents in which a cousin or a brother had been physically beaten, or in which a fight had spilled over into front lawns, destroying fences and flowers.

Most residents, however, did not have bullet holes to show me, and pointed instead to highly salient social activities such as public drug dealing when discussing problems with the neighborhood. Others voiced their annoyance with a larger group of teenagers affiliated with the drug dealers who often walk up and down the block from Ireland Road late at night, shouting and causing trouble. My field notes indicate that teenagers were hanging out in front of the drug dealers' residences on *sixteen* of eighteen visits to the block during warm spring and summer months of 2010 and 2011. Perhaps because an identifiable group of disorderly young people are so readily visible and audible in the block's public spaces, the moral landscape of the block appeared to be dominated by this social presence, leading block residents to associated quality of life on the block with a cast of identifiable good and bad residents who bear a largely incidental relationship to residential space.

This understanding of the block's problems turned residents' expectations (and blame) upon municipal officials rather than prospective housing investors as the

institutional actors capable of meaningful intervention. A standard question in my interviews asked residents how the block could be improved. Every resident in response to this question mentioned official action: the most frequent answers were increased policing or youth programs that would keep local teenagers off the street.

In several interviews, residents gave voice to the theoretical trade-off between people and places in affecting wellbeing on the block. Patricia, a longtime resident in her 40s remarked, "[t]he vacant homes are bad. But right, well, if it comes to empty houses versus [the street address of a house where a local drug dealer lives], then I guess I wish *more* houses were empty." On a separate occasion, another resident, a woman in her thirties with two children who had moved three years earlier, made a parallel remark:

> *DeAnne*: *They're younger and they're disrespectful. They make noise, they fight in the street. There are certain houses on the block that you just wish would vanish."*
>
> *Me: "Do you mean like the vacant houses?"*
>
> *DeAnne: (Laughs) "It's the houses with people* in *them that's the problem."*

Somewhat ironically, very little drug dealing appeared to occur *inside* the houses mentioned by DeAnne. In the two houses in question, several of the young men who sell drugs on the block lived with their mothers, aunts and grandmother. According to several neighbors acquainted with the family, the matriarchs in the houses forced business out into the block's public spaces. Thea, an elderly woman who had lived in the neighborhood for several decades, described this process:

> *The funny thing is the women who live over there, they supposed to be saved. And their sons are out there doing this stuff. They don't let them do it on their place so they go next door or down the street (gestures again toward corner with vacant bar).*

Some time after the yellow house had been abandoned, Thea explained, the drug dealers temporarily moved their operations into the vacant house, resulting in a decrease in the amount of drug dealing that took place directly in the public spaces on the block. At the time of the study, however, drug dealing had resumed in the street and on the sidewalk. With visible, constant reminders of the illegal activity on the block, residents tended not to see vacant housing as a serious facilitator for local disorder. In this context, the meaning of Patricia and DeAnne's comments about certain occupied homes "vanishing" is clear: *people*, not *places*, were to blame for Cheswick's problems. As Thea's daughter remarked in a separate interview when asked about the vacant homes, "that is just a symptom of the other thing."

"I Don't Go Over There."

Resident interviews and participant observation on Cheswick revealed an additional factor helping to minimize the importance of vacant housing for the block's residents. Nearly every resident with whom I spoke, when asked about conditions in the neighborhood or, more specifically, about the vacant houses, made comments revealing a tightly circumscribed delineation of the geographical area relevant to their everyday lives. Seven residents offered some variation on the remark that they "don't get out much," describing daily routines composed primarily of work and spending time inside with their families. Others defined their territory more explicitly. A 32 year-old woman with ornate neck tattoos and short hair, when asked whether a nearby vacant house bothered her, said, "I just don't go around there. I stay around here." The vacant house in question was two doors down, suggesting that "there" comprised a distance of perhaps 30 yards from "here", which could only have meant her house, front porch, and driveway. Similarly, a

second woman, a longtime resident in her 40s who has raised two children in the neighborhood remarked when asked about the vacant housing, "It doesn't make the neighborhood look good, but as far as me personally, I haven't been directly affected by it. I don't really go over there." In this case, two vacant structures, the yellow house and the abandoned bar, were two doors away. In the tightly circumscribed daily routines and interactions of Cheswick's residents, the group of disorderly teenagers exert an unavoidable and conspicuous presence in part because they are mobile. The majority of complaints (24 out of 37) concerning the teenagers in interview transcripts mentioned actions they performed directly in *front* of the informant's house or *within* their private property (for example sitting on their front steps, drinking in their driveway or littering on their front lawn.) Given the spatially restricted scope of resident's activities, the vacant houses appear as silent and immobile physical neighbors, and are thus, at least by comparison, easily ignored. My fieldwork on Cheswick suggests that, contrary to Newman's (1972) theory regarding the defensibility of single-family detached homes, the sharply defined boundaries between public and private space on the block may cut both ways: residents reacted strongly to trespass and other abuse of their properties and the streets directly in front, but seemed to take little ownership over any territory beyond their single-family suburban bailiwicks.

"No, I Haven't Seen It. That's the Whole Point."

The capacity of vacant housing to conceal drug related activities is related to the chief respect in which the vacant houses *did* seem to play into residents' concerns regarding the block's criminal activity. In interviews, the vacant houses on the block

occasionally came up in relation to the activities of the men down the street, but the association tended to be oblique and vaguely articulated – based on suspicion and largely inchoate anxieties. The following exchange is illustrative:

> *Me: "What about the housing in the neighborhood?"*
>
> *Clem: "Well, you can see for yourself. (Gestures toward the vacant houses across street.)"*
>
> *Me: "Are they an issue for you?"*
>
> *Clem: "Not an issue for me personally, but they don't help. Anytime you've got an empty house with the door kicked in and you've got guys making trouble in the street, I mean, it's not going to be a good thing."*
>
> *Me: "What's the connection?"*
>
> *Clem: "Uhhh… You see guys going in and out of there. What do you think happens in that house? They wanna get off the street and deal drugs or whatever, they can do it in there."*
>
> *Me: "Have you seen guys selling drugs out of that house?"*
>
> *Clem: "No I haven't <u>seen</u> it. That's the whole point. Every time they board it up, somebody opens it up again. Somebody's using it for something."*

Similarly, a young woman and I were discussing the kids who hang out in front of her house at night making noise when she abruptly switched the topic to the need to clean up or "knock down" two vacant houses several doors down:

> *Me: "Do people hang out in front of those houses?"*
>
> *Tracy: "No, they hang out right here. But you always worry that empty homes could attract people that shouldn't be there. It's what* could *happen.*

Vacant houses represent not simply a social absence, but an ambiguous social potential. When a recognizable resident is lacking, neighbors are free to imaginatively occupy a vacant house, filling its empty spaces in accordance with their broader social concerns or

aspirations about the neighborhood. Vacant buildings inevitably invoke a process of social construction. On the other hand, Tracy may have been justified in her concerns. As previously mentioned, according to the accounts of several other residents on the block and local police officers, the drug dealers did use the vacant house in question. But it is precisely the potential utility of the vacant house for the local drug dealers – its capacity to conceal illicit activity – that made these comments speculative. Vacant housing, then, appears paradoxically to influence the level of local concern regarding preexisting criminal deviance, providing a place of concealment and thus diminishing attention that would otherwise fall on objectionable behavior in a neighborhood's public spaces.

"Don't Do That Here"

By approximately the halfway point in my interviews on Cheswick Street, I had discovered two small social networks, each composed of between three and four residents, who coordinated their responses to social and physical disorder on the block. On network consisted of several residents who lived at the eastern terminus of the eastern block. The other network consisted of several residents who lived at the western terminus of the western block. My interviews with the members of these networks described a mechanism of informal social control actively engaged in monitoring physical and social conditions on the block.

At the heart of the network on the western block were two residents named Eugene and Henry. Eugene is a tall, muscular man with tattoos on his forearms, a sunny disposition and an earnest manner – a homeowner and a self-described "family man," Eugene is extremely active in the community, and was contemplating a run for city

council at the time of the study. When describing problems on the block and his response, he struck a measured yet indignant tone, describing the block as "not unsafe," but also urging the need for caution. On one occasion he described an incident shortly after one of the shootings in 2009, when he heard gunshots on a nearby street and soon afterward a man ran through his backyard and knocked over his gate. "They had a gang thing. We worry about our daughter going out. You own a home you shouldn't have to worry about that." Occasionally, the drug dealers from down the block come up and do business in front of his house – when this happens, according to both Eugene and several other residents on his end of the block, Eugene typically intervened, telling them, in his words, "Don't do that here."

After an interview and several casual conversations with Eugene, he introduced me to a neighbor named Henry, a man of Bangladeshi origin in his forties who works as a medical technician at a nearby hospital, and is, like Eugene, a homeowner. My field notes from a conversation with Henry at his house indicate his unique role in monitoring activity on the block.

> *Henry invited me to meet him when he got home from work. I arrived early and sat on the unfinished wooden stairs leading up to the main entrance to his apartment (he owns a two-family house). When he got home we went up to his kitchen and offered me a beer from the fridge. "You see this window?" Henry gestured at a large window above the kitchen table, "I see everything through here. And when the blinds go like this, everybody on Cheswick knows that I'm at home." Henry turned the lever to open the blinds on the window, revealing a sweeping view of the half of the block on which his home was located. [The kitchen in his home is on the third floor and his house is on a slight rise at the very end of the block.] "Everybody on this side knows that if I see something, I call it in [to the police]. What some people know and others don't know is that I listen to make sure they're sending someone out." Henry indicated a CB radio sitting on the windowsill, presumably used to listen in on police transmissions.*

Henry's role as unofficial watchman on Cheswick's western block was independently corroborated by several other residents of the western block, who identified him as a resident particularly involved in improving conditions on the block.

Henry's role on the western block was mirrored by that of Bernice, an elderly woman on Cheswick's eastern block, who echoed Eugene's qualified endorsement of the block's safety, linking the safety of various parts of the neighborhood with the local presence of neighbors who, like herself, keep watch over the safety of residents.

> *This neighborhood is safe at points… at points it's not safe. It's safe around here because… let me give you an example. My niece is over at my sister's house (gestures south), she's coming back here, my sister calls me and says she left. On the way she passes by our friend Janice's house. And everybody here knows her and knows I know where she is. See, I keep (points at her eyes)… I'm always paying attention. People know. I see anything strange, I'm (makes a phone gesture with her hand). They had to tell me to stop calling.*

These two networks exemplify in many respects the informal guardianship of public spaces described by Jacobs (1961), and (in Bernice's gestures quite literally), Jacobs's metonymic formulation concerning "eyes on the street." Both networks claimed to actively monitor the actions of the same group of misbehaving teenagers, readily calling the police when laws appeared to be broken. (The drug dealers' house was set toward the western end of the eastern block, and thus lay in between the clustered residences of both the eastern block network and the western block network.) However, the limitations of the networks' activities became steadily clearer with repeated field visits and interviews.

