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URBAN HOMICIDE IN THEORY AND FACT

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This study is designed to supply the factual basis of a theory which, we hope, will explain the systematic connection between homicides and the places where they occur. An interest in developing a purely descriptive account of the incidence of criminal homicides in a large metropolis has motivated the accumulation of the facts in the first instance. However, we soon observed phenomena which are not adequately explained by existing criminological theories. It is for this reason that we have sought to develop a more satisfactory theory.

INTRODUCTION

It has been well established in criminological literature that crime lives best in the disorganized areas of cities. Some of the researches supporting this conclusion have been mainly concerned with the spatial patterns made by crime rates when cast upon city maps. Others have sought to suggest causal relations between crime and select socio-economic variables of census tracts or sub-communities of large cities.[2]

Both types of researches, dealing mainly with delinquents, define the kind of area in which general forms of criminal behavior tend most to occur by developing a static picture of relationship between crime and characteristics of the areas. Therefore, neither presents a theoretical scheme that promises to explain the manner in which criminal areas are dynamically connected with criminal conduct. Cavan, after a rather complete summary of these works, makes note of the fact that areal studies merely show delinquency and social disintegration to exist in the same communities.[3]

If we are to move from the static interpretation of co-existing phenomena to the more dynamic interpretation of a social process, it may be essential that we study the relationship between a specific type of crime and the places where it occurs rather

[1] With Lois I. Mitchell as research assistant.

[2] See: CLIFFORD R. SHAW, DELINQUENCY AREAS (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929); CLIFFORD R. SHAW AND HENRY D. MCKAY, JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND URBAN AREAS (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942); E. LONGMOOR, E. SCHNEIDER, AND E. F. YOUNG, *Ecological Interrelationship of Juvenile Delinquency, Dependency, and Population Mobility: A Cartographic Analysis of Data from Long Beach, California,* AMER. J. OF SOCIOL. XLI, (March, 1936) 598–610; ERNEST MOWRER, DISORGANIZATION, PERSONAL AND SOCIAL (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1942).

[3] RUTH SHONLE CAVAN, CRIMINOLOGY (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1950), pp. 54–74: 342.

than between place and crime or delinquency in general. We take this view because criminal behavior is varied, and those expressing such behavior vary, too. The kind of spatial and interpersonal relations necessary for the completion of one type of criminal act may not be essential for the completion of another. Especially is this true in the instance of adult crime. Embezzlement, almost exclusively a form of adult crime, requires a spatial and an interpersonal setting quite different from that of theft—a crime with which delinquents are often associated. It is quite possible that similar differences exist in other instances of felonious crime. Although many crimes are associated with the central business districts of our cities, there are other areas that might be more favorable for the expression of certain types of criminal behavior. Reckless has emphasized this possibility by observing that urban hinterlands have become fertile grounds for illegal and illicit practices through the use of automobiles.[4]

It is safe to contend, then, that a coherent theory explaining the dynamic relations between disorganized areas and criminal behavior must grow, not only out of consideration of crime and place as coexistent phenomena, but also out of an analysis of a particular type of crime; a particular type of criminal; and particular places—all as elements of a common process. Using urban homicides as a form of criminal be-behavior, this paper seeks to suggest a direction toward the development of such a theory by tracing out the natural manner in which assailant, victim, and place become organized into a complex of ecological and interpersonal situations that result in homicide. As a starting point, it is theoretically assumed that strategic areas of the city pull people of potentially significant characteristics who, during their leisure time, become involved in situations of congenial origins out of which conflicts develop and homicides occur.

Are there areas of the city in which homicides tend most to occur? Are these areas strategic, in that they possess socio-economic characteristics that make them significantly different from other areas of the city? Is there some basic process, inherent in urban organization, that centralizes people of potentially significant characteristics? Are the differences and similarities of these people of such nature that congenial associations with conflict potential are occasioned? These are the questions whose answers will determine how well the facts fit the theory. Our facts will be spread blanket-like over our theory. Where there are holes in the facts, certain elements of the theory will show through, warning us where the factual fabric is thin.

