

Summer 1998

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### Recommended Citation

Richard Curtis, *The Improbable Transformation of Inner-City Neighborhoods: Crime, Violence, Drugs, and Youth in the 1990s*, 88 *J. Crim. L. & Criminology* 1233 (Summer 1998)

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# THE IMPROBABLE TRANSFORMATION OF INNER-CITY NEIGHBORHOODS: CRIME, VIOLENCE, DRUGS, AND YOUTH IN THE 1990s

RICHARD CURTIS\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

At the peak of the crack epidemic in many American cities—when people seemed ready to write off inner cities as hopelessly lost—a remarkable transformation began to take place. In a global economy where the gap between the haves and the have-nots continued to increase at an alarming rate, inner city neighborhoods defied nearly all expectations and with minimal outside intervention, mounted an improbable comeback.<sup>1</sup> The most visible and trumpeted manifestation of this rebirth was a plummeting crime rate which, in the latter half of the 1990s, fell to lows not seen in more than thirty years.<sup>2</sup> Incumbent politicians and law enforcement officials rushed to take credit, while the media and social scientists scrambled to explain how this seemingly unlikely turn of events could have happened in cities that had been unflinchingly described as being undermined and overrun by drugs, crime and violence.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kirk Johnson, *Washington Steps Back, and Cities Recover*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 16, 1997, § 4 at 5.

<sup>2</sup> Fox Butterfield, *Number of Victims of Crime Fell Again in '96, Study Says: Lowest Level Since Reports Began in 1973*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 16, 1997, at I18; Clifford Krauss, *New York Crime Rate Plummets to Levels Not Seen in 30 Years*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 20, 1996, at A1.

<sup>3</sup> See, e. g., ELIJAH ANDERSON, *STREETWISE: RACE, CLASS, AND CHANGE IN AN URBAN COMMUNITY* 57-69 (1990); WILLIAM J. BENNETT ET AL., *BODY COUNT: MORAL POVERTY . . . AND HOW TO WIN AMERICA'S WAR AGAINST CRIME AND DRUGS* 18-25 (1996); DALE D. CHITWOOD ET AL., *THE AMERICAN PIPE DREAM: CRACK COCAINE AND THE INNER CITY* ix-xii (1996); FELIX PADILLA, *THE GANG AS AN AMERICAN ENTERPRISE* 1-10 (1992); Jeffrey Fa-

The reduction of crime was startling because it contradicted two powerful assumptions about life in the United States. The first was that cities were becoming progressively more dangerous places to live. In this formulation, not only were Americans more at risk for becoming victims of violent crime, they were also more likely to become perpetrators of crime as a result of the deterioration of civil society and greater exposure to violence and an unsavory environment.<sup>4</sup> With great alarm, the media, social scientists and policy makers proclaimed that the hegemony enjoyed by white middle class culture was being steadily eroded by the insidious spread of an amoral lifestyle characterized by crime, violence and drug misuse that percolated out from inner city neighborhoods to infect suburbs and rural America.<sup>5</sup> In the drive to overtake the hearts and minds of America's youth, this self-destructive city-born subculture violated the taboo boundaries of race/ethnicity, gender and age. The threat to mainstream America was no longer exclusively embodied by black urban males, but increasingly included whites, females, country folk, and, most disturbingly, children.<sup>6</sup>

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gan, *The Social Organization of Drug Use and Drug Dealing Among Urban Gangs*, 27 CRIMINOLOGY 633, 659-62 (1989); Bruce D. Johnson et al., *Drug Abuse in the Inner City: Impact on Hard Drug Users and the Community*, in 13 DRUGS AND CRIME 9, 9-11 (Michael Tonry & James Q. Wilson eds., 1990); Thomas Mieczkowski, *The Operational Styles of Crack Houses in Detroit*, in DRUGS AND VIOLENCE: CAUSES, CORRELATES, AND CONSEQUENCES 60-91 (NIDA Research Monograph 103) (Mario De La Rosa et al. eds., 1990); Wesley G. Skogan, *Social Change and the Future of Violent Crime*, in 1 VIOLENCE IN AMERICA 235, 235-50 (T.R. Gurr ed., 1989); Rodrick Wallace & Deborah Wallace, *Contagious Urban Decay and the Collapse of Public Health*, 21 HEALTH/PAC BULLETIN 13, 13-18 (1991). Cf. JAMES A. INCIARDI ET AL., WOMEN AND CRACK-COCAINE 11-12 (1993).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., BENNETT ET AL., *supra* note 3, at 26-33; RICHARD CLOWARD & LLOYD OHLIN, DELINQUENCY AND OPPORTUNITY: A THEORY OF DELINQUENT GANGS 146-49 (1960); Ramiro Martinez Jr., *Latinos and Lethal Violence: The Impact of Poverty and Inequality*, 43 SOC. PROBS. 131, 132 (1996); Walter Miller, *Lower Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency*, 14 J. SOC. ISSUES 5, 5-19 (1958); Cathy Spatz Widom, *Does Violence Beget Violence? A Critical Examination of the Literature*, 106 PSYCHOL. BULL. 3, 3-28 (1989).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., JOHN HAGEDORN & PERRY MACON, PEOPLE AND FOLKS: GANGS, CRIME, AND THE UNDERCLASS IN A RUSTBELT CITY 150-63 (1988); MARVIN E. WOLFGANG & FRANCO FERRACUTI, THE SUBCULTURE OF VIOLENCE: TOWARD AN INTEGRATED THEORY IN CRIMINOLOGY 296-300 (1967); Jack Gladstein et al., *A Comparison of Inner-City and Upper-Middle Class Youths' Exposure to Violence*, 13 J. ADOLESCENT HEALTH 275, 279 (1992).

<sup>6</sup> See e.g., FRED A. ADLER, SISTERS IN CRIME: THE RISE OF THE NEW FEMALE CRIMINAL 1-3 (1975); ANNE CAMPBELL, THE GIRLS IN THE GANG: A REPORT FROM NEW YORK CITY 4-32 (1984); INCIARDI ET AL., *supra* note 3, at 19-21; IRVING A. SPERGEL, THE YOUTH GANG PROBLEM: A COMMUNITY APPROACH, 10 (1995); D. KELLY WEISBERG, CHILDREN OF THE

The second assumption was that children, the least prepared to withstand the rigors of life in a postmodern world, were becoming more violent.<sup>7</sup> Forced to grow up too soon, kids could no longer be kids and the critical period of adolescence was squeezed out as they transitioned directly into adulthood. Rushed along by care givers who force fed them in preparation for the working world or, alternatively, ignored by self-absorbed parents and left to fend for themselves, children experienced puberty at a much earlier age and the powerful hormonal cocktail that coursed through their bodies was left unregulated by the missing reins of moral reasoning or the calming influence of family and community. Bereft of guidance and safe passage to adulthood, children were increasingly cast adrift to define themselves in a hostile world.<sup>8</sup> Many children found that they must "pack guns instead of lunches"<sup>9</sup> to fight their way out of childhood in an upward spiral of violence. Some researchers

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NIGHT: A STUDY OF ADOLESCENT PROSTITUTION 110 (1985); Deborah Baskin et al., *The Political Economy of Violent Female Street Crime*, 20 *FORDHAM URB. L.J.* 401, 401-03 (1993); Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Horatio Alger: Culture and Ideology in the Crack Economy*, 16 *CONTEMP. DRUG PROBS.* 619, 643-45 (1989); Anne Campbell, *Female Participation in Gangs*, in *GANGS IN AMERICA* 163, 166-77 (Ronald Huff ed. 1990); Michelle Cooley-Quille et al., *Emotional Impact of Children's Exposure to Community Violence: A Preliminary Study*, 34 *J. AM. ACAD. CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY* 1362, 1362-63 (1995); Richard Dembo et al., *The Relationship Between Cocaine Use, Drug Sales, and Other Delinquency Among a Cohort of High-Risk Youths Over Time*, in *DRUGS AND VIOLENCE: CAUSES, CORRELATES, AND CONSEQUENCES*, *supra* note 3, at 112-35; Malcolm W. Klein, *Offence Specialisation and Versatility Among Juveniles*, 24 *BRIT. J. CRIMINOLOGY* 185, 192 (1984); Clyde B. McCoy et al., *Youth Opiate Use*, in *YOUTH OPIATE USE: PROBLEMS, ISSUES, AND TREATMENT* 353, 358 (George M. Beshner & A.S. Friedman eds., 1979); Wayne S. Wooden, *Tagger Crews and Members of the Posse*, in *THE MODERN GANG READER* 67-68 (Malcolm W. Klein et al., eds. 1995); Eloise Dunlap & Bruce D. Johnson, *Who They Are and What They Do: Female Crack Dealers in New York City*, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Society of Criminology, New Orleans 2 (Sept. 14, 1992) (unpublished manuscript, on file with *The Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*).

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., JAMES A. FOX, *TRENDS IN JUVENILE VIOLENCE: A REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY GENERAL ON CURRENT AND FUTURE RATES OF JUVENILE OFFENDING* 1-3 (1996); MARVIN E. WOLFGANG ET AL., *FROM BOY TO MAN, FROM DELINQUENCY TO CRIME* 195-202 (1987); Alfred Blumstein, *Youth Violence, Guns, and the Illicit Drug Trade*, 86 *J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY* 19, 19-20 (1995).

<sup>8</sup> Mike Collison, *In Search of the High Life: Drugs, Crime, Masculinities and Consumption*, 36 *BRIT. J. CRIMINOLOGY* 428, 441 (1996); cf. ANTHONY GIDDENS, *MODERNITY AND SELF-IDENTITY* 152-53 (1991); DANIEL MILLER, *CAPITALISM: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH* 224-26 (1997).

<sup>9</sup> BENNETT ET AL., *supra* note 3, at 25.

maintained that the "concentration effect" of living in inner city environments greatly increased the likelihood of using violence to resolve disputes and that exposure to "deviant models" characteristic of inner city life invariably led to greater drug abuse, violence, alienation and apathy.<sup>10</sup> As Sullivan notes, however, very little research has been done on the impact of growing up in a violent environment and how it may contribute to greater or less violent behavior as an adolescent and later in life.<sup>11</sup> Clearly, social and/or environmental factors shape developmental trajectories, but increasingly, researchers are interested in what people do and the choices they make within the parameters that bound their everyday lives. Ethnographic research has shown that people, even drug users,<sup>12</sup> have agency and possess the capacity to intervene meaningfully in their own lives, though not always in ways that they intend.<sup>13</sup> Young people, in particular, are noted, on one hand, for their malleability and capacity to adapt in novel ways to their environment, but they have also been recognized as possessing the ability to alter the status quo.<sup>14</sup>

While the inner cities of many large metropolitan areas in the United States have experienced severe social and economic problems since at least the 1960s, case studies and comparative

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., WILLIAM J. WILSON, *THE TRULY DISADVANTAGED: THE INNER CITY, THE UNDERCLASS, AND PUBLIC POLICY* 58-62 (1987); Thomas J. Bernard, *Angry Aggression Among the "Truly Disadvantaged,"* 28 *CRIMINOLOGY* 73, 87-88 (1990); Bruce P. Dohrenwend et al., *Socioeconomic Status and Psychiatric Disorders: The Causation-Selection Issue*, 255 *SCI.* 946, 946-47 (1992); Kevin Fitzpatrick & Janet Boldizar, *The Prevalence and Consequences of Exposure to Violence Among African-American Youth*, 32 *J. AM. ACAD. CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY* 424, 424-25 (1993); Joy Osofsky, *The Effects of Exposure to Violence on Young Children*, 50 *AM. PSYCHOLOGIST* 782, 783 (1995); Carmen N. Velez & Jane A. Ungemack, *Drug Use Among Puerto Rican Youth: An Exploration of Generational Status Differences*, 29 *SOC. SCI. & MED.* 779, 781 (1989).