These limitations appeared to be spatial, in two respects. First, members of the networks on Cheswick's two blocks were *unaware* of each other, and considering the tight clustering of each network's residences, this lack of awareness appeared to be perpetuated by physical distance. The two networks were effectively separated by

approximately two-hundred yards of space and the intersection with Galley Street, which dead-ends at Cheswick at the corner with the abandoned bar. A minimum of nine houses separated the residences of any two members of these networks – nine houses whose residents were more likely to be seen and interacted with. After the 2009 shootings, in order to address the violence as well as the everyday social disorder, Eugene had twice attempted to organize block meetings, going door to door on his block (while scrupulously skipping over the house inhabited by the drug dealers on the street). According to Henry, in both cases, "nobody showed up." Unbeknownst to Eugene several residents at the opposite end of the next block felt much the same way he did about the *same group* of problematic residents, but because his organizing attempts were limited to the western block, these residents were never informed. A second sense in which the limitations of the networks appeared to be spatial was the tight geographical constraints on the interventions of any one member. Eugene's comment to the local drug dealers, "Don't do that here," is telling. The residents' monitoring of local spaces was revealed to be tightly circumscribed – much like residents' daily routines, limited to their property and the public spaces directly in front of their homes.

An illustration of the limitations on the networks' guardianship is offered by several comments made by two of the members of the eastern block network concerning a need for closed circuit security cameras to be installed. Filomena, the middle-aged owner of an extremely well kept blue house near the railroad bridge, discussed the limitations in her ability to "keep watch" on her side of the block. A year earlier, her son's bicycle had been stolen from in back of the house. More recently, several large globe lights on the fence at the front of her property had been broken during the night,

presumably by the teenagers from down the block. Seething regarding the latter incident, she remarked:

> *They need cameras on the block. Then you'd see who's smashing my lights… who's stealing bikes and robbing and selling drugs in front of my house. They fixed up Newark why can't they fix up Orange? We need cameras."*

Bernice made parallel comments concerning kids who ostensibly hang out in the driveway of the two-family home in which she lives.

> *Bernice: "My landlord and me are thinking about installing a camera right here. That way, when people come in here at night…"*
>
> *Mike: "Come in here? Do people come into your yard?"*
>
> *Bernice: "Yeah they come in here. I know because I see the trash. If there's a camera we'll know who it was."*

Filomena and Bernice's statements are evocative of the limitations of informal monitoring in a heavily privatized suburban space. The crimes in question (trespassing, littering, destruction of private property) are confined to the private outdoor spaces of their homes. The proposed solution, private security cameras, seem likely only to aid in the deterrence or punishment of acts of localized nocturnal vandalism. I asked Filomena how cameras would stop the drug dealing down the block when the dealers could easily stay out of range, moving their activities into a driveway between homes, onto an adjacent street or, for that matter, into one of the vacant houses. She thought for a moment and responded: "Well it wouldn't be *here* would it?"

On Cheswick Street, a variety of agreed upon standards for the use of public and private spaces were routinely violated by a group of identifiable actors who live on the block. If scripts, by my formulation, link places (and types of places) with patterns of

expected behavior by human users, the concerns of Cheswick residents were unmistakably directed toward the human side of this relationship. However, *where* offenders performed offending acts still mattered – indeed, this specification appeared central in residents' accounts. Somewhat surprisingly, their strongest responses were not to incidents of public violence, but rather those of private trespass – cases in which, by loitering and drinking or littering on residents' properties or in the street in front, the offenders violated *both* informal or formal prohibitions against specific activities *and* residents' property rights. The configuration of private and public space on the block, typical of suburban communities where one or two-family houses are the norm, appeared to confound the possibility of a collective response to this social disorder.

Findings: Montclair Township and Highview Terrace

"Sometimes You Have to Let the Market Do Its Thing."

Where vacant housing in Orange is a condition perpetuated by lack of private sector investment, in affluent Upper Montclair, vacancies tend to be fleeting, their consequences limited by frequent private sector intervention. Large, well-kept, historic homes in expensive neighborhoods are perceived as carrying intrinsic value to private homeowners and investors. Even if such a home has been vacant and on the market for an extended period, any investments in physical maintenance and renovation are likely to be believed to be sound.

In 2010 the market vindicated such a belief: in Montclair, nearly half (approximately 46%) of properties listed during this period between $400,000 and

$800,000 were sold, resulting in an approximate total of $99 million in residential real estate sales only within one particularly popular category. In contrast, during the same period in the entire city of Orange, a total of $8 million in residential real estate sales completed. A realtor active in both communities explained the implications of these figures, suggesting that buyers were frightened away from Orange due to the local clustering of foreclosed, vacant properties. In contrast, Montclair middle-class blocks were still considered sound, making foreclosures simply a good deal in those neighborhoods. Even as unprecedented numbers of foreclosures swept into Montclair, demand for housing remained high, as it has historically been in many suburban communities.

In this economic context, when a homeowner abandons a property due to financial distress or impending foreclosure, Montclair's planners rely heavily upon private sector actors to maintain a high level of physical and social order. Karen Kadus, Montclair's City Planner during the first half of the study, described a wave of vacant housing moving across the county and evinced significant fears concerning the municipality's ability to respond. According to Kadus, Montclair's resources are limited in relation to the massive investment required to maintain the large, aging homes that comprise much of the town's housing stock:

> *It's a wave… You imagine the typical neighbor calling me or Frank and asking why doesn't the town buy this vacant home? It's an eyesore and it's hurting the block. Well, we don't have the resources to do that. We have a few hundred thousand in our trust fund. The town doesn't have the resources to do that.*

In a follow-up interview, Kadus again emphasized the municipal government's limitations, remarking that "[t]he town isn't going to be holding and maintaining these

homes – we don't want to be in that business." Given the costs of maintaining large, aging, single-family homes, even a fairly wealthy suburban municipality lacks the financial resources to fill in when a property owner cannot be found.

Fortunately, "that business" constitutes a flourishing industry in and around Montclair, as banks and realtors employ contractors, landscapers, and a growing population of "foreclosed property management" or "REO management" specialists to help renovate and maintain vacant homes in order to prepare the properties for sale. (REO is an acronym used to refer to property that is owned by a lending institution following foreclosure.) These private sector actors in many cases obviate the need for further public sector intervention. In interviews, realtors conducting business in Montclair described hiring a landscaping company as a service routinely provided to banks. "Their REO divisions are located in Texas, California, they've never seen the property and never will, so the maintenance really does fall on our responsibility." A separate realtor paralleled these comments, "The REO company, the person you're dealing with who's making the decisions has never been to the property, so you're their eyes and ears."

Physical investments in residential space by absentee property owners can be potentially quite meaningful for local officials, reducing the amount of public pressure. Frank Leslie, chief code enforcement officer in Montclair, suggested that officials' role in managing the consequences of vacant housing depends upon the dynamics of public engagement among wealthy homeowners:

> *People in Montclair are not afraid about complaining. Their homes are probably the most substantial investment people make in their lifetime. When people see overgrowth and abandonment they start to worry about their property values. In the areas that are more affluent you get more complaints and louder complaints.*

In early 2010, as the number of foreclosures in affluent as well as working class communities mounted in Montclair, Kadus admitted that the prospect of a deluge of complaints by residents constituted her most significant anxiety about the foreclosure crisis: "The big worry is, what if we start getting these calls? That's the scary part." The implications of this kind of private sector investment for local officials was neatly summarized by Kadus: "We're always trying to stay on top of code enforcement, and (prior to 2010) the signs weren't there… It's a complicated process that the town doesn't have control over. Sometimes you just have to let the market do its thing."

"It's Going Everywhere."

Highview Terrace, in Montclair's affluent "estate section," wends its way along the side of a high ridge running along the northwestern border of Montclair. Running parallel to Highview Terrace one block further down the ridge is Overlook Road. Close to the small commercial district in the center of Upper Montclair, these two roads intersect with Quaker and Burnstock Roads. The four streets form a long, skinny rectangle running parallel to the ridgeline – the second block on which I focused my fieldwork.

All of the houses on this block are large and expensive by the standards of local housing stock, but there is still much variation, in which size is roughly correlated with position on the ridge. Along the uphill side of Highview Terrace lie sprawling mansions in a wide array of architectural styles, all facing the distant New York City skyline. Enormous, sloped front lawns extend down to the road, where high-speed automobile traffic is constant during the day. On the opposite side of the road, the homes and lots are

significantly smaller, though still classifiable as mansions. If one walks downhill to Overlook Road, the homes are smaller still, and are more architecturally uniform, consisting of grand Victorian and colonial homes on medium-sized lots. Though significantly smaller than those on the uphill side of Highview, these homes still command property values in the million-dollar range.

At the time of the study, three homes lay vacant on this long, rectangular block, two due to foreclosure. According to Kadus, 43% of the foreclosure actions in 2009 affected the wealthier side of town, above Bloomfield Avenue: "It's going everywhere. We have a lot of people here who work on Wall Street who have lost their jobs and pretty soon they find that they can't make their home payments." One of the foreclosed homes on the block is a sweeping stone mansion on the uphill side of Highview Terrace, described in real estate advertisements as one of the most elegant houses in Upper Montclair. Only the front of this home was visible from the road, and even this minimal view required looking sharply uphill across the vast front lawn from the sidewalk on the uphill side of Highview Terrace. A second vacant house was a well-maintained colonial banked by manicured shrubs, which had been for sale for several months at the start of the study. The third house was the only property of the three that showed outward signs of deterioration – a stately white colonial home on the downhill side of Overlook Road with badly peeling paint and a front lawn filled with shin-high weeds.

"I Really Only Know That Guy Because Of Halloween."

If the lack of public concern over the vacant houses on Cheswick Street was surprising, even more surprising was an apparent lack of any *awareness* at all of the three



Figure 3: Vacant House in Montclair's Estate Section

vacant houses on Highview Terrace among block residents. Never once did any resident mention one of these three homes in broader conversation about physical or social conditions in the neighborhood without being prompted to consider the state of housing. When they did mention the homes, their comments were vague and conjectural, lacking in factual accuracy when checked against property records, municipal data and accounts by local news media. Interviews and fieldwork eventually suggested this vagueness and lack of awareness to be a result of two factors: the organization of social interaction on the block and the work of a corps of private sector actors – realtors and bloggers – who collaborated to keep vacant properties from deteriorating.