As a source for our facts we have drawn upon official records of all cases of criminal homicides[5] occurring in the city of Houston, Texas, during the period 1945–49. There were secured through special registration forms and from the City Police Department, specific facts pertinent to the homicide assailant, victim, and occurrence. The address, age, sex, and race of both assailant and victim were recorded. The date, hour, and place of the murder occurrence were noted; and details of the offense, verified by police investigation and court evidence, were written on each case form.[6] The records

[4] WALTER C. RECKLESS, CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1940), p. 67.

[5] As defined by state law, see: Texas Penal Code, Art. 1201, 1202.

[6] Appreciation is expressed to Sample Pittman for aid in copying case records and to Lieutenant Larry Fultz for supervising and coordinating the work in the offices of the Houston Police Department.

revealed 512 cases of criminal homicide for the five-year period. However, our study has been based upon 489, sixteen having been discarded because of incomplete facts, and seven dropped because they involved either multiple assailants or victims.

Urban Areas of Homicide Occurrence

The city of Houston has an average homicide rate of 22.7 per 100,000 population for the five-year period.[7] The distribution of cases according to the census tracts into which the city is divided shows intense variation. The number of homicide cases ranged from zero in eleven tracts near the city boundary to fifty-six in tract nine. There was an average of seven cases per census tract. Rates of occurrence, standardized for age on the basis of five-year intervals, ranged up to 76 per 100,000 in tract 17. Nevertheless, the spatial pattern made by a census tract distribution suggests the usual conclusion that there are particular areas of the city in which homicides occur much more frequently than at other points. The highest rates are found among those tracts that cluster around the city's central business district. Tract 25, composing the major portions of this district, therefore, becomes the focal point around which the city's world of homicidal behavior tends to whirl. These areas of highest concentration include only 18 of the city's tracts. They contain 32 percent of its population over 20 years of age, but 71 percent of the homicide cases.[8]

Homicidal behavior is shown to be even more highly concentrated when cases are distributed according to the streets on which they occurred. The census tract method, although controlling the factor of population size, creates the illusion that cases are generally distributed over the tracts within which they occur. On the other hand, the street-plotting method pinpoints the occurrence more or less at its specific location in space. Therefore, instead of communicating a picture of one large area composed of several continguous tracts, the latter method gives us the more realistic picture of four areas located at strategic points near the central business district.[9] The problem of urban homicide is actually a phenomenon that thrives best on and within the vicinity of specific streets of the city. Over 87 percent of our cases occurred on West Dallas, Dowling, Lyons, and Preston, or within eight blocks of these streets. It should be noted that many cases occur at points where these streets intersect with others. The resulting pattern is the delineation of four areas of concentration, with each area dominated by one of the above streets.[10] It is quite apparent, then, that although particular census tracts form the general locale for homicide incidents, the strategic spots for this type of crime are found on particular streets and on the corners made by their intersection with others.

We call these areas strategic because they possess socio-economic characteristics that make them significantly different from other areas of the city, and because these differences seem to facilitate the expression of homicidal behavior. Our present interest will be directed toward an analysis of these differences. However, the nature of the

[7] Population base for rates was secured from *Estimated Population*, 1940–54, supplied by the Houston Chamber of Commerce.

[8] Map showing distribution of rates according to census tracts omitted to conserve space.

[9] For an example of a similar conclusion, see: Stuart Lottier, *Distribution of Criminal Offenses in Metropolitan Regions*, Jour. Crim. L. and Criminol., 29 (May–June, 1938), p. 44.

[10] Areal map omitted to conserve space.

data we used to demonstrate differences obviously compels us to return to the census tract analysis. One characteristic of areas of high homicide occurrence is their marked degree of physical deterioration. Dwelling structures are older and more badly in need of repair than are those in other areas of the city, and by virtue of this fact the rent is cheap. Although the 18 tracts composing areas of highest homicide occurrence possessed 36 percent of the city's dwelling units, they contained 54 percent of those built 1919 and earlier, and 63 percent of those in need of major repairs. The average contract monthly rent for other areas of the city was $27.52; that for areas of high homicide occurrence was $19.96.[11]