<sup>11</sup> Mercer Sullivan, *Violence in Early Adolescence: Events and Development*, paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Society of Criminology, Chicago, Ill. 5 (1996) (unpublished manuscript, on file with *The Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*).

<sup>12</sup> Samuel R. Friedman et al., *Community Development as a Response to HIV among Drug Injectors*, 7 *AIDS* 92/93—A YEAR IN REVIEW s263, s267 (Supp. 1, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., LISA MAHER, *SEXED WORK: GENDER, RACE AND RESISTANCE IN A BROOKLYN DRUG MARKET* 201 (1997); PAUL E. WILLIS, *LEARNING TO LABOUR: HOW WORKING CLASS KIDS GET WORKING CLASS JOBS* 171-79 (1977).

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., DAVID FARBER, *CHICAGO* 68, at 218-19 (1988).

analyses—cornerstones of anthropological inquiry—have shown remarkable variation between cities and neighborhoods that are divided by race/ethnicity, class, immigrant status, housing patterns, crime, violence, employment opportunities, and many other factors, including the prevalence and tolerance of drug use and distribution.<sup>15</sup> I examine neighborhoods and communities because they are, in addition to family contexts, where people learn to be human. They form the crucible where orientations, outlooks, behaviors, and lifestyles are forged.<sup>16</sup> To understand neighborhood variation, as the substantivist school of economic anthropology insists,<sup>17</sup> economic behavior, indeed all behavior, must be situated in a local community which renders it intelligible. As Sullivan has pointed out with respect to crime, including drug dealing:

Criminal economic activity is embedded in community context to a far greater extent than other kinds of economic activity. The risks of regular business activity depend primarily on markets and competition. The risks of criminal activity depend on these factors<sup>18</sup> and on the relative positions of victims and offenders in the community.

To understand how and why inner city life has changed in the 1990s and the relationship between drugs, crime, violence and youth development, it is helpful to examine specific examples. This paper, which focuses on two Brooklyn, New York, neighborhoods, seeks to add to our understanding of the local-level processes which contributed to the remarkable transformation of the inner city in the 1990s. Examining the lives of dif-

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<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Bourgois, *supra* note 6, at 619-46; Thomas Mieczkowski, *Geeking Up and Throwing Down: Heroin Street Life in Detroit*, 24 *CRIMINOLOGY* 645, 645-64 (1986); see also MAHER, *supra* note 13, at 83-87; MERCER SULLIVAN, *GETTING PAID: YOUTH CRIME AND WORK IN THE INNER CITY* 3-8 (1989); see generally PATRICIA A. ADLER, *WHEELING AND DEALING: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF AN UPPER LEVEL DRUG DEALING AND SMUGGLING COMMUNITY* (1985); JOAN MOORE, *HOMEBOYS* (1978); TERRY WILLIAMS, *THE COCAINE KIDS: THE INSIDE STORY OF A TEENAGE DRUG RING* (1989).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. CONRAD M. ARENSBERG & SOLON T. KIMBALL, *CULTURE AND COMMUNITY* 28-34 (1965).

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., George Dalton, *Theoretical Issues in Economic Anthropology*, 10 *CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY* 63, 63-65 (1969); Karl Polanyi, *The Economy as Instituted Process*, in *TRADE AND MARKET IN EARLY EMPIRES* 243, 243-50 (Karl Polanyi, et al., eds. 1957).

<sup>18</sup> SULLIVAN, *supra* note 15, at 108.

ferent groups of young people—a household sample, gang members, and drug dealers—will show that the urge to invest explanatory power in structural (e.g., demographic, economic) or institutional (e.g., police, courts) factors to explain the turnaround witnessed in inner city neighborhoods, especially plummeting crime rates, is tempered by a close examination of the lives of people who live there, the very people who have agency and must ultimately decide whether to use a drug, pick a fight, or commit a crime.

## II. METHODS

This study is based upon ten years (1987-1997) of ethnographic fieldwork spanning nine different research projects conducted in several Brooklyn neighborhoods.<sup>19</sup> Though each of these projects focused on different topics and/or populations—for example, social networks among injecting drug users, crack markets, or the risk behaviors of local youth—the one enduring feature of each project was an attempt to situate the observed behavior of research subjects in the context of a wider community. As such, neighborhoods as a whole were examined, and the direct observation and analysis of behaviors and practices at both the individual and group level were thus able to be placed in the context of a community which gave them meaning. Research participants were observed in public and private domains, allowing for descriptions of the intimate, mundane or extraordinary details of their everyday lives, the social contexts which framed them, and the manner by which they comported themselves and constructed identities.

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<sup>19</sup> These projects include: Community AIDS Prevention Outreach Demonstration (National Institute on Drug Abuse #DA06723), The Community Effects of Street-Level Narcotics Enforcement: A Study of the New York City Police Department's Tactical Narcotics Teams (National Institute of Justice), The Ecology of Crime and Drug Use in American Cities: Social Structure and Neighborhood Dynamics (Social Science Research Council), Social Factors and HIV Risk (NIDA #DA 06723), HIV Risk Among Youth (National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases #A134723), Latin Kings and Gang Violence (Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation), The Natural History of Crack Distribution (NIDA #DA05126-05), Drug Use and HIV Risk Among Youth (NIDA #DA10411), and Heroin in the 21st Century (NIDA #DA10105-02). Due to the nature of this research, pseudonyms have been assigned to the sources quoted, to protect anonymity as promised.

For example, in one project,<sup>20</sup> hundreds of hours were spent observing injecting drug users (IDUs) in local settings where they interacted with each other. This included extended observations in shooting galleries, crack houses, shanties, shacks, street corner hangouts, abandoned buildings, vacant lots, rooftops, cars, trucks, public parks, fast food restaurants, and apartments. Many hours were spent observing injection events and discussing the procedures and protocols surrounding those events with individuals and groups. Observations were also made of the interactions between IDUs and drug distributors, family members, neighborhood residents, and various types of law enforcement personnel, including beat officers, members of the Tactical Narcotics Team (TNT), and the Warrant Squad. After three years of ethnographic fieldwork, several hundred pages of observational notes had been written and more than 210 open-ended interviews with drug users in the neighborhood were conducted. In addition, formal interviews with 767 IDUs were completed in the project's storefront. Ethnographic interviews were designed to elicit information on a wide range of topics including demographics, childhood and family background, education and work history, drug use history, current drug use, social networks, knowledge of distribution and sales, income generation and expenditures, participation in criminal activity, impact of law enforcement, injecting practices, knowledge of HIV and other blood-borne viruses, and experiences of treatment and/or quitting.

Ethnography allows for the combination of different data sources and permits information to be cross-validated and targeted for follow up and/or clarification. For this research, the combination of data from several studies provided widely divergent outlooks and orientations toward such topics as crime, violence, and drugs, and helped strengthen the process of triangulation between individuals and groups. Space does not permit a review of each of the research projects which contributed to this paper, however, hopefully what has emerged from

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<sup>20</sup> Social Factors and HIV Risk (NIDA # 06723).



this synthesis is a more sophisticated understanding of the people who have so remarkably changed their lives.

### III. DRUGS AND INNER CITY DETERIORATION

For many Americans, drug use by inner-city residents was responsible for the demise of once proud cities. Drugs, they said, devastated neighborhoods as swiftly and certainly as a wrecking ball and, in their wake, entire swaths of cities resembled Dresden after the war. Drugs were also seen as a contagious virus which eroded the flesh of communities and turned domestic and communal spaces meant for sociability and recreation into danger zones which needed to be quarantined from uninfected areas.<sup>21</sup> Parks were transformed into drug bazaars rendering them unsuitable for children. Mothers feared pushing baby carriages along streets resembling Sarejevo's "sniper alley" where even the police would not drive. Local businesses were systematically driven out by mounting losses as goods mysteriously flew off shelves and landed on street corners. Others were co-opted by nefarious druglords who callously inverted once-legitimate enterprises into thinly-disguised shelters for drug profits, personnel, and product. Hearty entrepreneurs who attempted to defy the trend invested heavily in bulletproof glass, video cameras, industrial-strength locks, vicious dogs, and private security guards, but still found themselves losing the battle against thugs who encircled the neighborhood to intimidate customers and choke off commerce. Drugs were also said to deplete a neighborhood's human capital by ruining once-promising lives and forcing productive members of the community to move elsewhere. As the social life of neighborhoods visibly constricted, public services also withered: garbage piled up uncollected as side streets became dumping grounds, firehouses were closed as beleaguered firefighters conceded to the arsonists and drug vultures who scavenged over the bones of

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<sup>21</sup> See, Jonathan Crane, *Effects of Neighborhoods on Dropping Out of School and Teenage Childbearing*, in *THE URBAN UNDERCLASS* 299, 318-19 (Christopher Jencks & Paul E. Peterson eds., 1991); Adele Harrell & Paul E. Peterson, *Introduction: Inner-City Isolation and Opportunity*, to *DRUGS, CRIME AND SOCIAL ISOLATION: BARRIERS TO URBAN OPPORTUNITY* 7 (Adele Harrell & Paul E. Peterson eds., 1992).

abandoned buildings, public transportation lines were cut back as fewer people had reason to come to or leave the neighborhood, taxi sightings became as rare as spotting a bald eagle, ambulances careened through the potholed streets but traveled long distances further endangering lives, schools were neglected causing the staff to become demoralized and the children to fall further behind developmental milestones, after-school programs were curtailed, libraries fell into disrepair, and pools, basketball courts, and other recreational facilities were transformed into fortresses which did little to insulate residents from the encroaching urban jungle. Replacing these hallmarks of community viability and vitality were institutions which fed the ultra-violent, cancerous drug culture that spread like wildfire, consuming inner cities throughout the United States and, increasingly, in urban centers around the globe.

This focus on drugs as the root of the problem plaguing cities was a new, more clever variation on a decades-old theme of blaming the decline of aging industrial centers on newly arrived minority populations.<sup>22</sup> In the older version, the afflictions and miseries associated with inner-city life were said to be the outcome of a "culture of poverty" or a "deviant subculture" in which poor people sought out, enjoyed, and perpetuated destructive lifestyles.<sup>23</sup> The new, less overtly racist variation on this theme—that drugs and the weak-willed racial/ethnic minorities who cannot resist them are responsible for the decline of cities—is a conviction which the crack discourse planted deeply in the American consciousness during the 1980s. It exempted the socioeconomic mainstream from responsibility for multiple inner-city crises. Within the social sciences, variations on the "deviant subculture" theme sealed off the inner-city drug economy

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<sup>22</sup> Susan D. Greenbaum, *Housing Abandonment in Inner-City Black Neighborhoods: A Case Study of the Effects of the Dual Housing Market*, in *THE CULTURAL MEANING OF URBAN SPACE* 139, 140 (Robert Rotenberg & Gary McDonogh eds., 1993).