Compared to Cheswick Street in Orange, Highview Terrace constitutes a very different interactional environment. Highview has only one poorly maintained sidewalk running along the uphill side. On the opposite side, the parking lane of the road is

bordered by a narrow alley of grass broken only by the typically circular driveways arcing to the front doors of the mansions on this side. In approximately 10 visits to this side of the block during warm weather I only observed people using the sidewalk on this road on two occasions. The other side of the block (Overlook Road) experiences more frequent use, as neat, well-maintained sidewalks run along each side of the residential street, which is busy with car traffic headed from one end of town to the other. During warm weather, residents could sporadically be seen walking dogs or exercising on these sidewalks, where tall oaks and maples provide plenty of shade.

The difference in the intensity of the social use of Cheswick and Highview corresponded with patterns in the broader social organization of the two blocks. A standard closed-ended question in my interviews was the number of neighbors with whom residents regularly spoke for more than five minutes. On Cheswick, the modal answer was 3 or 4. On Highview, it was 1 or 2. This difference, in turn, appeared to be related to the average duration of residence and the spatial layout of the two communities. The physical difficulty of interacting with residents of Highview made fieldwork challenging. On one visit, I spent more than an hour trying unsuccessfully to speak with residents on the street. Two of the homes I stopped at had intercom systems – the residents never opened the door, instead asking my business through the intercom and declining (one politely, the other less so) to speak with me, saying they had just gotten home or were on their way out. Three doors on this visit were answered by people I took to be domestic servants (my first question is usually "are you a resident of this house?" and all three answered in the negative. One added "I work here," another said, "I'm the housekeeper" and the third didn't say who she was, but referred to the house's owner as

"the lady" – "the lady isn't here right now".) When I finally succeeded in speaking with a resident during this visit, he turned out to be a recent émigré from New York City who, after nine months living on Highview, had developed a telling perspective on the relationship between physical space and social organization on the block:

> *Mike: "How do you like it so far?"*
>
> *Roger: "I'm ready to move back (laughs)."*
>
> *Mike: (laughing) "Really? What happened?"*
>
> *Roger: "I guess I'm just a city person."*
>
> *Mike: "What is it that made you decide you're a city person?"*
>
> *Roger: "Well, it's really this block. We're on a main road, the lots are bigger. There's not much interaction with neighbors. I think other places in Montclair there might be a lot of interaction – you hear about close knit places where everyone knows each other. But that's not what happens here. I know that guy (pointing next door), mainly because he's constantly doing work on his house and I see him outside a lot. Actually, now I'm thinking about it and I really only know that guy because of Halloween. I say hi to him, you know, but I don't know anybody else around here."*

Later in the interview, when I asked Roger how many neighbors he spoke with regularly for more than five minutes, he sheepishly held up one index finger, nodding with his head in the direction of the neighbor he had previously mentioned. It is tempting to attribute this lack of social contacts to his newcomer status. Perhaps more time on the block will result in a broader range of social ties.

But almost directly behind Roger on Overlook lives another relative newcomer whose contrasting experience illustrates the difference between the two streets. Derek, a man in his early 40s with graying, sandy colored hair, described moving to the neighborhood from California two years earlier. Upon arriving, the couple next door held a small dinner party to welcome his family to the neighborhood. Soon after that, the

section of Overlook on which he lives held its annual block party, and through these experiences, he met four or five neighbors with whom he and his wife now socialize. Highview, in contrast, does not have block parties. The size and seclusion of the homes and the lack of pedestrian street life may act as a selection mechanism, drawing residents for whom incidental interaction with neighbors is either unwanted or simply not a priority – whether or not this is the case, the physical layout of the street appears to encourage a degree of privacy and distance for those who already live on the block.

Even on Derek's side of the block, however, social relations seemed to reflect the "moral minimalism" described by Baumgartner (1988) in her ethnography of a middle-class suburb. Information about neighbors outside of the two or three that a resident may count among his or her friends tends to be limited to the arrivals and departures of new and old residents of the block. For this reason, when I asked residents whether they had seen any changes on the block as a result of the current economic downturn, almost all of them echoed the comments of an elderly woman who had lived on the block for thirty years, "more houses going up for sale – more people leaving, new people coming in." But when I asked whether residents were close with the old residents or had met the new residents, their answers were invariably no. As Derek put it, "The rumors fly around here when somebody is selling or moving in. But they're usually just rumors."

"A Hollywood Celebrity… That's Obviously Not Going To Be Typical."

In an environment where incidental social interaction with neighbors is uncommon, even minor signs of change in ownership may produce speculation (occasionally wildly inaccurate) concerning the identity and behavior of inhabitants.

When local housing is unassociated with a recognized social actor, the identity of that actor becomes the object of processes of social construction taking place through the rumor mill described by Derek. In this context, it becomes less surprising that local residents were unaware of the vacant homes on their block. There is simply no certain way for a resident to know whether a house down the street is vacant or occupied.

Ironically, this misattribution of occupancy works just as easily the other way around – several residents believed a property on the block to be vacant when it was not. Dennis, a 57-year old, heavy-set retiree with a full head of gray curly hair, answered the door in a blue sweater vest, khaki pants and loafers, and after a minute or so of guarded conversation, invited me into his house. In a well-appointed sitting room, he became more voluble while I sat in an overstuffed chair attempting to take notes while periodically deflecting attacks from a playful whippet. When I asked about the effects of foreclosure on the community, Dennis was dismissive:

> *I assume those things are going on but for the most part people who live in houses comparable to this one have lots of equity. My neighbors who live in a one million dollar home (presumably, like his) have value in their home and tend to have other financial resources. Now if you go lower down to say a half-million dollar house, then you might see people getting into trouble.*

After pausing thoughtfully, he went on say that there actually was a vacant estate around the corner that looked in bad condition. He described a massive brick mansion around the corner on Highview several doors down from a house that had been foreclosed upon the previous year:

> *There's a vacant house up here that nobody knows what's up with it. (Points behind house, roughly in the direction of Highview.) The landscaping has kind of a half-finished look... I heard it was owned by _____ who, you know, is in jail in Pennsylvania for tax evasion. But, I mean, a Hollywood celebrity not paying his taxes… that's obviously not*

> *going to be typical. So only in extenuating or extreme circumstances are you going to see any real deterioration up here.*

In fact, property records, campaign finance documents and an article in a magazine devoted to African-American business leaders indicated that the house he described was *not* vacant but occupied. The house was owned and inhabited as a primary residence by an attorney employed by a prominent law firm headquartered in New York City. The lawyer, like the celebrity, happened to be African American and shared the same last name as the celebrity. The celebrity, who was indeed incarcerated for tax evasion at the time of the study, had purchased an expensive house in a different county in New Jersey several years earlier. The confusion concerning the status of the house was clearly a result of lack of personal acquaintance. The lawyer had been conducting major renovations on his house and property, hence the unfinished look.

When I interviewed Dennis, two other residents of the block had already mentioned this house and its ostensible celebrity owner, which suggested to me that the house had become subject to the rumors described by Derek. The comments by Dennis serve to distance the neighborhood from the economic hardship affecting much of the nation and to attribute the most salient example of physically deteriorating housing to an exotic outsider – a celebrity criminal, in other words someone "that's obviously not going to be typical." I went on to ask him whether he had ever seen the actor in question in the neighborhood.

> *(Smiling) No. People speculate about the occasional place that looks a little bit off. I mean, it's behind us here and up on the hill. I might see a car start coming out of the driveway every now and then. But you're not going to see much when the front lawn is the size of a football field. And it's not like I'm camped out in my backyard with binoculars.*

Although property records indicated that foreclosures, short sales and vacant homes could be found on many of the more affluent blocks in Montclair, the residents of Highview seemed to retain a sense that they were insulated from the economic downturn. In fact, lending institutions, realtors and other private sector actors were doing considerable work to maintain this sense of insulation. Realtors and contractors active in Essex County described a range of services they routinely contributed on behalf of absentee sellers (whether homeowners or banks) to ensure that a house exhibited signs of inhabitance up until the time of sale. Jay, a realtor active in all three of the communities in the study summarized the types of services he provided in more affluent neighborhoods:

> *I would pick up the mail, you would do your typical timers in the lamps in the home to make sure the lights go on and off – you know, normal things you would do as if you went on vacation for like a week.*

In less wealthy neighborhoods, realtors routinely contract "third parties" (contractors or foreclosed property management specialists) to install lockboxes or board-up doors and windows against vandalism or theft. Very occasionally in the prior two years, a house in an affluent neighborhood in Montclair was vandalized or inhabited by squatters. The realtor's work in these cases proved particularly telling, indicating the lengths that they will go to maintain an impression of occupancy. Frank Leslie, the Montclair code enforcement officer described such a case. After a vacant house was boarded up by its absentee owner in the midst of an expensive part of town (an infrequent occurrence), a realtor attempting to sell a house *across the street* struck a deal with the vacant house's owner and hired a contractor to remove the boards and place them behind the house when

he was actively showing the house across the street. After potential buyers and the realtors had left, the contractor was to reinstall the plywood.

Insulated by the market, residents of Highview found that their expectations were largely met by the surrounding social and physical landscape, as the physical condition of houses and the few observable actions of people on the street stayed consistent in spite of an economic downturn resulting in higher-than-usual rates of turnover and vacancy on the block. The minimal nature of public behavior on the block and the constrained block-level social networks appeared to play no small role in this process. Still, even residents' responses to apparent physical and social continuity proved somewhat enlightening, revealing heightened sensitivity to relatively minor breaches of expectations, which were capable of producing wild rumors. In contrast to Cheswick, where the all-too-obvious social life on the block appeared to eclipse the physical condition of housing as an object of concern, on Highview a virtual absence of interpersonal information, connection and confrontation is met by intense scrutiny to relatively minor flaws in the built environment.

Findings: West Orange Township and Woodrun Ave.

"Where Urban Meets Suburban."

In a July 2010 interview with Susan Borg, city planner, and Geniese Gary-Adams, chief code enforcement officer in West Orange, it took only one question for the differences between the municipality and its more affluent and less affluent neighbors to become evident. After introducing myself and describing the project, I asked the two

officials how their work had been going in the last year. Gary-Adams cut my question off mid-sentence: "Foreclosures has been all we've been dealing with lately." In contrast to Orange, where the foreclosure crisis has merely exacerbated a preexisting issue, and Montclair, where, well into 2011, city planners were still wondering, "what if we start getting those calls?" in West Orange, according to Borg and Gary-Adams, the calls had been coming in fast and thick. When asked how the municipality typically became aware of vacant houses, Gary-Adams remarked:

> *Most of the time we find out because neighbors complain. Grass is the biggest thing, because it's so obvious. But there are other signs – the house hasn't been painted – the mail is piling up.*

Gary-Adams went on to offer a succinct assessment of the residents who complained most frequently: "It's homeowners concerned about property values." Both Borg and Gary-Adams suggested that although foreclosures and new vacancies were "everywhere" and "all over the place" in town – citing examples such as the owner of a $700,000 home who had lost his job – the most problematic parts of town were those where a large population of concerned residents coincided with a number of rapidly deteriorating vacant homes.