A second characteristic of high homicide areas is their special population composition. Each area appears dominated by members of a particular race. The Dowling, West Dallas, and Lyons areas are respective centers of what are commonly called Third, Fourth, and Fifth Wards. Third Ward is made up of tracts 34, 37, and 38. Fourth Ward is composed of tract 27, and Fifth Ward is formed by tracts 8, 9, and 18. These tracts collectively account for 63 percent of the city's Negro population, and thereby constitute the city's three largest Negro communities. Tracts 16, 17, and 23, adjacent to the central business district, form one of the main Spanish-American areas. Spanish-Americans constitute 5.2 percent of the city's general population, but 35 percent of all members of this racial group are found in these two tracts.[12] In addition to their racial quality, people of high homicide areas possess other personal characteristics that definitely place them in a lower economic class. They are employed on the lower levels of the city's occupational pyramid, and they run greater risks of unemployment. They have 47 percent of the city's gainfully employed, but 67 percent of its workers who are laborers and domestic servants, and 54 percent of the city's unemployed. Their educational status is generally lower than that of the people of other areas of the city. They have 39 percent of the city's population 25 years of age and over, but 63 percent of those of the city who are below fifth grade in schooling.

How significant are these differences between high and low homicide areas is shown by a comparison of the mean percentages of tracts composing the two areas, where these percentages are based on the above indexes. Table I gives these means and shows the critical ratios derived from their differences. In each instance, except percent Spanish-American population, we can be relatively certain that the differences are due to the nature of the areas rather than to chance.

Further evidence that these characteristics differentiate between high and low areas of homicide occurrence is presented by the correlation of rates of occurrence for each tract with five of the above characteristics taken as variables. The variables selected are (2) percent dwellings in need of major repairs, (3) percent Negro population, (4) percent unemployed, (5) percent workers who are laborers and domestics, and (6) median educational level. Table II gives the co-efficients of correlation between the rate of homicide occurrence and the respective variables, and indicates

[11] All socio-economic indexes are computed from: U. S. Bureau of Census, *Population and Housing, Houston, Texas, 1940* (Washington, D. C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1942).

[12] JOSEPH L. ZAREFSKY, SPANISH-AMERICANS IN HOUSTON AND HARRIS COUNTY(Houston, Texas: Research Bureau of the Community Council, 1953).

TABLE I

MEAN PERCENTAGES AND CRITICAL RATIOS OF HIGH AND LOW HOMICIDE AREAS AS BASED ON SELECT SOCIO-ECONOMIC VARIABLES OF CENSUS TRACTS, HOUSTON, TEXAS

Socio-economic variables	Low Area Means	High Area Means	Critical Ratios
Percent Negro Population	7.5	42.4	3.69
Percent Spanish-American population	13.1	23.6	1.18
Percent below fifth grade in schooling	7.4	18.7	4.07
Percent dwelling built 1919 and earlier	9.2	42.4	12.20
Percent dwellings needing major repairs	6.9	19.2	4.61
Percent laborers and domestic servants	11.7	28.1	3.98
Percent unemployed	6.3	10.5	4.59
Contract monthly rent	27.52	19.96	3.35

TABLE II

COEFFICIENTS OF CORRELATION BETWEEN STANDARDIZED HOMICIDE RATES OF OCCURRENCE AND SELECT SOCIO-ECONOMIC VARIABLES

Socio-Economic Variables	r	t*
Percent dwellings needing major repairs	0.63	5.62
Percent laborers and domestics	.62	5.47
Median educational level	−.60	5.20
Percent Negro population	.58	4.93
Percent unemployed	0.64	5.77

* Significance accepted on confidence level of .001. For t required at this level, see FREDERICK E. CROXTON and DUDLEY J. COWDEN, APPLIED GENERAL STATISTICS, (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1939), Appendix F, p. 875.

their degrees of reliability. As one would expect each of the five variables is moderately associated with homicide occurrence. However, the combined net effect of these variables through multiple correlation gives us the value of $R_y123456$ equals .813. Taking the five independent variables into consideration by way of six normal equations, which we solve by the Doolittle Method,[13] we get the multiple estimating equation of:

$$X_{c1}.23456 = -95.0144 + .39710X_2 + (-.11552)X_3 + 4.33947X_4 + 1.00500X_5 + 5.85314X_6$$

with a standard error of estimate of 1.92. These data allow the conclusion that those characteristics we have used to differentiate between high and low areas are sufficiently dependable to predict the rate of homicide occurrence in each tract within the margin of a reasonable error.