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., EDWARD C. BANFIELD, *THE UNHEAVENLY CITY: THE NATURE AND FUTURE OF OUR URBAN CRISIS* 53-54 (1970); GERALD SUTTLES, *SOCIAL ORDER OF THE SLUM: ETHNICITY AND TERRITORY IN THE INNER-CITY* 3-12 (1968); Oscar Lewis, *The Culture of Poverty*, 215 *SCI. AM.* 19, 21 (1966); see generally DOUGLAS G. GLASCOW, *THE BLACK UNDERCLASS: POVERTY, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND ENTRAPMENT OF GHETTO YOUTH* (1980).

as if it were in a virtual vacuum, impervious to all forces from the surrounding local, national, and global economies. In this school of thought, such an environment produced "superpredators" who grew up surrounded by "deviant, delinquent, and criminal adults in a practically perfect criminogenic environment—that is, an environment that seems almost consciously designed to produce vicious, unrepentant predatory street criminals."<sup>24</sup> Even some drug researchers who make reference to the role of larger structural forces in recent urban decline rely uncritically upon the analytically specious idea of a "criminal underclass."<sup>25</sup> At its most extreme, this ideology of individual blame revived long-discredited theories of "genetic predisposition" as the cause of criminal activity.<sup>26</sup>

Contrasting with those who blame the deterioration of the inner cities on the attitudes and norms of newly arrived minority populations or as a consequence of the drugs they used, another school of social scientists convincingly showed that structural factors played a decisive role in the degradation of inner city neighborhoods.<sup>27</sup> To these scholars, the destruction had far more to do with the absence of legitimate employment opportunities than with the presence of hard drugs. The major "destroyers" were those who, following the age-old pursuit of profit maximization and capital accumulation, made economic and political decisions in boardrooms and bedrooms far away from the inner city. The decline of the cities in the Northeast was the result of the regional de-industrialization of the 1960s, when manufacturing capital fled and relocated in the non-unionized South and West of the country, before moving on to

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<sup>24</sup> BENNETT ET AL., *supra* note 3, at 14.

<sup>25</sup> Johnson et al., *supra* note 3, at 10-11.

<sup>26</sup> JAMES Q. WILSON & RICHARD J. HERRNSTEIN, CRIME AND HUMAN NATURE 90-103 (1985); David C. Rowe & D. Wayne Osgood, *Heredity and Sociological Theories of Delinquency: A Reconsideration*, 49 AM. SOC. REV. 526, 537-38 (1984).

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., SASKIA SASSEN-KOOB, THE MOBILITY OF LABOR AND CAPITAL: A STUDY IN INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT AND LABOR FLOW 17-24 (1988); John D. Kasarda, *The Severely Distressed in Economically Transforming Cities*, in DRUGS, CRIME AND SOCIAL ISOLATION: BARRIERS TO URBAN OPPORTUNITY, *supra* note 21 at 65-74; Paul E. Peterson, *The Urban Underclass and the Poverty Paradox*, in THE URBAN UNDERCLASS, *supra* note 21, at 3, 15-25; Wallace & Wallace, *supra* note 3, at 13, 13-18. Cf. ALEJANDRO PORTES, THE NEW SECOND GENERATION 5 (1996).

Central and South America and the Pacific Rim.<sup>28</sup> Most of the loss of manufacturing jobs and the subsequent increase of inner city poverty was concentrated in four Northern "frostbelt" cities: New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and Detroit.<sup>29</sup> Kasarda notes that "between 1967 and 1987, Chicago lost 60 percent of its manufacturing jobs, Detroit 51%, New York City 58%, and Philadelphia 64%."<sup>30</sup> The conjoined effect of these structural forces over three decades had affected the availability of housing, real estate values, and money flows, producing the neighborhood contexts for the sorts of drug-using and drug-selling markets found in inner-city neighborhoods, each of which was accompanied by a different set of psychosocial outcomes.<sup>31</sup> These studies demonstrated that the destructive behavior of inner-city residents did not simply result from their use of illegal drugs, but originated in social-structural conditions.

Explanations which draw attention to the structural conditions underlying urban decay are an important corrective to those which interpret the problem as one of "deviant" norms, attitudes, or lifestyles, but a macrostructural perspective suffers from at least two weaknesses: (1) it has difficulty accounting for neighborhood variation, and (2) people are afforded little agency in such formulations; they are seen as simply reacting in predictable ways to their misfortunes.<sup>32</sup> With the exception of neighborhoods that are gentrifying,<sup>33</sup> the structuralist's portrayal of the conditions that serve to undermine inner-city life is unflinchingly bleak, and the expectation is that social conditions

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<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Kasarda, *supra* note 27, at 71; LESTER C. THUROW, *THE FUTURE OF CAPITALISM: HOW TODAY'S ECONOMIC FORCES SHAPE TOMORROW'S WORLD* 124-25, 194-210 (1996); ROBERT J.S. ROSS & KENT TRACHTE, *GLOBAL CAPITALISM: THE NEW LEVIATHAN* 91-92 (1990).

<sup>29</sup> Harrell & Peterson, *supra* note 21, at 5.

<sup>30</sup> Kasarda, *supra* note 27, at 71.

<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey Fagan, *Drug Selling and Licit Income in Distressed Neighborhoods: The Economic Lives of Street-Level Drug Users and Dealers*, in *DRUGS, CRIME AND SOCIAL ISOLATION: BARRIERS TO URBAN OPPORTUNITY*, *supra* note 21, at 99, 103; cf. SULLIVAN, *supra* note 15, at 214-15.

<sup>32</sup> J. David Greenstone, *Culture, Rationality, and the Underclass*, in *THE URBAN UNDERCLASS*, *supra* note 21, at 399, 403.

<sup>33</sup> See generally Peter Marcuse, *Abandonment, Gentrification, and Displacement: The Linkages in New York City*, in *GENTRIFICATION OF THE CITY* 153 (Neil Smith & Peter Williams, eds. 1986).

will follow suit. To adherents of this school of thought, the current drop in crime and drug use defies the logic of their model; they cannot adequately explain it. And yet, crime and hard drug use continued to decline, and, as of the end of 1997, had not bottomed out.<sup>34</sup>

#### IV. NORTHEAST BROOKLYN IN TRANSITION

In the early 1960s, many New York City neighborhoods experienced a radical transformation which originated in the period's restructuring of global, national, and regional socio-economic arrangements.<sup>35</sup> Neighborhoods which had once been populated by European-Americans were rapidly evacuated and repopulated by migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, where U.S.-directed development programs had transformed indigenous economies, causing malintegration between economic sectors, unemployment, and new waves of migration.<sup>36</sup> But as European-Americans deserted the city, over 500,000 manufacturing jobs also fled the city, and as the city's tax base shrank, expenditure on public services was sharply reduced.<sup>37</sup> Although a few large manufacturers remained, the typical poor-neighborhood company in the 1980s and 1990s intermittently employed workers in non-union, low-skill, low-wage, and high-risk jobs. The economy had stopped guaranteeing economic prosperity and security and instead offered high unemployment and underemployment. Thus, a significant proportion of new immigrants arriving in U.S. cities were trapped in steadily deteriorating neighborhoods by unemployment and the lack of low-income housing.

<sup>34</sup> Fox Butterfield, *Reason for Dramatic Drop in Crime Puzzles the Experts*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 29, 1998, at 16.

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., DAVID W. MCCULLOUGH, *BROOKLYN—AND HOW IT GOT THAT WAY* 217-19 (1983); ROSS & TRACHTE, *supra* note 28, at 157-69; cf. HARRY BRAVERMAN, *LABOR AND MONOPOLY CAPITAL: THE DEGRADATION OF WORK IN THE 20TH CENTURY* 24-39 (1974).

<sup>36</sup> See, e.g., Joanne Koslofsky, *Migration's Motor: Postwar Modernization*, in *DRUGS AND DRUG ABUSE: A READER* 151, 152 (Ansley Hamid ed. 1990); Saskia Sassen-Koob, *New York City's Informal Economy*, in *THE INFORMAL ECONOMY: STUDIES IN ADVANCED AND LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES* 60, 60-62 (Alejandro Portes et al. eds. 1989).

<sup>37</sup> Kasarda, *supra* note 27 at 72; John H. Mollenkopf & Manuel Castells, *Introduction to DUAL CITY: RESTRUCTURING NEW YORK* 3, 6-8 (John H. Mollenkopf & Manuel Castells, eds. 1991).

The changes which took place in northeast Brooklyn were, in many ways, typical of what happened elsewhere. In Williamsburg, reform, conservative, and orthodox Jews fled to the suburbs beginning in the late 1950s, abandoning apartment buildings on the Southside of the neighborhood.<sup>38</sup> The Italians on the Northside entrenched themselves, fiercely clinging to neighborhood traditions.<sup>39</sup> Bushwick, an adjacent neighborhood to the southeast, emptied out in a rash of arson-related house fires as homeowners who could not sell attempted to collect insurance monies instead. Where there were once bustling, viable neighborhoods which thrived on stable manufacturing jobs nearby, there were now shuttered factories and block after block of abandoned buildings and empty lots.<sup>40</sup> The section had become an urban wasteland whose charred, derelict landscape was matched by a frontier mentality where confrontation and violence were commonly used to impose order and resolve disputes.<sup>41</sup>

The high turnover of tenants and homeowners weakened voluntary associations, if they were not completely discontinued. Disinvestment in schools and community depleted PTAs, clubs, church groups, and grassroots political groupings. The informal controls which defined and protected neighborhoods were thus slackened, opening the door for organized drug distribu-

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<sup>38</sup> Thomas W. Ennis, *Brooklyn Walkups Rehabilitated*, N. Y. TIMES, Sept. 22, 1965, at 39.

<sup>39</sup> Guy Trebay, *The Giglio*, THE NEW YORKER, June 4, 1990, at 78, 87; Richard Curtis & Lisa Maher, *The Origin of Highly Structured Crack Markets on the Southside of Williamsburg, Brooklyn* 8 (1995) (Unpublished manuscript prepared for publication under contract with the Social Science Research Council and the Guggenheim Foundation Working Group on the Ecology of Crime and Drugs, on file with *The Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*).

<sup>40</sup> Martin Gottlieb, *In Bushwick, A Project Called Hope*, N.Y. TIMES, August 15, 1993, at 35; Pamela Newkirk & Manuel Perez-Rivas, *Fire in Their Eyes, Decay Gives Way to Despair*, N.Y. NEWSDAY, July 12, 1992, at 6; Alan S. Oser, *The Quest for Shops Below Bushwick El*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 27, 1994, at E7.

<sup>41</sup> James C. McKinley, Jr., *Friendships and Fear Undermine a Will to Fight Drugs in Brooklyn*, N.Y. TIMES, Sept. 18, 1989, at B1; Mary B.W. Tabor, *The World of a Drug Bazaar, Where Hope Has Burned Out*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 1, 1992, at A1; Mary B.W. Tabor, *Where the Drug Culture Rules, Neighborhood Symbolizing City, State, and National Failure*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 2, 1992, at B1.

tion and a steadily increasing crime rate.<sup>42</sup> The former wife of a Puerto Rican drug distributor in Williamsburg described how, even by the 1960s, their neighborhood lacked structure and how the absence of formal organization among neighborhood residents was partially compensated for by the existence of family-based drug distribution networks:

We never had any block associations. No, not in this neighborhood. This neighborhood wasn't together. One reason, I think, is because a lot of these people had a son or somebody bringing in some type of [illegally earned] money. Even grandmothers used to be lookouts. Whole families used to be into selling drugs. Yeah, from the 70s on; when they started selling drugs in the streets, they needed lookouts. It was like a family affair.<sup>43</sup>

These nascent organizations acted as springboards to political and/or economic power within the neighborhood. For newly arriving minority youths, aside from family connections, there were few enduring community ties to which they pledged loyalty. Lacking significant economic opportunity and entering an urban terrain where neighborhood conditions and controls were crumbling, many newcomers found themselves pulled into the orbit of drugs as distributors and/or users.<sup>44</sup> Drugs and the "fast" money circulating in drug markets proved more attractive to them than the seemingly bankrupt ideas of previous generations which believed it possible to climb the ladder to economic success and achieve the American dream through hard work.