At several points in the course of the interview, "suburban" expectations were invoked by one official or the other in order to describe concern of residents about proximate vacant properties. Gary-Adams offered an illustrative example:

> *We're a suburban area and people keep their houses so beautiful. They take a lot of pride in their houses and they don't like to see deterioration. They don't like it when the lawn next door is overgrown.*

The problem, according to Borg, lay in West Orange's economic diversity, which ensured that vacant properties due to foreclosure were cropping up in

neighborhoods where a large population of house-proud homeowners was sure to react unfavorably. As Borg tellingly put it, "[w]e like to say that West Orange is where urban meets suburban."

Lying along this imaginary dividing line does not simply result in intense pressure from concerned residents; it poses problems for the political economy of the municipality. The two officials precisely echoed Montclair planner Karen Kadus's comments, remarking, "[p]eople assume the town can cut the grass but we're not really in that business. We don't have the resources for that." But unlike Montclair's more affluent reaches, which had been able to rely on continued private sector assistance, vacant homes in economically diverse West Orange neighborhoods were having trouble attracting investors. In the absence of market intervention, Borg and Gary-Adams had resorted to an unfamiliar strategy for suburban officials more accustomed to dealing with private developers, landlords and homeowners. "We try to work with the banks," Gary-Adams remarked, describing a time-consuming process of research and negotiation to identify the mortgage holding institution and convince them to "send someone out":

> *We spend so much time calling banks. There are all of these homes in the pre-foreclosure stage where nobody's living and we have to track down the bank and get them to do something.*

Gary-Adams returned to the topic later in the interview:

> *A lot of people just left - they just ditched the house. There are so many banks, we can't keep up. Identifying the bank is our biggest problem… Sometimes we can't identify the bank and we have to go out and cut the grass and fix the place up ourselves. But it's rare for us to go out and cut the grass. We're just pounding the pavement with the banks.*

Like Montclair, where the private sector has filled in, keeping resident complaints to a minimum, West Orange is dependent upon private sector investment to help maintain the condition of the built environment. Unlike Montclair, West Orange has found this investment lacking. As a result, officials are lodged in an unenviable position in the political economy of the suburban built environment, pleading with the absentee owners of residential space to make investments that will they hope will minimize physical deterioration and public outrage.

"A Nice Neighborhood, But Mixed."

The neighborhood known in Montclair as the "South End" begins in West Orange, where a triangle of working and middle-class homes accommodating a racially mixed population crosses the border into Montclair, extending to Bloomfield Avenue in the north and Grove Street in the west, the informal divides that demarcate entry into Montclair's more affluent neighborhoods. As evidenced by the census tract statistics presented in Table 2, large portions of the neighborhood are equally mixed between blacks and whites, and, while pockets of poverty exist in the community, these are interspersed with stable blocks inhabited by working- and middle-class residents.

This diversity is central to the neighborhood's identity. Active measures such as an inclusionary zoning ordinance requiring new residential construction to incorporate affordable housing have been taken in order to maintain the neighborhood's heterogeneity, and further measures were currently under consideration at the time of the study. Residents expressed simultaneous enthusiasm for the neighborhood's diversity and an acknowledgement that it causes occasional institutional and interpersonal difficulties.

A couple originally from Germany who had moved into the community through a short sale the week before accurately the complexity of this attitude: "It's a nice neighborhood, but *mixed*. We like the diversity… Like the idea of it." Similarly, another relatively recent arrival – a woman who had moved from Brooklyn several years earlier, described the community as "a unique suburb… the diversity in economic levels and the racial diversity. It's part of the reason why we moved here and why we like it. But it comes with problems – a lot of resources go toward equalizing things."

Starting in the heart of this mixed neighborhood, at the border between West Orange and Montclair, Woodrun Avenue runs two blocks to the north, dead-ending at Carver Terrace. Running roughly parallel to Woodrun Avenue one block to the west is Quincy Boulevard, a major thoroughfare that connects the three towns of Orange, West Orange and Montclair. Woodrun Avenue is lined with medium-sized homes in relation to the houses on the other two blocks in the study, ranging from modest one-family houses built of brick or stucco and set close to the street to larger, multi-family Victorian homes with wraparound porches. As a general rule, the homes on the block appeared neat and attractively, if modestly, landscaped.

At the time of the study there were five vacant houses on the block. One of these houses had recently been vacated by its owner and was for sale. Three of the houses had been abandoned due to foreclosure within the previous two years, and were owned by banks at the time of the study. Finally, the fifth house, a sizeable private residence that had formerly housed the Milton school for the deaf, had been vacant for nearly six years. In general, three of these houses appeared in good condition, presenting no signs of vacancy to a casual observer. The Milton house had massive plywood sheets covering the



Figure 4: Vacant House in Montclair's South End

sizable first floor windows and doors, but its position in relation to the street mitigated the aesthetic effect, as it sits back from the street on top of a small hill, and is partially obscured by a glade of towering oak trees on the grounds in front of the house. A separate house (which I will refer to as "the white house"), had similarly boarded-up windows, badly peeling paint, and knee-high grass. Finally, a sixth house on the block had an ambiguous occupancy status – it had been vacant due to foreclosure until shortly before the study began, but was now being sporadically operated as a rooming house. During the course of the study the house was vacant for 14 weeks, while holding renters for the remainder of the period. This house (which I will refer to as "the gray house") showed similar, albeit not quite as severe, signs of deterioration, including discolored exterior

paint and a front yard that often goes untended, remaining strewn with litter and knee-high dandelions for weeks on end.

"Tragedies of the Market Slump."

In stark contrast to my findings on Cheswick Street and Highview Terrace, interviews with Woodrun residents quickly revealed widespread concern over the vacant houses on the block. The first resident on the block with whom I spoke, a white woman in her early 40s, who was minding a pair of young daughters playing in her front yard, nodded toward the adjacent house (the gray house) in humorous mock subtlety when asked about any negative influences on quality of life in the neighborhood: "You mean like this place?" The second resident interviewed, several houses down from the first and across the street, had a similar reaction. Glen, a tall man in his mid 40s with an intense gaze and a shock of curly graying hair, had recently moved to the block, and was busy renovating one of the largest homes on the block, directly next door to the Milton home.

> *Mike: "Why did you decide to move over here?"*
>
> *Glen: "I knew the neighborhood, I knew the neighbors, and I fell in love with the potential of this house (nodding toward the house he is renovating)."*
>
> *Mike: "So you like this neighborhood."*
>
> *Glen: "I love it."*
>
> *Mike: "Are there any downsides?"*
>
> *Glen: "Uhh… (sarcastically) how about living next to a vacant house that we don't know what is going to happen to it?"*

These responses showed themselves to be fairly representative in the following months of fieldwork on the block, as resident after resident (16 of the 20 interviewed) independently

named at least one of the three most dilapidated vacant houses on the block in describing the negative aspects of living in the community.

A further contrast with interviews on Cheswick and Highview emerged in the way residents accounted for these concerns. In every case in which a vacant house was mentioned, some combination of negative physical and economic consequences were cited. Both the white house and the gray house came up repeatedly as residents expressed worry about their potential effects on property values and their current effect on community aesthetics. Beth, a white woman in her late 30s who had recently purchased and moved into the house to the left of the gray house, made illustrative comments:

> *Mike: "Does the owner come by to take care of the property?"*
>
> *Beth: "No he doesn't. It's basically like a slumlordish guy – sort of like a super but he's not doing anything. He comes by from time to time. Takes out the trash and stuff. But you can see the grass for yourself. And the back is all overgrown. We have a fence in back thank god so we don't have to look at it. I don't even want to know what's back there."*
>
> *Mike: "So is the main issue in your mind how the house looks?"*
>
> *Beth: "Yes, how it looks. We just bought this nice home – it'll be a nice, big house once it's fixed up. Of course we want somebody to take care of the place next door."*

Jan, a white woman in her sixties with close-cropped white hair who owns the house on the other side of the gray house had similar views on the house:

> *Jan: "This (pointing toward the gray house) is the most miserable mess on the block… It had a huge wraparound porch and he (the owner) built this piece of crap on the back, which is not even legal. The guy who bought it has never lived there."*

The white house, unlike the gray house, had been vacant for several years at the time of the study, and had similarly aroused the ire of neighbors. However, even more pressing than residents' concerns about the white and gray house were their concerns about the

Milton house, which more than half of the residents (11 of 20) mentioned as a negative characteristic of the block.

Property records, city documents and interviews with local officials showed all three houses to be victims of repeated market failure and municipal powerlessness. The white house had been foreclosed upon twice in the previous six years and, at the time of the study, had unsuccessfully gone to auction seven consecutive times before becoming the property of the mortgage-holding bank. The gray house, after foreclosure and an unsuccessful attempt at sale was now being operated as an off-and-on rooming house. The Milton house had been vacant for more than five years, as its owners repeatedly tried to sell the property without success. The houses also represented failed attempts at government intervention. According to a city official, the gray house had been cited repeatedly for code violations that the absentee owner appeared content to pay while drawing sporadic income by renting rooms in the building. Meanwhile, the white house had been proven extremely problematic for municipal officials, as its 2007 abandonment prompted a prolonged search for the owner that crossed municipal boundaries. Kadus related the series of events involved:

> *We were chasing him and chasing him. One thing we tried – we listed his property as an area in need of development. This usually scares people – it's the first step in the city taking the property away. Well, it didn't scare him. We finally found him in Orange. We found him and he said 'I have no money left, so I just walked away.' The house is still vacant. We went through hell to find that guy.*

Caught between a lack of private market interest and the constraints on state intervention, the residents of Woodrun were forced to reconcile high expectations for the physical conditions of local housing with the stubborn deterioration of houses that Alice, an opinionated resident in her late sixties and a former city councilwoman, aptly described

as "tragedies of the market slump." Woodrun Avenue, unlike Cheswick Street or Highview Terrace, exemplified West Orange officials' description of blocks where "urban meets suburban": a rapid economic decline and a rise in vacant housing was clearly contrasting with the physical expectations of the community.

"I Love Seeing The Empty Lot Across The Street."