DYNAMIC RELATIONS OF STRATEGIC AREAS AND HOMICIDE OCCURRENCE

Strategic areas of the city become dynamically related to the occurrence of homicide through the basic ecological process of segregation. The relationship is made

[13] FREDERICK E. CROXTON and DUDLEY J. COWDEN, APPLIED GENERAL STATISTICS (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1939), pp. 716–720.

TABLE III

OBSERVED AND THEORETICAL FREQUENCIES OF HOMICIDE ASSAILANT AND VICTIM AS TO RACE
(Theoretical in parentheses)

Race of Assailant	Race of Victim			Total
	White	Spanish-American	Negro	
White	108 (26)	3 (12)	8 (81)	119
Spanish-American	1 (11)	42 (4)	0 (28)	43
Negro	5 (77)	1 (30)	321 (220)	327
Total	114	46	329	489

possible by virtue of the power of this process to determine the spatial distribution of people and institutions. Through the segregation process, members of like races concentrate in space, engage in intimate association, and are made available to each other for homicidal conflicts. Several facts suggest this conclusion. The first is found in the racial composition of our homicide group. Negroes, the most highly concentrated of the city's racial elements, dominate our homicide population. They compose 67 percent of the assailants and the same proportion of the victims. The significance of this concentration is very clearly shown by the tendency for homicide assailants to select victims from their own racial group. Table III, distributing assailants and victims according to race, shows that this selection is considerably greater than chance.

Computations from these data yield a chi square of 798.86.[14] The high degree of association between assailant and victim as based on race is shown by a mean square contingency of .79. Our evidence points decisively toward the conclusion that urban homicides are interracial in nature, a conclusion which has been drawn by previous research.[15]

The second fact suggesting proximity and intimacy of association is that of distance between the people and places involved. It is clear that there are three spatial points inherent in every situation of homicide. These are (1) residence of assailant, (2) residence of victim, and (3) place of occurrence of the homicide act. When we measure the distance between these points in terms of miles, it becomes quite clear that assailant and victim live near each other. Although distance between them ranged from less than one block to eight miles, the average was less than one mile. In fact, Table IV shows that more than 70 percent of the assailants and their victims lived less than two miles apart. The fact that 32.8 percent of them lived at the same address or within the same block makes us know how extremely the distribution on the basis of distance is skewed in favor of spatial proximity. Urban homicides, therefore, appear to be the result of conflicts between not only members of the same race, but also between neighbors.

There is a similar degree of proximity between assailant or victim on the one hand and place of occurrence on the other. The range is greater, but the concentration on

[14] Confidence level of .001 with 4 degrees of freedom.

[15] HAROLD GARFINKEL, *Research Note on Inter- and Intra-Racial Homicides*, SOCIAL FORCES, 27, (May, 1949), 371.

TABLE IV

PERCENT HOMICIDE CASES ACCORDING TO DISTANCES BETWEEN ASSAILANT, VICTIM, AND PLACE OF OCCURRENCE

Distance in Miles	Assailant-Victim	Assailant-Occurrence	Victim-Occurrence
0.0–0.4	46.7	57.0	61.0
0.5–0.9	10.8	10.0	14.3
1.0–1.4	5.8	5.0	8.2
1.5–1.9	6.9	2.2	3.9
2.0–2.4	4.1	2.8	2.8
2.5–2.9	1.1	1.5	1.1
3.0–3.4	3.0	2.8	2.6
3.5–3.9	2.8	1.7	1.5
4.0–4.4	1.1	1.3	1.3
4.5–4.9	1.1	0.4	0.6
5.0–5.4	0.2	0.2	0.6
5.5–5.9	1.5	0.6	0.2
6.0–6.4	0.9	0.6	0.4
6.5–6.9	0.4	0.2	0.4
7.0 and over	13.6	13.7	1.1
Total.....	100.0	100.0	100.0