#### A. DRUG MARKETS IN NORTHEAST BROOKLYN

An enduring theme of illegal drugs in New York City is that although distribution has been vertically organized since the prohibition of alcohol, control over it has shifted from one ethnic population to another. In northeast Brooklyn, Puerto Rican freelance distributors and family businesses filled the vacuum

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<sup>42</sup> See Curtis & Maher, *supra* note 39, at 16-19; Wallace & Wallace, *supra* note 3, at 14-15.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Carmela, conducted at the CAPOD Research storefront, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, N.Y. (Aug. 14, 1988).

<sup>44</sup> Edward Preble & John J. Casey Jr., *Taking Care of Business: The Heroin User's Life on the Street*, 4 INT'L J. ADDICTIONS 1, 4-5 (1969); Curtis & Maher, *supra* note 39, at 35.

left by the withdrawal of Italian retailers in the early 1960s. As the popularity of heroin skyrocketed in the mid 1960s, they quickly cornered street-level sales in many neighborhoods and their incipient organizations grew in size and complexity.<sup>45</sup> When the heroin epidemic ended in the 1970s, just a few Puerto Rican "owners" had consolidated the market and formed monolithic enterprises which tightly integrated wholesale, mid-level, and street-level markets. Located in selected Latino neighborhoods, these businesses remained an exclusively Puerto Rican enterprise. In Williamsburg, five Puerto Rican "owners" employed a street-level staff of exclusively Puerto Ricans.<sup>46</sup>

When the popularity of crack skyrocketed in New York City in the mid-1980s, the owners of heroin and cocaine businesses in Williamsburg resisted adding crack to their menus despite increasing numbers of customers who were asking for it, and only grudgingly allowed fledgling (Dominican) crack distributors to operate on the edge of their turfs.<sup>47</sup> Even though crack eventually made inroads into Williamsburg in the late 1980s, the antipathy which heroin and cocaine distributors, shooting gallery operators and drug injectors held toward crack users initially kept the crack scene on the neighborhood fringe. But by passing up the opportunity to diversify their tightly controlled market, the owners of drug businesses in Williamsburg emboldened competitors who eventually usurped Puerto Rican dominance over the market.

Throughout the 1970s and most of the 1980s, Bushwick was a second-tier drug market compared to Williamsburg. Located immediately southeast of the latter and further into Brooklyn, Bushwick is more isolated and inconvenient for drug users from outside the neighborhood to reach via car or public transportation. In Bushwick, territory was much less rigidly controlled than in Williamsburg, and crack, cocaine and heroin distributors, many of them newly arrived Dominicans, were able to

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<sup>45</sup> See Randy Young Paul, *Where the Drugs Are*, SOHO WEEKLY NEWS, Oct. 7, 1976, at 4; Curtis & Maher, *supra* note 39 at 29-33; see generally Preble & Casey, *supra* note 44, at 8-14 (explaining the complexity of heroin distribution in New York City).

<sup>46</sup> Curtis & Maher, *supra* note 39, at 38-39.

<sup>47</sup> *Id.* at 47.



make significant inroads into the neighborhood in the late 1980s.<sup>48</sup> By 1988, fueled by aggressive crack sales and offering an entire range of street-level drugs to consumers, drug markets in Bushwick began to rival those in Williamsburg.<sup>49</sup> Still, their location was bad and many drug users continued to utilize Bushwick as a secondary market, a place they would go only when drugs could not be found elsewhere. But if Bushwick's location was inconvenient, Williamsburg's was good, too good. In the mid-1980s, gentrification in lower Manhattan began to drive many young artists and professionals to the outer boroughs and Williamsburg became an increasingly attractive option to many of them.<sup>50</sup> A housing shortage in Williamsburg, which was already bad given rapidly expanding Latino and Hasidic communities,<sup>51</sup> was thus exacerbated by an influx of Manhattanites. Suddenly, buildings which had been abandoned since the early 1970s and were the sites of shooting galleries and hideouts for drug dealers were valuable property. They were sealed up, cleaned up, and completely transformed within the space of a few years. Many factory buildings near the waterfront, especially those with a view of Manhattan, were turned into lofts and sold for handsome profits. Apartment buildings were rehabilitated and rented out to local low- and middle-income families who waged spirited battles to gain entry.

For Bushwick, the citywide blackout of August 1977, when many businesses and homes were burned, represented a low point. Throughout the 1980s, like Williamsburg, Bushwick too began to experience renewal, though much more modest in scope.<sup>52</sup> Small industries reclaimed many vacant factories and New York City, in partnership with landlords, slowly began to

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<sup>48</sup> See Lisa Maher & Richard Curtis, *In Search of the Female Gangsta*, in *THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AND WOMEN: OFFENDERS, VICTIMS, AND WORKERS* 147, 154-55 (Barbara Raffel Price & Natalie J. Sokoloff eds., 1982).

<sup>49</sup> *Id.* at 155.

<sup>50</sup> Lisa W. Foderaro, *A Metamorphosis for Old Williamsburg*, *N.Y. TIMES*, July 19, 1987.

<sup>51</sup> See Martin Gansberg, *Williamsburg Violence Reflects Tension in Area*, *N.Y. TIMES*, June 30, 1970, at 45; Margot Hornblower, *Cultures Clash*, *LIBERTY*, Mar./Apr. 1988, at 23, 23-25; Edmund Newton, *Tension in Williamsburg—Housing for Whom?*, *N.Y. DAILY POST MAG.*, Dec. 22, 1976, at 27.

<sup>52</sup> Oser, *supra* note 40, at E7.

rehabilitate some of the apartment buildings which had gone untended for many years. But when Williamsburg began to gentrify and the Tactical Narcotics Team cracked down on street-level drug markets there, the drug markets were displaced to Bushwick.<sup>53</sup> Robert, a forty-one-year-old African-American from Newark, NJ, discussed his reasons for coming to Bushwick in 1990:

I started copping at Alphabet City [Manhattan's Lower East Side]. When [Operation] Pressure Point started [in 1983-84], the boys told me things had moved over to Williamsburg, South Second Street. Then they cracked down over there and unless you actually know someone or something like that, because of the new housing, the place is virtually cleaned except for a few bodegas up and down Broadway that you can buy cocaine from, and stuff like that. So then that whole scene closed down and I started coming down here.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, the modest recovery mounted by Bushwick was promptly stalled by a steady increase in the amount of street-level crack, heroin, and cocaine trafficking which drew participants from throughout the New York metropolitan area.<sup>55</sup> By 1990, a street-level drug "supermarket" had formed in the northern tier of Bushwick and within a four block area, more than two dozen different "stamps" of heroin were aggressively hawked by street-level sellers who called out the name of their product like Coney Island carnival barkers. Between February 1991 and May 1992, the number of distributors and users at the largest street-level market in Bushwick doubled.<sup>56</sup>

The police, and Tactical Narcotics Teams (TNT) in particular, enjoyed a great benefit from the contraction and concentration of street-level cocaine (crack) markets throughout New York City. They were able to focus their efforts on fewer pre-

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<sup>53</sup> Richard Curtis & Michelle Sviridoff, *The Social Organization of Street-Level Drug Markets and Its Impact on the Displacement Effect*, in CRIME DISPLACEMENT: THE OTHER SIDE OF PREVENTION 155, 160 (Robert P. McNamara ed., 1994).

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Robert, a heroin injector, conducted at the SFHR research storefront (May 31, 1991).

<sup>55</sup> Richard Curtis et al., *Street Level Drug Markets: Network Structure and HIV Risk*, 17 SOC. NETWORKS 229, 231-32 (1995).

<sup>56</sup> *Id.* at 231.

cincts and still maintain the same high number of arrests (about 400 per month per unit) previously achieved within a much larger geographical area. For example, over 8,200 persons were arrested between 1988 and 1992 in Bushwick alone. A common joke was that Rikers Island, the city jail, had turned into "a Bushwick block party"<sup>57</sup> where young women and children sat in the waiting room exchanging gossip about recent arrests, sentences received, and mounting family pressures, while young men gathered on the other side of the bars in anticipation of visits by family and friends.

The citywide conversion of more decentralized drug markets into a few supermarkets in Bushwick, East Harlem, and a few other neighborhoods also precipitated greater tumult. Drug distributors have long commanded attention<sup>58</sup> for their unprecedented levels of and novel approaches to violence, including the infamous "Colombian necktie," the use of boxcutters to slash faces, and their promotion of the 9mm pistol to the status of cultural icon. Goldstein has noted that "systemic" violence accounts for the lion's share of incidents related to illegal drugs,<sup>59</sup> and nowhere was that more apparent than in Bushwick. While some markets earned reputations for controlling violence (e.g., Hamid's marijuana distributors<sup>60</sup> and Williams' crack dealers<sup>61</sup>), distributors in Bushwick employed it regularly and systematically.<sup>62</sup> There, large corporate-like organizations effected

<sup>57</sup> Richard Curtis & Ansley Hamid, *Neighborhood Violence in New York City and Indigent Attempts to Contain It: The Mediating Role of the Third Crown (Sgt. at Arms) of the Latin Kings*, in INTEGRATING CULTURAL, OBSERVATIONAL, AND EPIDEMIOLOGICAL APPROACHES IN THE PREVENTION OF DRUG ABUSE AND HIV/AIDS: CURRENT STATUS AND PROSPECTS (National Institute on Drug Abuse ed., forthcoming 1999) (manuscript at 5, on file with *The Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*).

<sup>58</sup> See Paul J. Goldstein, *The Drugs/Violence Nexus: A Tripartite Conceptual Framework*, 15 J. DRUG ISSUES 493, 497-502 (1985); see generally Ansley Hamid, *From Ganja to Crack: Caribbean Participation in the Underground Economy in Brooklyn, 1976-1986, Part 2: Establishment of the Cocaine (and Crack) Economy*, 26 INT'L J. ADDICTIONS 729 (1991).

<sup>59</sup> Goldstein, *supra* note 58, at 503.

<sup>60</sup> Hamid, *supra* note 57, at 729.

<sup>61</sup> WILLIAMS, *supra* note 15, at 14-16.

<sup>62</sup> See MAHER, *supra* note 13 at 94-95; Lisa Maher & Richard Curtis, *Women on the Edge of Crime: Crack Cocaine and the Changing Contexts of Street-Level Sex Work in New York City*, 18 CRIME L. & SOC. CHANGE 221, 221-51 (1992); Curtis & Maher, *supra* note 39, at 48-50.

street-level drug sales, and since institutional and neighborhood-level restraints had already vanished, they completely disregarded the sensibilities of residents in doing so. They also undermined the prosperity of the community which hosted them, just as their counterparts in the formal economy had done. While their sole benefit consisted of low-level, dead-end jobs for youths, the damages included plummeting property values, a greater incidence of drug misuse, and high rates of incarceration and AIDS. But their most crippling legacy was violence. As one college student from the neighborhood wrote in 1991, "Nights here are like the Fourth of July, but all year round. There are always guns being fired."<sup>63</sup> Another noted that there were few public places that were safe any longer:

It was the summer of 1989 and I was together with my best friend from high school, Julio, and we were going to the park to play some ball and catch up on old times. All of a sudden we heard gun shots from an Uzi machine gun. I yelled, "get down," and took cover behind a tree. My friend, on the other hand, panicked and ran. I couldn't believe that I was witnessing an actual drug war over territory in my neighborhood. I was shocked and amazed. I wondered where and how my friend was doing. I looked and saw him lying on the ground, bleeding from his left leg. The whole thing must have lasted only a few minutes, but it seemed like forever. Today, I can no longer go to the park where I used to run track and field for fear of such episodes. I either drive to another track or just run through the neighborhood in the early morning, which can also be dangerous.<sup>64</sup>

## B. CORPORATE DISTRIBUTORS AND THE LEGACY OF VIOLENCE

By 1992, one Puerto Rican and three Dominican "owners" ruled over crack distribution at the northern end of Bushwick. Each had a trademark, or the color of the "tops" of the crack vials they sold: white, blue, brown and pink. Dominican families monitored the day to day operations of the largest three. Younger family members and close non-kin "associates" directed street sales, while older family members, entirely removed from

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<sup>63</sup> Jose (Nov. 1991) (unpublished manuscripts, on file with author).