That the three houses described above aroused concern initially struck me as straightforward and unsurprising. The three houses all presented obvious signs of deterioration, and, perhaps for lack of evident social disorder on the block, this deterioration appeared to be sufficient to provoke residents' concern. However, as my fieldwork continued, I became increasingly aware of the complexity of residents' attitudes toward the houses and the degree of consensus that characterized these attitudes.

The case of the Milton house offers a good example. Residents' concern was centered less on its present condition than on its uncertain future. This was surprising, given the home's dilapidated physical condition and a recent history of vandalism, trespass and disorderly behavior. According to police reports, graffiti had been spray-painted on the interior of the house, drug paraphernalia had been found inside, and in one case, a mattress on the second floor had been ignited, drawing a visit from the local fire department. According to residents' accounts, the back of the house served as a favorite late-night drinking spot for local teenagers.

However, in part because the house occupied an expansive lot fronted by large trees, residents *without exception* voiced a preference for the vacant house in its present dilapidated condition over a plan to redevelop the lot and accommodate several smaller,

single-family homes. This attitude is sophisticated, relying upon knowledge of the lot's redevelopment plans and a decision that green space, even when arrayed in front of an vacant mansion covered with plywood, was preferable to new townhouses or single-family homes. The complexity of this view is evident from the following comments, which are also illustrative of the degree of consensus I uncovered regarding these opinions:

> *Sandy: "They're trying to sell it, but I'm praying they don't – I love seeing the empty lot across the street. There's been talk about bringing townhouses. I think it would bring property down. Nobody wants to look at townhouses."*
>
> *Heidi: "There is this plan people have mentioned which I'm concerned about… Because the value of homes will go down. It will place strain on a lot of things - parking, water, sewage. It will take away the green space."*
>
> *Alice:* "*The Milton house (directly across the street from Alice's home) is kind of an issue… It's just a mess. Right now it's problematic. I would hope that whoever buys it would not put a bunch of single families there. I love having nobody in front of me. I love having my trees in front."*

All three residents independently mentioned the details of the development plan and a desire to see the property remain as it was, including the plywood if necessary, because of the value of the green space, or "trees in front." In fact, the development plan was mentioned by *every* resident who brought up the Milton house, which occurred more than 10 times in my interviews. This finding led me to conclude that these attitudes could only have been shaped by conversations between residents, and expressed more than a coincidental overlap in individually held attitudes. In theoretical terms, the *script* that residents were describing in the context of the Milton house – their desired pattern of use – was complicated, in some respects, counterintuitive, and, I increasingly believed, a product of explicit discussion and agreement within the community.

"We've Fought a Lot of Battles Down Here."

In part, residents' reactions to the vacant houses might have been explained by the social structure of the resident population. It was not uncommon for my informants to have lived in the neighborhood or on the block for thirty years or more. Clearly related to this stability and longevity was the size of local social networks between neighbors, which were typically far larger than on the other two blocks. (See Table 3.) Residents' explanation for the tightly knit society on the block led to a complimentary factor that helped to explain resident attitudes toward the vacant houses. If the spatial organization of Cheswick and Highview appeared to inhibit social interaction (and, in the case of Cheswick, mobilization), Woodrun Avenue possessed a pre-existing social infrastructure in the form of an active civic association that helped structure regular interaction among residents. In my fifth interview on Woodrun, a resident mentioned the local civic association, remarking that it encouraged sociability and trust in a physical context where incidental interaction with neighbors was uncommon:

> *You don't necessarily see your neighbors regularly on the street, but we've got meetings once a month at somebody's house, so it's a chance for people to get together. And the association has other benefits. The kids on the street know each other and they can just be left to play together because their parents know each other.*

The Woodrun Avenue Civic Association, it turned out, had taken an active concern in redevelopment plans surrounding the Milton house. As was the case with the informal guardians of Cheswick, the parameters of social networks on the block began to emerge through successive interviews, several of which were arranged by Heidi, the local Lutheran minister's wife, who introduced me to some of the oldest and most active members of the civic association. My investigation of this organization suggested that the

block had a long history of conflict and mobilization that derived directly from Woodrun's status as a place of economic heterogeneity and vulnerability in an otherwise affluent town. Unlike Highview, Woodrun and its environs had been repeatedly proposed as a site for development plans requiring relatively inexpensive and available real estate. For the civic association, the problems posed by vacant houses represented familiar foes, rooted in the parallel inadequacy of private and public sectors to mitigate negative physical consequences for the block.

An 86 year-old black resident named Bill Ferguson was a member of one of the first black households on the block. Answering the door of his small, stucco home in a cooking apron, the soft-spoken Ferguson invited me onto a patio where he grilled chicken while recollecting the mobilizing events behind the association's creation in the period immediately following World War II. During this time, the block was in a period of demographic transition, as black residents were integrating the neighborhood, which had previously housed a mix of blue-collar and middle-class whites. After the state presented a plan to reroute a state road (currently on Quincy Boulevard) down Woodrun Avenue instead, homeowners on the block organized to fight the proposal. The civic association was a direct product of this political struggle, as neighbors who organized, meeting frequently in order to fight the road plan, continued monthly meetings after their victory. Although the organization originally represented only residents of Woodrun Avenue, for several decades it had been open to residents of adjacent blocks, forming as focal point for sociability and political mobilization in this area of the South End. According to Ferguson, after the organization's founding, a series of similar fights followed during the next half-decade.

> *That's right. They were going to bring the eastbound side [of Quincy Boulevard] all the way down here, right through people's backyards. Which was ridiculous, because if they left it up there and just expanded the road they only had to move two houses. Then they were going to put a garbage truck turnaround here, right in front of my family's house. So we fought that too. Ever since then there have been many things we've had to fight. They wanted to put a pool hall in where the hardware store is, and we fought that. They wanted to take the location of the Jehovah's Witness place up there and turn that into a lot for rental cars. Another time they wanted to turn it into an armory. So we've fought a lot of battles down here. And we've been pretty successful with most of them.*

Notable in Ferguson's summary is the ambiguous pronoun, "they," which alternately refers to developers, private business owners and municipal planners. For his rhetorical purposes (and more importantly, the objectives of the civic association), the discursive grouping of these actors signifies their shared status as outsiders to the block who would change conditions on the block.

Although the work of the civic association shares more than a passing resemblance to a suburban "NIMBYism" in which analysts have often seen a euphemistic cover for social exclusion, the fights waged by the Woodrun Avenue Civic Association appear to have had the paradoxical result of creating solidarity among a racially and economically mixed population. Glen, a longtime resident of the neighborhood and a sort of amateur historian of the civic association remarked, "[t]he block banded together to fight the plan and won. I think it integrated the community… the neighborhood was already being integrated in '45, but the fight against the road drew everybody together and created solidarity." Along with this solidarity came an institutional platform organizing informal ties between community members. Granovetter (1973) in a critique of Gans's (1965) description of the inability of a low-income community's ability to fight a municipal redevelopment plan, suggests that a lack of bridging, "weak ties" between

members of the community may have prevented organized resistance. Separate exchanges with Jan and Glen suggested that the civic organization was useful in part because it helped to preserve ties of precisely this sort. According to Jan, the civic association encouraged sociability and trust in a physical context where incidental interaction with neighbors was uncommon:

> *You don't necessarily see your neighbors regularly on the street, but we've got meetings once a month at somebody's house, so it's a chance for people to get together. And the association has other benefits. The kids on the street know each other and they can just be left to play together because their parents know each other.*

By encouraging regular meetings between neighbors and focusing discussion on issues of shared concern, the civic association organized and reinforced informal networks between neighbors. According to several informants, these networks were particularly useful in cases where neighbors were moving in or moving out, cases where network ties stand to both minimize risk and connect actors to resources outside of their immediate social context (in this case, their neighborhood) (DiMaggio and Louch 1998; Granovetter 1973):

> *Glen: I'm not aware of people who bought in 2006 at the height of the market for twice the gross national product of Chad. I haven't seen that around here. We don't have too many distressed sales here as a result of the housing bubble – instead, we have people selling because the husband died and the wife can't make payments. That's another case that I know of. But what I can tell you is that in this neighborhood, if the widow is facing foreclosure there's a grapevine looking for a buyer and looking for new housing for her. There's a support network."*
>
> *Me: "Do you know is that something unique to this neighborhood or are there other examples in Montclair?"*
>
> *Glen: "I thought it was unique but it's not entirely unique it turns out. It's wherever you have longevity and a common cause. The debates that occurred here after World War II, especially fighting the road, were a*

common cause. And a civic association helps. They're all about figuring out what the common cause is."

The economic integration of the block was a vestige of the postwar period, and was brokered by the civic association. Many of the larger homes on the block had been converted for accessory apartments during the housing shortage of the 1930s and 40s. Although the larger neighborhood was zoned for single-family homes, the civic association won an exception for Woodrun Avenue allowing the accessory apartments to remain, with the provision that they be continuously occupied or become illegal. "We have renters on the third floor, in the servants' quarters," Jan, a retired municipal clerk, told me with pride. "That's how we've been able to stay here. Otherwise there's no way we could afford it." Repeated mobilizations against public and private threats to block conditions had helped to produce an economically integrated community with a high level of both solidarity and organization.

Indeed, if prior observers of suburban homeowners' associations have seen these civic organizations as protecting the economic interests and aesthetic tastes of homeowners in order to further insulate exclusive residential enclaves, in this case, the Woodrun Civic Association's powerful role on the block *only* makes sense in a context of an economically mixed suburban neighborhood in an otherwise affluent municipality. The facilities and infrastructure that repeatedly threatened the block's physical and aesthetic landscape (major roadways, garbage truck turnarounds, and, most recently, institutional housing) were those that urban scholars have often seen placed in less affluent neighborhoods, given the diminished political and economic power typically wielded by these communities. In a proudly diverse neighborhood at the lower end of the economic spectrum in the municipality, the civic association had repeatedly fought

against private and public sector interests, both to preserve its cherished heterogeneity and to preserve the physical and aesthetic status quo.

In recent months, the association had staked out a position in the negotiations surrounding the Milton house's sale and redevelopment, operating in the space between the community, private corporations and the municipality in order to pursue perceived collective interests. Logan and Molotch (1987: 134-139) suggest that, unlike affluent communities, which are able to invoke the exchange value embedded in their residences when opposing substantial physical alterations in the name of public infrastructure or private redevelopment, low-income communities are left to assert the importance of the often subjective or sentimental use values that local spaces have for them. Although Woodrun Avenue is far from an urban ghetto buffeted by economic change, as a relatively low-income neighborhood in an affluent town, it is forced to assert the relevance of its constituents' desires for broader public and private priorities. In the negotiations surrounding the vacant Milton house and other "battles," the discursive tactic of the civic association was to force private or public actors to recognize the aesthetic and sentimental concerns held by residents of the block toward local spaces, which required either *elevating* the civic association to the status of a legitimate player in negotiations between developers and the township *or* bringing these actors *down* to the organization's level, reframing developers as members of the community who should be held to informal "neighborly" standards.