the lower end of the distance scale is greater also. More than 74 percent of the assailants and 87 percent of the victims lived less than two miles from the points of their fatal conflicts. Approximately 40 percent of each lived at the place of occurrence or within the same block. In a more general sense, the assailant-victim-place of occurrence pattern is mainly one in which neighbors are dispersed about places of homicide occurrence that act as points of orientation. White's work in Indianapolis has shown that there is a smaller distance from residence to place of offense in case of crimes against persons than in case of crimes against property. He, too, concluded that crimes against persons are, therefore, crimes against neighbors—that they suggest irritation from close and frequent contacts.[16]

The nature of these contacts is more clearly revealed when we look at the institutional structures around which homicidal behavior takes place. The forceful nature of the segregation process sets up institutional structures that give a renewed meaning to points of homicide occurrence. Segregation, in assorting people, also assorts institutions. These institutions, in turn, act as places at which people of like kind gather and engage in interpersonal relations of congenial origins. This gives us the third fact that shows the importance of proximity and intimacy in the homicide picture. Each of our homicide areas is pierced by a main stem or street on which are located the usual round of institutions found in areas of deterioration. Taverns and eating places dominate, although these are interspersed by rooming houses, pool parlors, and occasional retail units. Table V shows that homicides generally occur at rooming houses, taverns or eating places, and in the open on some street nearby. In fact, 70 percent of the cases occurred at the first two kinds of institutions. It is difficult to pinpoint the position of occurrence of the conflict because many of them originate at

[16] CLYDE R. WHITE, *The Relation of Felonies to Environmental Factors in Indianapolis*, SOCIAL FORCES, 10 (May, 1932), p. 507.

TABLE V

PERCENT DISTRIBUTION OF HOMICIDE CASES ACCORDING TO SPECIFIC PLACE OF OCCURRENCE

Specific Place of Occurrence	Number	Percent
Rooming House	206	42.1
Tavern or Cafe	140	28.6
Street	103	21.1
Other	40	8.2
Total	489	100.0

one kind of point and culminate at another. Nevertheless, the point of occurrence appears important as a place at which people concentrate.

There is a temporal order inherent in homicide occurrence in which institutions and places play a major role. When people of like kind concentrate in a common area, especially when this likeness is based on race and class, the area takes on a temporal rhythm consistent with this fact. Most of the people of our homicide areas are laborers and domestic workers. Consequently, these workers are at leisure at the same time. Institutions serving them are timed with this leisure, and this timing reflects itself in homicide occurrence. The tempo of occurrence varies slightly according to season, but more markedly according to the days of the weeks and hours of the day. Although there appears no significant difference in the number of homicides occurring during a particular month, cases occurring during months containing holidays are concentrated unevenly within these months. Whereas 17.5 percent of our cases occurred during March and April, 11 percent occurred within the Lenten season. Generally, 24.1 percent occurred during holiday season. From a point of view of days of the week, the tempo steps up sharply during week-ends. Over 84 percent of our cases occurred during Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Particular hours of the day seem preferred over others. According to facts presented by Table VI, homicidal behavior is also a nocturnal phenomenon. Approximately 72 percent of the cases occurred between 6:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. In each instance, whether measured by month, day, or hour, the tempo of occurrence seems to vary according to the leisure hours of working people.

Institutions, geared to these leisure hours, offer convenient places where people of a common race or class can gather and engage in congenial association. Homicidal behavior seems to grow indirectly out of such association and more directly out of the conflict situations that develop incidental to it. Our assailants and victims were not strangers to each other. In 87 percent of the cases they had previously associated on a basis of personal intimacy. The three most frequent patterns of conflict were (1) arguments originating out of a variety of situations; (2) love triangles produced by jealousy between friends; and (3) marital discords made more acute by some specific moment. Space will not allow an extended account of these conflict situations. However, we present a few illustrative instances in the hope that they will define more adequately the three-fold classification we have named above.[17]

[17] Cases are recorded as taken from police reports except that names of persons and places are fictitious and addresses are given in block numbers only.