<sup>64</sup> Orlando (Nov. 1991) (unpublished manuscript, on file with author); [Editor's note: Both authors were students at John Jay College, who were writing about drugs in their neighborhoods, which for each was Bushwick, New York. Professor Curtis promised both students anonymity in their papers.]

the street scene, were the "executives." When there were not enough family members, owners employed persons who shared a similar background. The practice earned them the resentment of street-level workers, particularly among the Puerto Ricans who had controlled distribution throughout the 1970s and early 1980s (and had similar policies), but were later toppled by the Dominicans in the late 1980s. The rivalry which had long existed between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in New York City was thus sharpened in the drug business:

The Puerto Ricans and Dominicans are pretty separate. They got their own clubs, you know, their own crew. Some of them socialize, you know . . . people that are not in the drug business. They might work together in the same factory, same jobs. Some I could say they're tight. But when it comes to the drug business, they're not tight, you know. There's no trust whatsoever, you know; and it's always remorse and always backbitin' and they're always tryin' to get over on each other.<sup>65</sup>

The supply of eligible Latino street-level dealers was depleted by arrests resulting from the war on drugs. African-Americans, European-Americans and heavy drug users, who were marginalized and victimized even more severely by these organizations, replaced them.<sup>66</sup> The gulf separating management from labor widened and their already contentious and adversarial relationships turned even more distrustful and violence-prone. Resenting their harsh and dangerous conditions of labor, and the disrespect their managers showed, many street-level sellers took every opportunity to abscond with the drugs. They fully expected physical punishment for the transgression.

I haven't been down here recently because well, 'cause I ain't got they money yet. And the last guy I seen that had got busted, or jetted, or whatever, he came back months later and he didn't have the money, and I seen them bat him down. They broke his ribs, they broke his lungs.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with Henry, Puerto Rican heroin seller, at the SFHR storefront in Bushwick, N.Y. (Mar. 20, 1992).

<sup>66</sup> Maher & Curtis, *supra* note 62, at 156.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Doc, an African-American heroin seller, at the SFHR storefront in Bushwick, N.Y. (Mar. 26, 1992).

If they catch the people that are cuttin' out with their product they either make them work for nothing or they'll break their arm, or break their leg. Forget it, man. They hurt . . . they get a beating. They break their legs or an arm. But now if anyone hits you, they all hit you. They all hit you.<sup>68</sup>

While brute force, or the threat of it, is the ultimate means distributors have to enforce rules, a business is ruined when it invites police attention too frequently. Accordingly, sensible or successful distributors avoided or minimized its use. But Bushwick's corporate "owners" were reckless. Violent acts were more common in their markets because of the divisions and animosities that rigidly separated different levels of the organizations, because the owners did not live in the neighborhood and did not have to witness or confront the aftermath of their deeds, and because they could easily relocate supplies to outlets they maintained in other neighborhoods. Indeed, owners regularly encouraged their managers to use public displays of force as a way of intimidating customers, untrustworthy employees, and to send the message that they should not be crossed. For example, one owner hired an "enforcer" who strolled around the neighborhood with a baseball bat on which he wrote the names of his targets. After punishing them, he rubbed off their names.

In the Bushwick of the early 1990s, "face to face" or "man to man" confrontations between individuals were replaced by humiliating group beatings, or "beatdowns." Their unrestrained brutality affected local adolescents, who were its daily witnesses. Sometimes they too participated gratuitously in beatdowns and other bloody episodes in which they had no stake. They simply saw someone being chased and, with malicious smiles on their faces, picked up their baseball bats or bicycle chains and joined the chase. For them, "fun" was no longer spraying graffiti, playing ball, or dancing, it was the number and severity of beatdowns they administered daily, and the beatdowns became so frequent that the sight of blood stopped being a cause for alarm to researchers and local residents alike:

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Jose, a Puerto Rican heroin seller, at the SFHR storefront in Bushwick, N.Y. (Jan. 21, 1992).

Looking out the storefront's picture window, I saw my old neighbor, George, this morning. He was all beaten up and his nose was all bloody. He said that some "dope fiends" had jumped him this morning and tried to take his money. I don't know whether this is true or not, but suspected that he might have been the one who tried to take someone's money. He came inside the storefront and wiped his face off with some paper towels. We hadn't seen him for several months, at least since New Year's. He said that today was the first time that he had come down here in a couple of months. So I asked him what he's selling out here today. He said he was going to be selling "brown tops" [crack]. Apparently, brown tops is an organization where somebody can just show up on their door step all beaten up and say, "yo, I want to sell for you today," and they will put him out there on the street, bloody nose and all.<sup>69</sup>

Drug supermarkets made these atrocities an unremarkable commonplace feature of everyday life. While police operations which target street-level drug markets may anticipate the use of force as people resist being arrested or during their attempts to flee, some members of the New York City Police Department were innovative, and conceived many unusual applications which deeply alienated neighborhood residents. For example, when "sweeping" the main drug selling areas, the officers would cordon off both ends of a street and require everyone in between to lie down, regardless of who they were. While this tactic sometimes yielded a handsome number of arrests, it also obliged elderly grandmothers and young children to grovel on the asphalt while being roughly searched—and it enraged many residents.

When the police could not find drug distributors to arrest, they went to well-known shooting galleries. But officers loathed going into them. They believed that too many hiding places lurked in the dark and sometimes labyrinthine constructions and that they were an obstacle course of discarded HIV-infected syringes. Instead, to flush the drug users out, some officers used to throw large rocks through the windows. They were caught in the act by a prize-winning reporter for the Los Angeles Times, who had been interviewing heroin injectors when the projectiles

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with George, conducted at the SFHR storefront in Bushwick, N.Y. (July 15, 1992).

whizzed by his head.<sup>70</sup> Drug users also showed the research team large welts across their torsos which officers had inflicted with whips of thick television cable as they fled the galleries.

In the summer, local police officers mercilessly and systematically harassed drug users who loitered near the major drug selling locales. Early in the morning when they had fallen asleep on the sidewalk, foot patrol officers would routinely rouse them with kicks and order them to move. Sometimes the kick simply nudged the unfortunate awake, at other times it was meant to cause pain. So habituated were they to the past-time that the police officers continued it even when video cameras were brought to photograph them. They also responded with an overwhelming show of force at almost any infraction by a drug user, dealer, or passerby.

A young Latino, about 25 or 30 years old and weighing about 120 pounds, was being arrested by two officers. They had him in a choke hold and he started bleeding through his nose. I informed the police officer that the guy was bleeding through his nose and he couldn't breathe. His reaction to me was, "hey, I can't breathe either." As the crowd got bigger, they started to notice the guy was bleeding through his nose, and people were saying things [addressing insults] to the cop. He sent some sort of message into his walkie-talkie, and within 30 seconds there were dozens of cops on the corner. They were all there to arrest one guy who apparently had attempted to steal a bicycle. It just looked ridiculous, but the situation could have easily gotten out of control.<sup>71</sup>

By late summer 1992, the populace was close to insurrection and television and newspaper crews came to interview unruly crowds who were protesting the mounting number of police shootings and beatings of youths.<sup>72</sup> Police had responded in full riot gear, and other residents had pelted them from the rooftops with bottles, debris, and hateful epithets. Apparently thinking that beleaguered drug distributors were fomenting the neighborhood's growing hostility towards them, and immediately following a sensationalizing article in the New York

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<sup>70</sup> Barry Bearak, *A Room for Heroin and HIV*, L.A. TIMES, Sept. 28, 1992, at A1.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Pablo, at the SFHR storefront in Bushwick, N.Y. (July 24, 1991).

<sup>72</sup> Pamela Newkirk & Wendell Jamieson, *Street of Fury: Shooting Riles Brooklyn Crowd*, N.Y. NEWSDAY, May 24, 1992, at 3.



Times,<sup>73</sup> the police mounted yet another major offensive against street-level drug markets in September, 1992.<sup>74</sup> They stationed a mobile trailer in a nearby park to serve as the base of operations for more than 300 additional uniformed officers. These were positioned around the park and on each corner of drug "hot spots." Mounted police trotted by to discourage trafficking or "loitering." Officers stopped and questioned all pedestrians and asked for their identification and destination. Non-residents were told to stay out. The heaviest drug trafficking streets were sealed with wooden barricades and police vans, and traffic was diverted to other streets. When evening came, they drove in large flatbed trucks with gas-powered generators and klieg lights which, parked at strategic corners, illuminated entire blocks. Police painted the street numbers of buildings on rooftops to enable helicopters to give additional support to officers pursuing suspects on foot. For the next 18 months, Bushwick was virtually occupied by a small army of police.

#### V. GROWING UP IN THE 1990s: VIOLENCE, CRIME AND DRUGS

For Bushwick youth, it would not have been unreasonable to expect that rates of crime and violence would continue to increase throughout the 1990s, and that it was only a matter of time before a new breed of superpredators made their ominous presence felt. Much evidence seemed to suggest that the dominant models of urban decay and worsening youth violence were correct. Many youth had grown up in dysfunctional multi-problem families, without positive role models, and were left unchecked by the informal controls which had defined and protected previous generations. The lack of structure worsened as youth turned into adolescents. There was typically a diffusion of responsibility for social control shifting away from parents and onto societal institutions, especially schools. In Bushwick, these societal checks had been largely missing and young adults had to forge their own solutions to problems.

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<sup>73</sup> Tabor, *supra* note 41.

<sup>74</sup> See Curtis & Hamid, *supra* note 57, at 17-19.

The daily occurrences of violence and crime etched deep furrows on the bodies and psyches of Bushwick youth. A representative household sample of Bushwick youth aged eighteen to twenty-one conducted in 1994-95 noted the pervasiveness of violence:

Violence has been an important part of their lives: approximately 10% report having been physically abused by a police officer, 30% have been threatened or stabbed with a knife, 27% have been caught in a random shoot-out, 22% have been threatened or shot at with a gun, 33% have been mugged or robbed with a threat of violence, and 14% of the women and 5% of the men report having been sexually abused. Over half (51%) report having carried a weapon such as a knife, club or gun.<sup>75</sup>

But rather than becoming superpredators as an outcome of this exposure, many youth withdrew from social life, afraid of lingering in public spaces for fear of violence. Violence had become so commonplace that they often listened in near disbelief to stories about when fighting was fair, and done for reasons that were righteous or virtuous. Walter (seventeen years old when interviewed in 1993) discussed his reasons for avoiding spending time on the street:

Like the stories I heard about when my uncles were growing up: if there was a problem between two gangs, those two gangs would kill each other. It's not like that anymore. They try to hit you . . . if there's ten people there, they're just gonna come and spray the whole block and whoever gets caught gets caught. They're not even aiming at you, they're just . . . that's the crowd, he's in there somewhere, let's knock everybody. It's crazy. And they don't care if there's children, older people. They don't even respect cops anymore. They don't respect anybody.<sup>76</sup>

Many youth who were interviewed between 1993 and 1995 said that they were so fearful of random and/or police violence that they no longer spent much time in parks, playgrounds, stoops, or the other places where youths had traditionally "hung

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<sup>75</sup> Samuel R. Friedman et al., *Adolescents and HIV Risk Due to Drug Injection or Sex with Drug Injectors in the United States*, in *AIDS AND ADOLESCENTS* 107, 120 (Lorraine Sherr ed., 1997).