For example, in two separate meetings concerning development plans affecting the block, a particularly vocal association member first referred to the private institution funding the development plan as a "bad neighbor" who failed to observe local norms for

the upkeep of properties, and later complained that a developer had not independently come before the civic association to present its plans. “It’s almost, like, disrespectful” he was quoted by a local newspaper as saying. “You’re going to come in my neighborhood and do what?” By wedging itself into the space between “the neighborhood” and powerful actors in local political economy, the organization sought to reduce uncertainty for residents, not by “walling it out,” but by wading into the fray of public and private sector decision-making concerning contested uses of suburban space.

Discussion and Conclusion: Institutional Script Dissonance

In the three municipalities in this study, political and economic conditions lead the consequences of vacant housing to fall upon different actors. In Orange, as neighborhoods have been deserted by the private housing market, the state monitors and attempts to mitigate the effects of vacant homes with help from an active non-profit organization. In Upper Montclair, the market can largely be left “to do its thing.” While in West Orange, accountability for vacant homes is more ambiguous. In the months following my last round of interviews on Cheswick, Highview and Woodrun, I was able to see these forces directly at work on the physical landscape of the three blocks. On Cheswick Street, in August 2010, the four-family building housing the abandoned bar was demolished by the town, which issued a press release and photographs of the demolition. On Highview, as befitting the rapid turnover and market involvement in this affluent community, two of the houses that were vacant at the time of my interviews had been sold and were now occupied, while an additional house had become vacant. Only on

Woodrun had no major interventions taken place. The bank that owned the white house had apparently given up on auctioning it off, and was now periodically sending a contractor out to regularly mow the lawn and secure the property. Meanwhile, negotiations surrounding the Milton house were dragging on, and the gray house remained in poor condition.

If assumptions concerning the appearance and use of the built environment are institutionalized through third-party recognition and enforcement, in the three communities, the *third parties* are different, and these differences provide crucial context for the block-level responses to vacant housing. On Cheswick Street, residents' immediate concern was social disorder on the block – a concern that placed residents into dialogue with local government. On Highview Terrace, residents' awareness of local vacancies was mediated (indeed, practically eliminated) by private sector involvement. While on Woodrun Avenue, both residents' concerns and the mode of their collective action in response to these concerns are indicative of the block's position at the intersection, or perhaps more accurately, the fault-line, between predicable, sustained private sector investment and top-down municipal intervention, both of which have repeatedly threatened the block with undesirable physical change.

If I anticipated that an increase in vacant homes would produce ruptures of accustomed patterns of social behavior or organizational routine, this turned out not to be precisely the case. On Cheswick, prior patterns of social disorder on the block appeared to outweigh vacant housing as a source of public concern. On Highview, market demand remained high, allowing private sector actors to preempt the threats posed by prolonged

vacancy and physical decay. It was only on Woodrun Avenue that vacant houses appeared as a cause for serious concern among residents.

But rather than disrupting the local routines and relationships on the block, the vacancies triggered a concerted response from neighbors who already had at their disposal a mode of civic action specifically organized around just such a contingency. In this respect, the "dissonance" of institutional scripts tying the built environment to socially acceptable patterns of use lies at the heart of the Woodrun Avenue Civic Association's work. As an economically mixed suburban neighborhood in a large affluent municipality, the block has faced repeated disjuncture between residents' desired scripts for the block and potential industrial, infrastructural or commercial incursions on the block's physical space threatened by outside institutional actors.

A common denominator of the threats mentioned by Woodrun residents was their apparent capacity to affect the property values, aesthetic values and sentimental attachments of *multiple* residents. The proposal to reroute a major roadway that formed the catalyzing event for the association's creation is an excellent example. Given the physical scope of the plan, which stood through eminent domain to affect nearly every property on Woodrun's two blocks, it is less surprising that the plan prompted an economically and racially heterogeneous community to recognize a degree of shared risk, and thus to mobilize around shared opposition to the city's plan. A fruitful comparison can be made to the apparent threat to Cheswick residents' quality of life – a group of roaming, misbehaving teenagers whose offenses were understood in spatially localized terms and appeared only to activate only local networks of organized social control. The vacant houses on Woodrun Avenue might easily have been interpreted in similar terms,

affecting only the property values and aesthetic sensibilities of adjacent or proximate neighbors. But the existence of an active organizational platform for recognizing shared interests and coordinating informal social ties between neighbors helped to transform the vacant homes into an object of collective concern. And due to the neighborhood's history with repeated proposals that stood to affect the preferences and property values of many block residents, this organization was able to draw on solidarity forged during a long past of similar battles.

In empirical terms, the apparent importance of the block's history in explaining its response to vacant housing suggests parallels with Small's (2002) qualitative study of a low-income community with abnormally high social capital. In contrast to structural arguments suggesting the primacy of community's economic resources, Small traces present social capital to a past mobilization around physical renovation, which created a dense network of residents with a shared affective attachment to the built environment. In theoretical terms, both my findings and Small's resonate with Collins's (2004; 1981) micro-macrosociological theory concerning the creation of "coalitions" through communication and action centered on shared symbols and objectives. Understandings of property, "based on a sense of what kinds of persons do and not belong where," are in fact produced at moments in which a new coalition emerges with a claim to a space or a physical object. The answer to the questions, "[W]hat makes someone a member of a coalition? What determines the extensiveness of the coalition or the intensity of the bonds within it?" is, in Collins's perspective, emotion generated at times of intense collective interaction.

The fight against the road appeared to have provided this sort of interaction. As a sort of sociological byproduct of mobilization, the community's social identity was defined, leading to repeated efforts to maintain the economic diversity that prevailed at that moment in time. That the civic association had mobilized to keep, rather than to exclude, multifamily housing on the block only illustrates the specificity and the clarity of the community's emergent self-image, which led to the association's mobilization around an institutional script (in this case, a zoning ordinance) defining a number of local residential spaces as apartments rather than single-family homes. Woodrun Avenue residents organized to oppose a large-scale physical encroachment on residential space, and, in the process, discovered that they "like[d] the diversity. Like[d] the *idea* of the diversity," and were willing to fight for it.

Finally, what do these three communities have to tell us about institutional reactions to the consequences of socioeconomic transformation in the suburbs? When localized economic decline produces observable changes in residential spaces, violating the institutional scripts – zoning ordinances, housing codes, or simply informal standards – that formalize inchoate expectations concerning how residential spaces should look and be used, the cases of Cheswick and Highview suggest that conflict may be averted if prevailing block-level social conditions and institutional intervention combine to produce a degree of perceived continuity among residents. The content and the mode of interactions between residents are clearly shaped by these conditions. Political economy is particularly important, as rules concerning the appearance and use of suburban housing are established and enforced by an array of private and public interests - "third parties" in the parlance of property theorists. When markets fail and public sector intervention

proves inadequate, the case of Woodrun suggests that changes in the physical landscape may generate widespread concern, producing concerted attempts to bring this landscape back into line with residents' hopes and expectations. This suggests that whatever long-term effects an increase in vacant housing stands to have in affluent enclaves or on struggling suburban blocks where the specter of blight looms large, the most pronounced block-level consequences may be seen in mixed communities where economic vulnerability coexists with a large population of homeowners, or where, as West Orange officials put it, "urban meets suburban." Woodrun Avenue however, surely represents a "unique suburb" not only in its economic heterogeneity, but in the presence of an extremely active sixty-five year old civic association through which script realignment may be sought. In less well-equipped communities, where the organizational infrastructure for civic engagement is not as well-developed and social capital not as high, it remains to be seen how old standards for the relationship between people and place may be preserved or new standards established.

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Notes:

[1] Although this research ties into a much broader literature linking outcomes such as crime prevention to community-level variables such as social disorganization and socioeconomic status, for the purposes of this project, interventions in the physical and social order prevailing on local blocks – on proximate properties, sidewalks and street corners - are of particular interest.

[2] Unfortunately, empirical studies often conflate vacant housing with vacant lots and both of these with commercial, institutional and other non-residential property.

[3] The authors do not formally model this interaction – rather, they find separate effects for poverty and foreclosure, while providing a complex theoretical model suggesting that income has a higher order effect on the association between foreclosure and crime.

[4] Names of streets and block residents are fictitious, and some geographic details are left intentionally vague to protect the anonymity of informants.

[5] Residents' accounts of the shootings were verified against newspaper stories covering the incidents. The shooting victim's mother was also, coincidentally, interviewed, and provided some corroboration of basic details. Marijuana consumption and/or sale were visually observed on at least four occasions.

Conclusion:

Script Realignment

Where the Sidewalks Begin
Power and Place in Changing Suburbs

This dissertation has argued that the built environment embodies a set of assumptions concerning the social behavior of users. Most directly and obviously, the physical design of objects relies upon assumptions concerning user behavior. Less obviously, systems of cognition, symbolism and representation are built up around these assumptions, predisposing actors to expect physical spaces to be used in a certain way and leading to confusion when expectations are violated. Finally, political, economic and social institutions incorporate and enforce assumptions concerning how space is to be used. During times of relative social stability, I suggest, the components of the physical landscape that surrounds actors are less likely to arise as topics of concern, for social analysts or the people they study. Analysis, then, can fruitfully focus on moments of *dissonance* or disjunction, when the needs of a population come into conflict with the scripts embedded in the physical spaces they inhabit. At these moments, objects may cease to act as passive social media, intruding more saliently upon human affairs. As a result of this dissonance, empirical traces – for example, injuries, disagreements, debates, or regulations – may be produced, permitting a researcher to directly observe the role of material objects in processes of social change.

In suburban communities experiencing socioeconomic decline, a built environment designed and built for the middle-class families of an earlier American epoch is increasingly inhabited by a new class of inhabitants: low-wage workers, aging pensioners and recently arrived immigrants who, due in part to their economic vulnerability, are inhabiting this environment in new ways. In the first chapter, I investigated physical conflict between low-income suburban residents and their environment, finding that pedestrian risk and residential fire risk are clustered in locations where low-density residential patterns coincide with relatively high poverty rates. In the second chapter, I examined the cognitive and political reactions of suburban communities on Long Island to changing uses of public and private space, showing that morally resonant "symbolic scripts" for suburban places are tied to assessments of community stability and health. The violation of these scripts can thus offer the basis for a political rhetoric that links relatively small breaches of spatial and social order with the fate of "suburbia as we know it." Finally, by comparing street-level and municipal reactions to vacant housing, I highlighted the political, economic and social linkages that tie assumptions regarding physical space to the broader institutional organization of suburban communities. The analysis suggested that disruption at moments of broad socioeconomic change is likely to be most pronounced in neighborhoods where suburban norms coincide with economic vulnerability. By focusing on suburban socioeconomic change as a research site and a case study for these modest empirical projects, I have attempted to work toward a theory articulating the role of material objects in broad processes of social change and stasis. The programs, or "scripts" of expected behavior that become embedded in the built environment through design, perception, discourse

and institutional accretion are vital, I suggest, to understanding how and why people act the way they do.