TABLE VI

PERCENT DISTRIBUTION OF HOMICIDE CASES ACCORDING TO HOUR OF OCCURRENCE

Hour of Occurrence	Number	Percent
6:00- 8:59 AM	17	3.4
9:00-12:00 N	24	5.0
12:01- 5:59 PM	82	16.7
6:00- 9:59 PM	137	28.0
10:00-12:00 Mdn	120	24.6
12:01- 5:59 AM	94	19.2
Hour unknown	15	3.1
Total	489	100.0

Arguments that result in homicides originate out of a variety of situations. Each situation is laden with conflict potential both because of the absence of usual mechanisms of controlling conversation and because of the strength of passion generated by the setting. More specifically, there are times when normal conversations are allowed to degenerate into disputes. The police report given below illustrates this fact:

In talking with witness we found that Dick Sharp has been in the beer joint at a table talking and drinking with Evelyn Main, Willie Main, her husband, and an unknown man. Dick Sharp then began to show the effects of his drinking and got into an argument with Main and his wife. He got up from the table and told them, "If you want anything you can sure get it," and then pulled a pistol (32-20 Calibre Spanish Revolver) from his shirt and fired two times in the direction of Main's wife. At this point, the complainant, who was standing by the counter with her husband, fell to the floor. She had been shot one time in the forehead about three inches directly over the right eye. Sharp was found guilty of murder in this case and given twenty years.[18]

Taverns and alleys in homicide areas, because of the absence of constant police supervision, afford good spots for gambling activities. Often people develop gambling games around such spots and get into bitter disputes that frequently lead to homicide. The following case illustrates this fact:

Sam Singleton, Negro male 31, stated that he has been shooting dice on Saw Dust Alley with the above deceased, Elijah Givens, Negro male age 24, and got into an argument over a bet. The deceased pulled a knife and ran Sam down the track. Sam stated he fell down and the deceased got on top of him and began cutting him and he stabbed the deceased one time.[19]

Homicides frequently occur out of conflicts that arise incidental to parties held in private homes. Too much drink, while encouraging boisterousness, can place tempers on edge and make life cheap. This type of situation developed in the case that is reported below:

We find that both complainant and the defendant were attending a party at 3000 Brewster, house of Emma Dorman, Negro female, 52. The defendant was drinking and, according to witness got loud and boisterous, and got into an argument with some Negro, name unknown, and the deceased tried to separate them, and the defendant then started an argument with him. Beverley

[18] Case Number E68264.

[19] Case Number F77693.

[20] Case Number E44691.

Wilton, Negro female, 3200 Della, daughter of Emma Dorman, threw some hot water and ran them all out of the house. The defendant then ran the complainant down the street to the intersection of Josephine and Brewster where he stabbed and cut him.[20]

Conflicts born of the love triangle might be momentary or they might be more firmly entrenched as a result of a grudge of long standing. Those of a momentary nature tend to develop between two men over the question of who will have the privilege of taking some woman home from a party or a cafe. Those that result from differences of long standing usually involve disputes between individuals interested in the same mate. Although the persons involved meet during the moment of fatal conflict by chance, our cases lead us to believe that the assailant had been waiting for such an opportunity when the chance presented itself. Murder, in this instance, is more deliberate. We cite two cases to illustrate these points:

On investigation we found that the deceased, H. B. Mitson, Negro male, 30, had been to a beer joint at 2900 Sauer Street and became involved in an argument with Ed Yalsin over a woman known as "Boo-Boo." Information shows that the deceased was walking with this girl "Boo-Boo" when Ed Yaslin walked up to him and stabbed him two times in his chest because this girl had promised Yalsin that she would go with him after the cafe closed. Statement was taken from Margie Lee Williams, Negro female, 20, of 2500 Winbern Street, who is known as "Boo-Boo" and also who is known to the defendant as Hilda.[21]

On investigation we find that the deceased was sitting on a car fender at 2500 Pease when Clara King walked past her on the street. The deceased is reported to have said something to Clara about fooling with her boy friend and then hit Clara with a stick. Both of them went to fighting and the deceased was using a stick and Clara was using her knife. The fighters were separated by Beverley Franks, 500 Allston, who was with Clara King, and she was also cut.[22]