<sup>76</sup> Focus group with three teens from Bushwick, conducted at Intermediate School After School Program (Dec. 13, 1993).

out.” Indeed, the question, “where do you hang out?” seemed to offend them. When pushed to explain, one former cocaine and heroin dealer on Fishman Street who had renounced his violent past and tried to distance himself from peers who continued to commit crimes and sell drugs for corporate owners, said that hanging out was for “hoodlums.” Harv (nineteen years old when first interviewed in 1993):

What makes one a hoodlum? It’s a kid who runs around doing stupid, ignorant things, like hanging out late at night, getting drunk, startin’ fights, wanna do crime, steal...that’s a hoodlum. Somebody who’s always in the streets and he’s very streetwise. It’s someone who does vandalism like shooting in the air or breaking bottles in the street.<sup>77</sup>

Javier (sixteen years old when first interviewed in 1993) grudgingly admitted that he sometimes spent time with age-mates who were involved with drugs, violence, and crime, but he preferred to avoid them in favor of a more mature crowd.

Some of the people I grew up with are getting killed, like about ten of them got killed. For me, I think I grew up ahead of time. I’m more of an adult than anything else. OK, I hang out. I chill out now and then with the young guys, but it’s rare. Most of the time, during the week you find me with people like thirty, mid thirties, forty years old and I’m chilling with them. I feel safer, you know. I don’t have to deal with what’s going on in the street. Once in a while I’ll hang out with one of the fellas I grew up with. Maybe if I bump into him. Like if I’m walking down the street, and I haven’t seen him for a while or I’d see what he was doing and I was avoiding him. Maybe I’d hang with him for a couple of minutes, or at the most for an hour. But then, you try and draw back, ‘cause you don’t want to get caught up in what he’s doing especially if the police are looking for him.<sup>78</sup>

Violence and crime did not disappear overnight or entirely from the lives of this generation of youth, but in moving away from exposure to high-risk settings and the performance of violent acts in public spheres, the intimate contexts of private, and especially family, life became the arena where violent episodes

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<sup>77</sup> Focus group with four street level drug distributors, conducted at doctor’s office, Bushwick Ave. (Nov. 18, 1993).

<sup>78</sup> Focus group with three teens from Bushwick, conducted at an Intermediate School After School Program (Dec. 13, 1993).

found their expression. In the mid 1990s, social service providers throughout Bushwick reported significant increases in the amount of domestic violence cases that had gone, for the most part, unreported to the police and which there were precious few community resources to handle. The director of one social service program said that between 1995 and 1997, the number of phone calls, referrals, and cases of domestic violence they handled more than doubled, compelling the agency to hire a social worker who handled only such cases.<sup>79</sup>

Many youth had intimate experience with the variety of problems that afflicted their elders as an outcome of involvement with cocaine, crack, or heroin, and they made a conscious attempt to avoid similar fates. Bubbler (seventeen years old in 1996), for example, had witnessed his mother's despair after two older, heroin-using brothers who worked for the corporate owners on Fishman Street became casualties of the war on drugs and were sentenced to lengthy prison terms. Bubbler smoked only marijuana, and though he had intermittently sold crack in his middle-teens, by seventeen, he had stopped selling, moved in with his girlfriend, attended high school regularly, and sought legitimate employment.

The impact of parental drug misuse on family life was deeply felt by many young Bushwick residents, often narrowing the parameters of their own drug use. Victoria (twenty-five years old in 1997) had extensive involvement with drug distributors and users as a child and a teenager, but she remained steadfastly abstinent, chastened by her mother's experience:

My mom used dope, crack and other drugs for many years. She used to make deliveries for big-time dealers. One guy was Puerto Rican and his partner was Colombian. Sometimes, she'd take dope and coke to Puerto Rico for them. They would strap the packages to her body. Somebody would come to the house and do it for her. She'd make these runs for them about once a month—to San Juan—and never got caught. I'm not sure how much money she made each time, but once, I know,

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<sup>79</sup> Personal communication with Jose Olmo, Director of Family Dynamics, at the DUHRAY research storefront (Nov. 15, 1997). Family Dynamics, located in Bushwick, provides a range of social services, particularly preventive services for families in the neighborhood.

she made \$15,000. She still sniffs and shoots dope . . . mostly shoots it. She's a client of ADAPT's needle exchange.<sup>80</sup>

Victoria never divulged whether her mother had contracted HIV from her many years of injecting, but Bushwick had one of the highest rates of HIV and AIDS in New York City<sup>81</sup>—double the rate of the city as a whole—and the threat of contracting the virus was never far from the minds of youth. Bolo, the owner of a crack business in the neighborhood,<sup>82</sup> shook his head in sorrow when talking about his mother's sister who lived next door, a forty-three year old drug injector and crack smoker who had been diagnosed with AIDS. Macho (born in 1978), an abstinent youth who occasionally sold crack to make money, talked about the impact of AIDS on his life:

My mom, who's dead now, grew up on Knickerbocker Avenue in Bushwick. She died last year [1996], on June 12th, of AIDS. My little sister's father gave it to her and she died 3 months after she was diagnosed with the disease. He had the virus and never said anything to her. Eventually, she began to wonder why she was getting sick all the time and when we found out the truth, she was shocked.<sup>83</sup>

Given the AIDS epidemic, a growing body count in the war on drugs, and the many adverse psychosocial outcomes that follow drug misuse, many African American youth throughout New York City began to avoid heroin and crack in the 1990s.<sup>84</sup> In Manhattan, for example, "the rate [of cocaine/crack use] among youthful arrestees went from 70% in 1988 down to 31% in 1991, where it remained through 1995. It declined further to 22% in 1996."<sup>85</sup> In place of hard drugs, they consumed only marijuana, and viewed even cigarettes and malt liquor, which

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Victoria, in her apartment, Bushwick, N.Y. (Feb. 16, 1997).

<sup>81</sup> Curtis et al., *supra* note 55, at 230-31.

<sup>82</sup> See *infra*, Part VII.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Macho, at friend's apartment on Stanhope Street, in Bushwick (Sept. 5, 1997).

<sup>84</sup> Ansley Hamid et al., *The Heroin Epidemic in New York City: Current Status and Prognoses*, 29 J. PSYCHOACTIVE DRUGS 375, 378 (1997).

<sup>85</sup> ANDREW L. GOLUB & BRUCE D. JOHNSON, CRACK'S DECLINE: SOME SURPRISES ACROSS U.S. CITIES. NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE: RESEARCH IN BRIEF 6 (July 1997).

had been aggressively marketed in their neighborhoods,<sup>86</sup> with disfavor. This generation of youth put tremendous pressure on their age mates to eschew stigmatized substances. "You don't get no respect [if you use drugs]. See, the in-thing is the weed or drinking, but if you start messing with the dope, that's bad, you're a crackhead now."<sup>87</sup>

Bushwick youth were nearly unanimous in their opinion that their peers would not be proud of using heroin or crack. When asked where people their age might be using heroin or crack, one said, "Hiding somewhere on the down low. Probably in the bathroom. Only the oldtimers do those things where others can see them."<sup>88</sup> Another said that he knew only one peer who used heroin or cocaine:

The reason I found out [a friend was using drugs] was by accident. I'm walking in the back of the building in the dark and I just happened to . . . oops. But now, he has to keep it on the hush-hush, you know. Its not something that [he's] proud of.<sup>89</sup>

In a neighborhood which had become nearly resigned to the presence of brazen street-level drug markets, successive generations of youth who participated in them, and high rates of HIV/AIDS,<sup>90</sup> it initially came as a surprise when Friedman et al discovered that less than 3% of their sample of youth said that they had used heroin, only 9% said that they had ever used cocaine, and none were infected with HIV, syphilis, or HTLV-2.<sup>91</sup> After all, most models of adolescent development had suggested

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<sup>86</sup> See Michel Marriott, *For Minority Youths, 40 Ounces of Trouble*, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 16, 1993, at A1; Barry Meier, *Among Girls, Blacks Smoke Much Less*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 10, 1997, at A22.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Walter, during focus group at Intermediate School, in Bushwick (Dec. 13, 1993).

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Harv, focus group with four street level distributors, Bushwick (Nov. 18, 1993).

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Fila, focus group with four street level distributors, Bushwick (Nov. 18, 1993).

<sup>90</sup> Benny Jose, et al., *Syringe-Mediated Drug-Sharing (Backloading): A New Risk Factor for HIV Among Injecting Drug-Users*, 7 AIDS 1653, 1655-57 (1993).

<sup>91</sup> Samuel R. Friedman et al., *Sex, Drugs, and Infections Among Youth: Parenterally and Sexually Transmitted Diseases in a High-Risk Neighborhood*, 24 SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES 322, 323-24 (1997).

that inner-city youth were at progressively greater risk of drug abuse and contracting pathogens like HIV.<sup>92</sup> Even worse, models of the likely progression of the AIDS epidemic had predicted that the virus would increasingly spread via heterosexual contact—the province of sexually active youngsters.<sup>93</sup> But clearly, this generation was not using hard drugs at rates characteristic of earlier generations. Given the low rates of HIV and other markers of risk that were discovered, Friedman et al. concluded that their drug use and sexual networks overlapped little with those already infected.<sup>94</sup> Even the handful of young people we interviewed in Bushwick who admitted that they had used heroin confessed that they were terrified to try it. For example, Boo (born in 1971, interviewed in 1997) had sniffed heroin, but said that the drug had taken a terrible toll on her family and she was petrified of becoming addicted:

In '95, I tried dope for the first time. I was in my mom's house. I had recently moved back there after having broken up with an abusive boyfriend. Anyway, I was there and feeling achey. I have a bad hip from an accident long ago, and it was painning me on this day. A guy friend (he was around 29) said that he had something that would take the pain

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<sup>92</sup> See, e.g., Sevgi O. Aral et al., *Demographic and Societal Factors Influencing Risk Behaviors*, in RESEARCH ISSUES IN HUMAN BEHAVIOR AND SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES IN THE AIDS ERA 161, 162-64 (Judith N. Wasserheit et al. eds. 1991); Jonathan M. Ellen et al., *Socioeconomic Differences in Sexually Transmitted Disease Rates Among Black and White Adolescents*, 85 AM. J. PUB. HEALTH 1546, 1547 (1995); Robert T. Rolfs et al., *Risk Factors for Syphilis: Cocaine Use and Prostitution*, 80 AM. J. PUB. HEALTH 853, 855-56 (1990); cf. Denise B. Kandel & Kazuo Yamaguchi, *From Beer to Crack: Developmental Patterns of Drug Involvement*, 83 AM. J. PUB. HEALTH 853, 855-56 (1990).