But where, exactly, is *power* in all of this? How does this perspective account for the ability of objects to coerce, marginalize or punish – to advance the interests of one party over those of another? Where is the capacity for physical boundaries to exclude, or for housing to discriminate? By theorizing about "scripts" and "dissonance" and "patterns of use" do I absolve objects (and their designers) of any intentional role they might play in shaping social inequalities? By assuming demographic and economic changes to be the creative forces behind the suburban landscape, does this perspective deny the role of intentionally exclusive zoning regulations? Does it ignore the discriminatory federal guidelines that drove the construction of single-family homes? Or, for that matter, the reproduction of disempowering gender roles through suburban architecture? Even the humble cul-de-sac, which clearly offers a place for children to play, simultaneously constitutes a barrier against through-traffic, rendering residential spaces not just physically safe but socially *exclusive*. Should it matter which of these functions was more central to the object's design?

In the introduction to this dissertation, I offered an illustrative example of the ways in which physical, symbolic and institutional scripts may enact moral boundaries, thus reinforcing the infrastructure of a normative public order. By sleeping on park benches, I suggested, the homeless violate morally loaded scripts pertaining to the use of public space. In response, benches may be redesigned to prohibit sleeping, passersby may enact rituals of avoidance, and new laws may be enacted or existing laws enforced. These reactions – taking place at physical, symbolic and institutional levels – are

complementary and interchangeable. A redesigned bench may obviate the need for enforcement, similar in this respect to Latour's (1992) speed bump, or "sleeping policeman" – an object that serves as a stand-in for human actors, performing crucial work on behalf of some vision of social order.

In this example, doesn't the park bench describe a *political* system – a set of interlocking mechanisms for preserving and reproducing social inequality? Homeless men and women constitute a marginalized class of actors who are compelled by necessity to use objects in unconventional ways (Duneier and Carter 1999: 173-187). To point out the obvious, their very status (*home*-lessness) is defined with reference to their problematic relationship to physical space. Physical, symbolic and institutional scripts align against such groups. The physical survival of homeless men and women *require* actions that violate scripts, thus leading political actors to reinforce or redefine the acceptable uses of objects and, in so doing, to exacerbate or lessen marginalization. If scripts are rigorously enforced, then the park bench offers both a physical opportunity to the homeless and a possible *social trap*. And if the park bench is political, how can the divided highway, the strip mall, or the detached single-family home *not* be?

In recent decades, scholars have staged a heated debate concerning the embeddedness of power relations in the built environment. Usefully, this debate has centered upon its own "park bench," or metaphorical object-example. Landon Winner (1980) suggested the Long Island Expressway overpass as an example of a "political" artifact: an object whose design incorporates and executes a social agenda. According to Winner, who cites Caro's (1974) biography of planner Robert Moses, Moses intentionally built low expressway overpasses on Long Island's parkway system in order

to exclude buses – and the undesirables who might use them – from the beaches and parks of Long Island. The overpass, "obdurate" (Akrich 1992) in its embodiment of a social agenda, resonates with a model of suburban design in which mechanisms of exclusion are concealed within apparently functional spaces. For analysts and actors alike, the distinction between accommodating the needs and desires of middle-class white residents and excluding low-income and minority residents has occasionally appeared blurry. As developer William Levitt remarked in defense of the racial covenants employed in his suburban housing developments, "We can solve a housing problem, or we can try to solve a racial problem, but we cannot combine the two" (Sugrue 2010: 176). Levitt's comment suggests that the social exclusivity of a suburban landscape designed for middle-class habitation and consumption may be inevitable – the result of an unavoidable tradeoff.

Some analysts have gone even further, seeing an insidious social logic concealed within suburban space. Davis (1990) for example, suggests an analogy to the disembodied, unverifiable power of Foucault's (1995) "carceral city", and describes a "Panopticon Shopping Mall" bristling with security guards and closed circuit television cameras. But such self-evident tools of power seem out-of-keeping with Foucault's statements regarding the "perfection of power" (1995: 201), which was only achieved through the disaggregation of power into institutions, roles and spaces that *seem* to wield no power at all. Nor does Foucault help us to make sense of Levittown's deed restrictions, written contracts that were quite explicit in their coercive capacity. Even Levitt's comments, in disavowing responsibility for the racial consequences of his communities, reveal these consequences of suburban design to be too *close to the surface*

– too overt, conscious and intentional – to be part of some panoptic construct. Foucault's power is without intentionality, invisibly permeating places and institutions. But if suburban spaces are seen to be carrying and executing a social agenda, the intentions of designers seem very relevant indeed.

In Winner's example, these intentions have proven problematic. Scholars have pointed out that *all* parkways excluded commercial traffic at the time, raising the possibility that the story is false (Joerges 1999). Underlying the critique of Winner's historiography is a more serious theoretical argument that suggests that the attribution of political meaning to the design of *any* object requires neglecting the contextual social processes through which political meaning is constructed, processes that shape both the creation of objects and their use (Woolgar and Cooper 1999). Whatever the intentions behind their design, existing objects may have a social agenda in the *here* and *now*, presenting tangible opportunities to some actors while complicating or endangering the lives of others.

If both the intentions of designers and the unforeseen consequences of objects would seem too important to ignore, then where is power to be found? Rather than confining power to the architect's blueprint *or* assuming it to ineffably permeate the built environment, I suggest that we look at the moments where objects become problematic, eliciting a response. In the *fixes* considered by powerful actors for socially problematic objects, the needs of users and the intentions of designers come into close articulation. A problem is defined and a solution proposed. During this two-step process, the capacity of objects to reproduce or overturn existing power imbalances between groups seems likely to come into focus. In their responses to "script dissonance," policy makers, designers

and other shapers-of-*things* are forced to confront their role as shapers-of-*people*. At these moments, power seems very close to the surface indeed.

In the debates and decisions through which stakeholders formulate responses to dissonance, either raising the bridges or deciding to leave them be, the interests of various groups come to the fore and the underlying role of the built environment in mitigating or reproducing social inequalities is laid bare. In order to illustrate this point, I will conclude with three more park benches – illustrative examples of objects that articulate and manifest social boundaries in ways that bear upon social inequality: the median fence, the overpass and the crosswalk sign.

Script Realignment: Fence, Overpass and Sign

Consider a flowerbed in front of a public building (say a library) that, due to its position in between the sidewalk and the library entrance, has come to serve as an informal pedestrian route, resulting in a defined pathway of crushed daffodils. An unobtrusive chain can be strung around the border; a small sign can be planted in the flowerbed asking visitors to stick to the sidewalk; or library security guards can be tasked with keeping an eye on the flowerbed during their rounds and asking patrons not to intrude. In the three hypothetical scenarios, the script for the use of the space is not altered, but is instead *reinforced* physically, symbolically or institutionally. Now consider a fourth possibility: a city landscaper creates a formal path where there was previously an informal one, lining it with paving stones while leaving the surrounding flowerbed untouched. The social meaning of the space has been changed. Formerly ornamental,

now the space is both ornamental and functional. In the latter case, the script has been altered – *adapted* rather than reinforced.

If this example is trivial, other examples more in keeping with this dissertation's empirical focus are less so. In areas where socioeconomic change produces changes in the way suburban spaces are used, stakeholders face a decision between *reinforcing* or *adapting* local scripts, and they may do so through physical, symbolic or institutional means, or, in the parlance of traffic planners, "engineering", "education", or "enforcement." In their choices among these options, the political role of objects becomes clear. A brief discussion of three recent responses to script dissonance by New Jersey state traffic engineers and legislators illustrates the processes through which power enters into script realignment.

Reinforcement and Adaptation: Median Fence and Overpass

In New Jersey in 2009, the number of pedestrian fatalities abruptly increased as a percentage of overall traffic fatalities, drawing concern from state officials. A report by an influential non-profit advocacy group documented the increase and identified the most dangerous roads in the state for pedestrians (Rouse 2009). High on this list were State Route 1 and State Route 46. Both are, for much of their lengths, four to six-lane divided arterial roads with "jersey barriers" (three-foot tall modular cement dividers) separating the northbound and southbound lanes (or, in the case of Route 46, eastbound and westbound lanes). Clusters of commercial and residential establishments line both roads, including "big box" stores, fast-food restaurants, storage facilities, gas stations and motels offering low cost accommodations. Density is low, traffic speeds along the



Figure 1: Median Fence, Monmouth Junction, NJ

roadways are high, and sidewalks are non-existent. In other words, the built environment along both roadways is heavily scripted for private automobile traffic.

In 2009 and 2010, at two points along Route 1 and Route 46, the state executed very different modifications of physical space. Where Route 1 passes through a town named Monmouth Junction, just northeast of Princeton, the only notable features on the southbound side are a large trailer park and a budget motel. Directly across the road, are an automobile repair shop, a gas station with an attached convenience store, and a medium-sized shopping center containing several fast food restaurants, a barbershop and an Office Max. In summer 2010, along this stretch of Route 1, a series of chain-link fences were installed on top of the concrete median at sporadic intervals. When added to the height of the median, the fence creates a barrier approximately seven feet tall. The

target population for the fence was clear: residents of the trailer park and the motel who cross the road in order to reach the shopping plaza and the gas station convenience store. The fences were the result of a top-down bureaucratic response to rising pedestrian fatalities in the state. Pedestrian users had no apparent role in this process, as Middlesex County officials were awarded a $95,750 grant to improve pedestrian safety and, within several months, erected the fences (quite literally) overnight. In a media report describing the grant and mentioning pedestrian safety problems along Route 1, two local law enforcement explained the logic manifest in the fences, a logic of *script reinforcement*: "These are people that are crossing the roads (without) an intersection in the middle of the night, so accidents are going to happen," remarked the first official. "If people go by the rules and the laws of the road, right now our roads are very safe for pedestrians," said the second (Burd 2008).