Marital discord usually has a history. It seems that the persistent course of tensions that develop from it encourages some people to kill as an escape from the tension. We cite two cases that illustrate this conclusion. The first is a police report of an instance in which a white female, 40, murdered her husband, 44, culminating a persistent form of marital discord:

Mrs. Riverton stated that "I shot him because he has been running around with some woman for the past 18 months." She further stated that they had been lying in bed arguing for the past hour and she made up her mind to do it.[23]

Stanley Masterson, white male, 45, stated that his wife, Jane Masterson, white female, 40, quit him and sued him for divorce, and that she was running around with a truck driver. Masterson states that about 12:30 P.M. he went over to his house and that she was in the bedroom and he asked her about talking things over, and she told him that she already had her mind made up, and that no one could change it. Masterson states that she began cursing and fighting him, and that he went to the living room and got his pistol from a dresser drawer, and went back to the bedroom and shot her one time in the head.[24]

From the point of view of general community mores, these are cheap issues for which people trade their lives. However, areas of high homicide occurrence can not be interpreted in terms of general community mores. The persistence of conditions set in motion by the ecological process of segregation gives these areas their own mores,

[21] Case Number E50528.
[22] Case Number E50536.
[23] Case Number E4806.
[24] Case Number F58431.

and thereby encourages a relaxed form of social control. The very nature of the contacts experienced by these people lowers inhibitions and encourages response to passion. Each homicide area is inhabited by people who carry on most of their daily routine, experiencing only symbiotic contacts between themselves and members of other racial or cultural groups. Opportunities for passionate conflict between them and other groups are limited. Here we are reminded of the soundness of Gillin's conclusion that the murderer is largely a criminal by passion.[25] The process of segregation raises the probability of intra-group conflict not only by virtue of its power to generate proximity and intimacy, but also by virtue of its power to reduce respect for the areas that are segregated into deterioration. This is seen more clearly by those who, as inhabitants of these areas, experience the daily routine of such communal living. In Negro areas the relaxed pattern of social control is more obvious. It is reflected in the shuffle of unregulated traffic; the sharp odors of segregated theatres; or the sheer infrequency of uniformed police. In the downtown white area it is less obvious—more underground. Bell-boys of the cheaper hotels feel it; janitors of rooming houses feel and see it too, but the majority of this relaxed social control is behind the closed doors of places of cheap entertainment. The essence of it is that there has developed among many of the people who inhabit these areas a psychology of excuse. They often feel justified in breaking the general community code, or at least they have little conscience against it. They define community expectations in terms of their own deprivations. Probably this type of collective psychology is best illustrated through the case of a Negro man who sought to date a Negro woman, known to him only by the incident that they were both eating at the same segregated counter of a five and ten store. When the woman showed resentment of his advances, the man replied, "Don't get all het up, lady, we are all colored folks here together." The point we seek to make here is that many people of high homicide areas recognize that they generally fall below the city in terms of conventional concepts of social worth and class, and they merely act the part.

Summary and Conclusions[26]

The author is aware of the fact that there are some conditions inherent in this research that may affect the validity of the conclusions. Facts given in police reports were not validated in every case by court evidence. Data pertaining to the relaxed social control of areas of deterioration were gathered by the method of participant observer and not by controlled observation. Nevertheless, important elements of the theory posed appear to be verified by tested fact. There are areas in the city in which homicides tend most to occur. These areas are strategic in nature, in that they possess socio-economic characteristics that make them significantly different from other areas of the city. The basic ecological process of urban segregation centralizes people of like kind, throws them together at common institutions, occasions their association on levels of intimacy, and thereby paves the way for conflicts out of which homicides occur.

[25] John L. Gillin, *The Wisconsin Murderer*, Social Forces, 10, (May, 1932), p. 551.

[26] Several conclusions of this research, so far as fact is concerned, have been previously shown. See: Howard Harlan, *Five Hundred Homicides*, Jour. of Crim. L. and Criminol., XL, (March–April, 1950) 736–752.