<sup>93</sup> See Nancy J. Alexander, *Sexual Spread of HIV Infection*, 1 J. BRIT. FERTILITY SOC'Y 111, 111, *supplement to 11 HUM. REPROD.* (1996); Suzanne Bowler et al., *HIV and AIDS Among Adolescents in the United States: Increasing Risk in the 1990s*, 15 J. ADOLESCENCE 345, 347-48 (1992); Centers for Disease Control, U.S. Dep't of Health & Human Servs., *CDC Update: Trends in AIDS Incidence-United States, 1996*, 46 MORTALITY & MOBILITY WEEKLY REV. 861, 866 (1997); Helene D. Gayle & Lawrence J. D'Angelo, *Epidemiology of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome and Human Immunodeficiency Virus Infection in Adolescents*, 10 PEDIATRIC INFECTIOUS DISEASE J. 322, 322 (1991); Steven E. Keller et al., *HIV-Relevant Sexual Behavior Among a Healthy Inner-City Heterosexual Adolescent Population in an Endemic Area of HIV*, 12 J. ADOLESCENT HEALTH 44, 44 (1991); Janneke H. H. M. Van De Wijgert & Nancy S. Padian, *Heterosexual Transmission of HIV*, in AIDS AND THE HETEROSEXUAL POPULATION 1 (Lorraine Sherr, ed., 1993); Heather J. Walter et al., *Factors Associated with AIDS Risk Behaviors Among High School Students in an AIDS Epicenter*, 82 AM. J. PUB. HEALTH 528, 530-31 (1992).

<sup>94</sup> Friedman et al., *supra* note 75, at 119-20.

away. When he told me that it was dope, I didn't want to do it because I was afraid of becoming addicted and had seen what it did to some of my older brothers and sisters. But he talked me into it, saying that a little bit wouldn't get me addicted. I did a "two and two" [two sniffs up each nostril] and threw up all over the place.<sup>95</sup>

The widely reported drop in crack and other hard drug use among inner city youth in the 1990s<sup>96</sup> was, on one hand, an outcome of the natural progression of drug eras,<sup>97</sup> but changes in drug preferences coincided with and were deepened by more fundamental changes in youth culture. Where crack in the 1980s had emptied out the inner city and left neighborhoods and their residents looking like skeletons, the anti-crack/heroin generation of the 1990s sought to fill out their bodies. They visually displayed this attitude in the too-large designer clothing they wore, and through the language of "living large" where everything good was "phat" (fat) and "butter." Still, their style was very much muted, devoid of the garish clothing and gaudy accessories that characterized the crack-era "gangsta" persona.

## VI. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GANGS IN THE 1990s

Rather than fulfilling the prophecy of becoming addicted and remorseless "superpredators," the overwhelming majority of kids who grew up in Bushwick in the late 1980s and early 1990s responded to the multiple threats of violence, crime, AIDS and addiction—as most Americans would likely do—by withdrawing from the danger and opting for the relative safety of family, home, church, and other sheltering institutions which persevered during the most difficult years.<sup>98</sup> However, not all youths were scared into avoiding public spaces and hiding behind closed doors. As an unintended consequence of the war on drugs, gang life of a type never encountered before revived among a population of convicted drug distributors and users af-

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<sup>95</sup> Interview with Boo, at John Jay College (May 2, 1997).

<sup>96</sup> GOLUB & JOHNSON, *supra* note 85, at 3.

<sup>97</sup> See Ansley Hamid, *The Development Cycle of a Drug Epidemic: The Cocaine Smoking Epidemic of 1981-1991*, 24 J. PSYCHOACTIVE DRUGS 337, 345 (1992); Bruce D. Johnson et al., *Emerging Models of Crack Distribution*, in DRUGS CRIME AND SOCIAL POLICY 56-78 (Thomas M. Mieczkowski ed., 1992).

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Friedman et al., *supra* note 91, at 325.



ter a long dormancy. Following the massive police initiative that began in September 1992 in which hundreds of neighborhood youth were jailed, sizable chapters of the Latin Kings and Ñetas formed and asserted their control over some blocks, especially those where there had been large street-level drug markets and unchecked violence. Predominantly of Puerto Rican descent, they reported that they had experienced a genuine rebirth, and in attempting to reconstitute their lives, their new goal was to “uplift the Latino community.”<sup>99</sup> As former street-level drug workers who had suffered at the hands of their Dominican bosses and the police, they were disillusioned. Though they had long realized their limitations in American society, the sweeping arrests had also taught them the shallowness of the drug distribution organizations which had employed them but had ultimately harmed their families and neighborhoods. The Dominican “owners” did not bail them out of jail, hire lawyers, look after family, or compensate them for the time in prison. They remained indifferent to Puerto Rican sensibilities, although mainly Puerto Ricans suffered the brunt of the war on drugs.

During my time on Rikers Island, I was going to court. My bail was only \$5,000. My foster mother spoke to the [Dominican] owner and asked if he could bail me out. At that time, I had \$10,000 out there in the streets that different people owed me. He said, “well, whoever works for me and gets arrested has got to be a man. Do the crime, do the time.” That right there pissed me off. Eventually, I came home. I wanted to get even with this guy ‘cause he played me. All that time, I could have been at home. I could have fought the case outside. Five thousand dollars, you’re telling me that you couldn’t bail me out? I don’t want to hear that.<sup>100</sup>

For many former street-level drug distributors like Ariel, going to jail—Rikers Island—capped many years of frustration, victimization, and abuse. In jail, membership in the Latin Kings offered them repudiation of the past and redemption.

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<sup>99</sup> Curtis & Hamid, *supra* note 57, at 10.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Ariel, John Jay College (Feb. 28, 1996).

Before I was a King, I was a knucklehead. My temper got me kicked out of school. I used to fight a lot with teachers. I used to sell drugs a lot inside school. During my time on Rikers Island, I was in the position of changing myself: stop selling drugs. I started seeing the light more and wanted to follow a more spiritual path. It's not all about selling drugs anymore. It's not all about taking. It's all about giving back to the community. I took so much, now, it's time to give back. I want to stay in the young tribe to help my younger brothers, to let them know that gang banging is not the way of life. Believe me, I experienced it, I know it, I lived it, and it's time for another path. I tried that path and I failed. Now let me try this one.<sup>101</sup>

The Latin Kings solved many of the difficulties of young Puerto Rican men and women who were incarcerated. The most pressing problem was protection from other inmates. For a first-time arrestee, membership in an organization which applied blanket protection throughout the prison system was a blessing. It bestowed status and prestige, prevented victimization, and allowed disputes with other members to be arbitrated peacefully.

Gang membership was also advantageous on return to civilian life. Where many members' households were chaotic, the gang functioned as an alternative family which prescribed rules and justifications for behavior, thereby bringing order and structure into potentially unmanageable social and emotional situations. The gangs imposed organization, government, and order on marginalized individuals. To break the hold which drug distributors and their lifestyle had held on local youth for so long, the leadership provided realistic alternatives and a strong social support network. Clave, a leader of the Ñetas, spoke about the lure of drugs on local youth:

Like myself, I sold, I used. We recognize the difficulty that some people have had and what leads them to these things. So, before they go and fall, we go and pick them up as quick as possible. In order to help somebody, you've got to be more than concerned.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> *Id.*

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Clave, conducted in Maria Hernandez Park, Bushwick, N.Y. (Aug. 23, 1996).

Tapping into the overwhelming sense of chaos, powerlessness, and fear which had gripped neighborhood youth, Latin Kings and Ñetas projected an unabashedly Puerto Rican image and solution to the problem. The organizations became the rage among Bushwick youth in 1993-94 and membership soared, even among those who had not been front-line participants or victims of the war on drugs. Youth who did not embrace the Latino cause as feverently as Latin Kings and Ñetas still found themselves attracted to the nationalist symbolism and ideas that percolated through the neighborhood, especially those regarding the importance of family and community, and the long-term destructive effects of violence and drugs. Not coincidentally, the summer of 1993 marked the appearance of the Puerto Rican flag necklace (made from plastic beads) as the must-have clothing accessory among local youth throughout the city. Teaching youths a relatively safe passage through neighborhood mine fields, organizations like the Latin Kings and Ñetas may well have lowered the level of violence that might have existed in their absence. Paul, a leader of the Ñetas, explained how they kept members in check.

Whatever the problem is, I'll talk with them and after that they'll say, "you're right, it's not worth it" and they'll leave. And I feel like I've done my job, I've stopped a brother from making a wrong decision and probably end up hurting somebody and going to jail because he forgot for a moment that he's a Ñeta, that there's other ways to handle things. This is what we're taught. We're taught to avoid problems at all costs. If someone is going to hurt you, then you have a right to defend yourself. 'Cause that's all we are, we're just people like everybody else. But the way we fight is with our mouths. We talk our way out of situations. 'Cause that's not what we're about, we're about living in peace and harmony and improving our lives.<sup>103</sup>

In these forms of grass roots socio-cultural and political organizing, lower class/"underclass" youths adapted progressively and more or less composedly to pressures of adolescent development, alterations of family structure and in legal/illegal labor

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<sup>103</sup> Interview with Paul, conducted in Bushwick, N.Y. (May 27, 1995).

markets.<sup>104</sup> Latin Kings and Ñetas set new standards of behavior for many neighborhood youth, but with swarms of adolescents clamoring for entry, the organizations had become too popular and unwieldy, and in 1995, they took steps to limit membership.

Ñetas became very popular out here a few years ago and a lot of young people joined at that time. But a lot of them got taken out of the association because they were too young. Others got taken out because they weren't up to our standards. There's still great interest in the community in becoming a Ñeta. A lot of people want to join. Every day, about 10 or 20 people ask me about it. We deny a lot of people entry. Because first we have to find out about them. We first find out where they live, we go and investigate, we watch them, we see the things that they do, we see if they go to school. If they're young, they've got to go to school. We don't accept any youth who's not in school. If they're not in school, they've got to get into school. Just like an adult, you've got to work. You have to do something. Because if he's not doing it, we know that sooner or later he's going to be fucking up. And he's going to be getting into drug selling or whatever. If a member loses his job and become unemployed, we help him look for a job. We're all over the place, so usually we bump into opportunities, job openings and stuff like that.<sup>105</sup>

Despite the stated goals of Latin Kings and Ñetas to uplift the community and transform the lives of young people, violence continued to be an integral part of neighborhood life for many youth, and selling drugs remained one of the only ways to earn money. But even those who continued to sell drugs found that their routines had been dramatically transformed by an altered neighborhood terrain; drug markets were now much more integrated into the community and less violent.

#### VII. THE NEW DRUG DISTRIBUTORS: BOLO'S BLOCK:

Attacked by the occupying army of police in September 1992, drug business "owners" initially responded by simply replacing low-level workers who were arrested, but greater business losses and violence followed as antagonism between

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<sup>104</sup> See MICHAEL BRAKE, *COMPARATIVE YOUTH CULTURES* 189-90 (1985); Dwight Conquergood, *On Reppin' and Rhetoric: Gang Representations* 22-24 (April 8, 1992) (Unpublished manuscript presented at the Philosophy and Rhetoric of Inquiry Seminar, University of Iowa, on file with *The Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*).

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Clave, conducted in his apartment, Bushwick, N.Y. (Aug. 23, 1996).

Dominican management and Puerto Rican labor worsened. Most disbanded, while the remainder downsized and moved off the street. New distributors were soon challenging them. As one of the latter commented:

The police made my business. They created it. Before, there was a line of people standing on the street waiting to cop out of the door of a building, look-outs up and down the block. Who'd bother to call me on the beeper? Wouldn't have to. You could buy it like it was a supermarket. [But when the police destroyed them,] they created my business.<sup>106</sup>

Many of the new drug selling organizations which formed or flourished when the monopoly enjoyed by the corporate owners was broken were not simply smaller, more discreet versions of the supermarket vendors, they were qualitatively different. Characterized by transactions that were dependent upon familiarity and trust between participants, undercover police were less able to make drug buys and were forced into tedious surveillance of suspected street-level drug markets (from rooftops, apartment windows or parked vehicles) in the hope of witnessing a sale.