In Denville, New Jersey, Route 46 intersects with Savage Road and Franklin Road. The setting bears a visual resemblance to the setting described above. Route 46 is a six-lane divided highway with no shoulder. A Burger King and a Charlie Brown steakhouse are situated along one side of the road. A stoplight and a striped crosswalk protect pedestrians attempting to cross Route 46, but the size of the highway and the speed of traffic render crossings dangerous, as pedestrians are required to cross nearly 80 feet of pavement in a relatively short time. If the site is physically similar to Monmouth Junction in its emphasis on automobile traffic, in socioeconomic terms the surrounding area offers a sharp contrast to the trailer parks and budget motels along Route 1. On one side of Route 46 is Indian Lake, an upper-middle class community composed of 1,200 large suburban homes clustered around a private lakefront club requiring membership.



Figure 2: Pedestrian Overpass, Denville, NJ

On the opposite side of Route 46 is a large public park. In 2009, after a sustained campaign by the Indian Lake community to convince state agencies to enhance pedestrian safety at intersection (Denville Township 2009), the New Jersey Department of Transportation unveiled a $3.3 million pedestrian overpass crossing Route 46 at the intersection with Savage Road. Again, the target population was unambiguous: residents of Indian Lake seeking to cross to the playing fields and walking paths of the public park. The process, in comparison to the construction of the median fences, was prolonged and intentionally democratic, including public meetings in the Denville Municipal Building where community members were invited to offer input on the design. In the discourse of public officials, the overpass was held forth as part of a broader governmental commitment to walking and bicycling. Governor Jon Corzine, in a press release, explained the logic manifest in the overpass – the logic of *script adaptation*: "The Route

46 pedestrian bridge reflects the State of New Jersey's dedication to improving pedestrian safety…[it] will encourage residents to walk rather than drive" (NJDOT 2009).

These two approaches to script alignment speak of power. The representation of a class of users (pedestrians) in the process that led to the two objects was quite different. But more importantly for the present discussion: the objects *themselves* empower and disempower. By constructing the median fence in Monmouth Junction where Route 1 passes through low-income communities, officials physically *reinforced* the prevalent script, converting risk into inconvenience for the residents of the trailer park and the budget motel, as the only physically feasible way of safely crossing the road now consists of walking five or ten minutes along the shoulder of a divided highway to reach the nearest intersection. The costs of script dissonance are transferred entirely to these pedestrians, as reinforcement substantially decreases risk of serious injury, while presenting drivers with no need to alter their behavior. The lives of pedestrian users are made safer by this intervention, but their marginalization within the symbolic and the functional terms of the space is not altered. In fact, by taking away the possibility of a direct, if dangerous, crossing to the shopping center, the fence creates a barrier between the two focal points of a possible daily routine revolving around habitation and sustenance. It presumes, in other words, that people who both lack an automobile and inhabit the trailer park or the budget motel either do not exist or do not need to buy food. It prioritizes a physical use, and thus prioritizes a social class.

In contrast, the Savage Road overpass does *not* reinforce the apparent behavioral rules of the space – it changes them. By constructing the overpass, state officials replaced

a dangerously inadequate crosswalk with an imposing structure whose only purpose is to accommodate pedestrian users and to insulate these users from the high-speed automobile traffic below. The overpass *adapts* the script of the immediate area, redefining the intersection as a space conducive to travel by foot. In his comments, Corzine expressed hope not only that this would make pedestrian crossings safer, but that it would create *more* pedestrians. The balance of power between two classes of users – drivers and pedestrians – is substantively altered by the two objects. Both objects respond to a similar need, but the responses differ in the capacities that they assign to the two classes of users.

Institutional Adaptation: Casey's Law and the Crosswalk Sign

The fence and the overpass are physical responses to script dissonance. In both cases, objects were used to physically create new rules or underline the old ones. However, the two examples are limited by their physicality, which renders their behavioral intervention direct, but also fragile. Both objects are easily circumvented: a New Jersey government construction manual describes a median fence as a temporary fix, noting the tendency for holes to appear, and the pedestrian overpass, with its cumbersome stairs and wheelchair ramps, can easily be ignored by a group of teenagers in a hurry. More importantly, however, the physicality of each solution to pedestrian risk anchors it in space and thus constrains its effects: both objects are inherently geographically specific. If space is segregated along one or more social dimensions, as it is in suburban New Jersey, then the adoption of different physical fixes in different locations confers unequal burdens and rewards. If low-income and affluent pedestrians have a differential ability to be heard by local and state planners, then it is unsurprising

that median fences might appear in poor neighborhoods while pedestrian overpasses rise up in wealthier communities. But script dissonance can be resolved in other ways than physical engineering. Attempts at institutional or symbolic realignment in response to socially problematic objects may produce results that are less bound by the confines of physical space and financial resources, and that are thus less socioeconomically specific in their consequences.

In 2010, New Jersey's government attempted to change statewide institutional scripts pertaining to the use of crosswalks by drivers and pedestrians. The political impetus for the change centered upon a symbolic victim. A 21-year old female pedestrian named Casey Feldman was killed in a crosswalk in Ocean City, New Jersey in July 2009. Feldman's death, coinciding with the aforementioned statewide increase in pedestrian deaths, prompted extensive media coverage and a political campaign mounted by the victim's family, resulting in the first change to New Jersey's pedestrian law in more than fifty years (Burger 2010; McCullen 2011). Where previously drivers were required to yield to pedestrians at crosswalks, the new law, referred to as "Casey's Law" by state officials, required that drivers come to a full stop.

In March of 2010 the legislation was announced in a public ceremony where Feldman's family appeared alongside state transportation officials (Casey Feldman Foundation 2010). Municipalities tasked local police officers with enforcing the new law, resulting in an increase in traffic fines documented by local newspapers. In enacting the law, the state changed the script for the program of driver behavior when approaching a marked crosswalk. This institutional adaptation, only effective to the extent that knowledge of the law was disseminated to drivers, was accompanied by a systematic

attempt at symbolic adaptation. Small, yellow signs emblazoned with stop signs were made available by state agencies to municipalities to advertise the new law. In Linden, New Jersey, state funding was provided for a more substantial script adaptation – a movable, five-foot tall, wedge-shaped sign that could be erected in front of any crosswalk and then relocated to other crosswalks (Haydon 2011).

By changing the law and advertising this change, the state sought a broad change in the formal rules and the engrained behaviors governing the sequence of actions occurring at intersections across the state. Although the apparent political motivation for the law centered upon the high-profile death of a young, white, middle-class woman – the suburban daughter of a prominent Philadelphia attorney – who was working a summer job as a waitress at a popular Jersey shore beach, the behavioral changes sought by the law stand to empower pedestrians throughout New Jersey, including a growing population of low-income residents whose reliance on foot travel is a function of economic necessity. Unlike the physical script reinforcement and adaptations of the median fence and the crosswalk, a new law, coupled with enforcement and marketing, empowers or disempowers through broad changes in the legal and cognitive context within which people and places interact.

Closing Word: Obduracy and Adaptation in the Changing U.S. Suburbs

If power is exercised and embedded when powerful actors are forced to consider the consequences of objects, how should power be exercised in suburban communities undergoing processes of socioeconomic change? The examples posed above present parallels for a wide range of possible political reactions to changing uses of public and

private suburban space. At the most basic level, scripts may be reinforced or they may be adapted. Due to the "obduracy" of the built environment (Akrich 1992), which can be taken to include both the financial cost of physical alteration and cultural and political resistance to change, reinforcement is likely to prove inherently easier than adaptation simply because it works with the physical material, cognitive orientations and institutions that are already in place. For suburban politicians seeking a response to the overcrowding of suburban homes, enforcing occupancy limits is likely to be less costly (financially and politically) than constructing affordable housing. For officials facing public anxiety over street corner hiring sites for day laborers, enacting anti-loitering laws is likely to be less expensive and quicker than reducing symbolic dissonance by moving hiring sites indoors. In other words, a median fence is typically cheaper than an overpass. On the other hand, in every case, reinforcing the script seems destined to merely displace dissonance to a different street corner or, at best, a different municipality. In pragmatic terms, an overpass, while more expensive than a median fence, appears to more accurately reflect the future of many changing suburban communities, making resistance to the changing uses of suburban space a losing proposition. Two final examples can be used to illustrate the normative consequences of script reinforcement and adaptation.

In December 2009, after an acrimonious public debate concerning day labor hiring sites, the township of Oyster Bay, Long Island, adopted an ordinance prohibiting "solicitation of employment" in public places. Because the object of this law was not job seekers, generally, but rather, a specific population of men loitering on local street corners and in convenience store parking lots, the ordinance was forced to be more targeted in its scripting of behavior. Lawmakers defined "solicitation of employment" in

specific terms, prohibiting behaviors such as waving one's hand in the air and "standing in public roads facing in the direction of oncoming traffic" (Finn 2009).

Several months later, in Mamaroneck, a New York City suburb just a few miles from Oyster Bay across a narrow portion of Long Island Sound, a day labor support organization named the Hispanic Resource Center opened in a storefront location next to a park that had served as an informal day labor hiring site just a few years earlier which had provoked vociferous public complaints. When it opened in May 2010, the Hispanic Resource Center included job training, a bank of computers for public use, and most importantly, a sanctioned hiring site where workers and employers could connect. In a local newspaper article, a town trustee emphasized the symbolic importance of the site's central location within the town: "It's nice to see them moving to Mamaroneck Avenue, in a place where it's highly visible, just down the block from the school and the train station and showing that they're really a part of the community" (Rentz 2010).

In normative terms, an openness to the re-envisioning of suburban spaces seems like the *right* approach to take. By deciding what can be done in suburban spaces, policy makers decide who belongs in the suburbs, drawing social boundaries. In this context, whether or not new laws and redesigned objects meet constitutional muster, they directly define local spaces as more or less flexible and more or less democratic. Attempts to reinforce traditional patterns of behavior in diversifying suburbs, regardless of their direct social repercussions, embed an implicit definition of community in the physical, symbolic and legal framework that ties people to place. So do attempts to adapt local spaces to accommodate new patterns of behavior. At one end of this continuum lie rigidly scripted places where waving one's hand on a public street is illegal. On the other end lie

undefined suburban places that have yet to be imagined – places whose physical, symbolic and legal landscape will seek to include and incorporate new arrivals and adapt to new constraints. As this concluding discussion has argued, in the context of changing suburban communities, script reinforcement hides mechanisms of inequality. Responding to risk by compounding the everyday inconveniences faced by low-income suburban residents means making the consequences of their marginalization less violent, but no less real. By the same token, planning policies requiring that new roads accommodate pedestrian and bicycle traffic do far more than produce apartment buildings, sidewalks and bicycle lanes – they legitimize walking and bicycling and, in so doing, legitimize the *people* who perform these actions, expanding the boundaries of acceptable behavior in local spaces, and thus redefining the boundaries of community to include the growing socioeconomic diversity to be found in the American suburbs.

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