One such new business was run by Bolo, a thirty year old Puerto Rican who grew up in Bushwick and ran a crack selling operation from 1990 to 1996 on the corner of his block, located about six blocks from the main drug supermarket discussed earlier. His business, which employed about twenty-five people, generated about \$5,000 per day in sales—average sized by Bushwick standards. Bolo's business had both local and drive-through customers, most of whom were quickly recognized by the workers. The business operated seven days a week, from around 10:00 A.M. until 1:00 or 2:00 A.M. or whenever business got slow, but not around the clock as was the case with corporate sellers.

Bolo and his "associates" were well aware that their business was quite different from the corporate sellers who had domi-

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Rico, conducted in a friend's apartment, Williamsburg, N.Y. (June 24, 1997).

nated street-level sales several blocks to the north. Below, he characterizes the corporate distributors:

Fishman [Street] is the only international spot where they have Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and whites, where everybody's working. Other areas they do not. The guys who run Fishman are good, but they're sloppy. So many of those guys are in prison from Fishman. Nobody with a mind [works there]. All they care is "hey, fuck the workers. As long as my money comes . . ." that kind of attitude.<sup>107</sup>

Several of Bolo's associates had formerly worked for the corporate "owners" on Fishman Street. For EZ, a father of five young children, it had been an embittering experience:

I came home [from prison] about a month ago. While I was gone, my wife survived with the help of her mother and stepfather. She was also on public assistance. The guys who I worked for had said that if I got locked up that they'd look out for her, but they never even gave her a quarter for her to call me. They never helped her with anything. She struggled on her own until I got home. It's lucky that I put money away to allow her to cope with the first few months. If not, we'd probably be living in the street right now. As soon as I came home they asked if I wanted to work. I told them that I didn't want to work and that since they hadn't helped me while I was in prison I knew that they wouldn't help me if I got locked up again.<sup>108</sup>

Cibo, a manager for Bolo's business, talked with regret about his prior experience working in the area dominated by corporate sellers. The violence and fear that were part and parcel of that arena had turned him into a person that his wife and family scarcely recognized:

Too many people started coming on that block. The block, you know, the street was changing. It wasn't fun anymore. It was getting too dangerous. I got stopped twice. I didn't want nobody hanging out in front of the spot. I didn't want the police there ever again. You got to protect what is yours, man. I had a big disagreement with the Dominicans, so I ran upstairs and pulled out a .30-.30, a Winchester, and chased them out to, what is the name of that club again? . . . I got shot right in

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<sup>107</sup> Interview with Bolo, conducted on Stanhope Street, Bushwick, N.Y. (Aug. 23, 1996).

<sup>108</sup> Interview with EZ, conducted in Bolo's apartment, Bushwick, N.Y. (May 23, 1996).

front of it. It went through my leg. If it wasn't for my daughter's Godfather to jump on top of me and cover me, they would have fucked me up. I left. I went to Puerto Rico, for like two weeks. I came back, and I started staying home. My wife wouldn't let me go out.<sup>109</sup>

Bolo and his associates were careful to be respectful of neighborhood residents, acutely aware that the success of their business was dependent upon their integration into the neighborhood rather than their alienation from it as was the case with the corporate distributors. As Bolo noted:

This is the suburbs. That's [Fishman St.] like New York, and this is the suburbs, do you know what I'm saying? It is quiet, it's peaceful. You got people walking . . . people who do not buy drugs. I mean, you have people walking, you know, shopping. Just mind your business, stay clean, and you are okay. So, you don't see no bums or burnt down houses or shit like that over here like you do over there. Yeah, you get beautiful girls over here. You have to dress nice because you want to pick up girls. You've got nice guys, they park their cars here. They go to work over there, and you see the block. There is not that many abandoned cars here. This is the suburbs, and that is like a pile of shit down there. And, you know, this is like this because I maintain it like this. I demand this to be like this. I don't want my workers fucking around with people. Do you notice how many people walk by, and not one of these people called the police on my guys? You don't disrespect nobody. My guys don't make sales in front of kids or wives. You stop, let the customer wait, let the pedestrian pass by, make sure it is clear, and then you make your sale. Respect. That is all it is. You have to respect people, especially when you are in a dirty game. You have to. There is no if, or buts or maybes. Work with me, you have to respect, if not, go work for [the owners on] Fishman St. and go to jail.<sup>110</sup>

While corporate distributors had specialized in public displays of violence to keep workers in line, Bolo never used it to reprimand employees. He felt that such dramas were unnecessary because he knew his workers so well (including their families) that it was nearly impossible for them to run away with drugs or money. In addition, public violence had the effect of attracting the police and instilling fear rather than building re-

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<sup>109</sup> Interview with Cibo, conducted on the corner of Stanhope St. and Irving Ave., Bushwick, N.Y. (Sept. 27, 1995).

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Bolo, conducted on Stanhope St., Bushwick, N.Y. (Aug. 24, 1997).

spect among other residents on the block. Below, he describes how he handled problems with workers:

When Cibo ran off with the profits the other day, I understood why he did it. But that's ok. You got to learn to accept it and just carry on. You can't get mad. You can never show people you get upset. I tell people, "hey, what do you want to do now? You had a good time, and now it's time to pay, right?" He said "yeah, yeah." "Are you going to come Friday?" "Yeah, I'll be here." He's there. He was a little embarrassed, but he's got to do what he's got to do. Better to be embarrassed than dead. That is a very ugly word. Being dead is an ugly word. You only get one chance to die.<sup>111</sup>

Unlike corporate owners, Bolo cared about his workers and the neighborhood. He hired only people who lived in the area with their families and carefully scrutinized their motives for wanting to join his organization. He made a conscious effort to stay away from young drug sellers who publicly announced their intention to use drug profits to buy fancy clothes, jewelry, or expensive cars:

Most of the fellows who work for me need the money. I mean, I'll be honest with you, I'm not going to bring in a kid who just needs money to buy a pair of sneakers. I will bring a guy with me that has to support his family in one way or another. I mean, I told everybody, "nobody is here getting rich. All we are doing is surviving. If you know how to save and cut corners, you can have all the money to save."<sup>112</sup>

In interviews with his street-level workers, they all voiced similar motivations for working—and none of them sported flashy clothing, jewelry, or other consumer display items which many people thought were characteristic of drug dealers. For example, Robert (nineteen years old in 1995) cited the need to support his mother who lived on welfare as his primary purpose for working:

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<sup>111</sup> Interview with Bolo, conducted in his apartment, Bushwick, N.Y. (Nov. 16, 1995).

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Bolo, conducted in his apartment, Bushwick, N.Y. (Aug. 24, 1995).



It's fucked up because I'm the one . . . I knew that my brother really wasn't going to take care of my family, you understand, take care of my mom and my father. It's that, damn, you know, if she fuckin' put food in your mouth, fuckin' fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen years—that's your mother! She brought you into this world. You're supposed to help her when she needs it. He doesn't help her; that's my brother and everything, he's a selfish bastard! He only thinks of himself.<sup>113</sup>

An eighteen-year-old worker, Mano, also contributed heavily to his family's household income. His unemployed father, Manuel, feared for Mano's safety and often sat nearby whenever Mano worked to "watch his back."

I live in an apartment in this building with my wife and two kids. I seen 'em grow here. Two boys, fifteen and eighteen. You interviewed the eighteen year old. He gets hung up with all this (pointing to the street). I try to keep my eye on him. They don't steal it from nobody, that's one thing. It's [dealing drugs] still bad, you know. The only thing I say [to the police is], "take him if he's done something wrong." But you don't have to beat on him, knock him all silly.

The guys that work out here work hard in a way, but it's still wrong. I got my own opinions. Nobody puts a gun to nobody to use drugs. But the law says that's a law . . . I just say not to mistreat them, that's all. That's the only thing that gets to me, the hitting, the way they treat them. If they've got them, put the handcuffs on them and take them away and do what you have to do. But why abuse them, start punching on them, kicking them on the floor? I don't know what to do. I'm here (sitting on the stoop) because of him. I know they're gonna take him on me, sooner or later.<sup>114</sup>

By 1996, with crack sales continuing to decline throughout the neighborhood, Bolo decided to get out of the drug business. With a wife and eighteen-month old son, he wanted a life for his family that did not include the constant threat of arrest or violent confrontation in the street. His wife found an office job in Manhattan and he found a security job in the neighborhood. Giving up his claim to the corner, he advised his younger associates to get out of the business and pursue legitimate jobs

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<sup>113</sup> Interview with Robert, conducted as he sold crack on Stanhope St., Bushwick, N.Y. (Sept. 25, 1995).

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Manuel, conducted on the stoop of his apartment building on Irving Avenue, Bushwick, N.Y. (Aug. 19, 1996).

or complete their education. When Dominican crack dealers moved in to assert control over his once-lucrative spot, several of Bolo's workers signed on with them for a short period of time. Frenchy was arrested within one week and plea-bargained a sentence of two to four years in prison. After getting arrested and spending a short time in jail, Robert found a job as a messenger on Wall Street and then shocked his friends by falling into a well-paying job at a brokerage house. Mano, after one arrest, and under pressure from his parents, girlfriend, and probation officer, gave up dealing drugs and began to spend increasing amounts of time inside the house, watching TV and listening to music. Cibo moved out of the neighborhood and took a construction job. Twin, a beefy seventeen year old, had sold part-time for Bolo when he was laid off from his job as a stockboy in a shoe store on Grand Street in Williamsburg, but when Bolo quit, Twin went back to searching for legitimate employment.

Even after they quit the business, Bolo and several former associates continued to get arrested. The decline in crime in New York City had not been accompanied by fewer arrests, but paradoxically, by more arrests.<sup>115</sup> After having built up armies of specialized squads in the last decade, the police had an empire to maintain, and with fewer criminals to apprehend they nevertheless continued to manufacture "statistics" at an unprecedented rate. Following Kelling and Coles' advice,<sup>116</sup> the NYPD began concentrating on low-level offenses as "a means of restraining 'wannabes,' the less-dedicated-to-crime friends and associates of repeat offenders. Many in this group, if pressured, or if schools and police pressure their parents, ultimately will change their behavior to conform to more appropriate and decent standards."

But by arresting Bolo and his former associates, the police locked up the converted, the "had beens" rather than the "wannabes," and thereby endangered the very transformation they sought to achieve.

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<sup>115</sup> Michael Cooper, *You're Under Arrest*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 1, 1996, § 13, at 1.

<sup>116</sup> GEORGE L. KELLING & CATHERINE M. COLES, *FIXING BROKEN WINDOWS: RESTORING ORDER AND REDUCING CRIME IN OUR COMMUNITIES* 248 (1996).

In summary, the reconfiguration of drug markets in the mid-1990s appreciably reduced the level of neighborhood violence. As distribution retired indoors, turf battles were eliminated. Since organizers of drug businesses hired a few trusted friends rather than easily replaceable workers, there was less conflict between them. Distributors were robbed by users less frequently because they were more protected selling indoors to known customers. Like other neighborhood residents, drug distributors and users had also adapted and contributed to dramatic changes in neighborhood conditions.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

The future of inner-cities in the global economy of the approaching millennium does not appear particularly bright. The residents of inner city neighborhoods did not share equally in the fruits of the economic revitalization of the 1990s which created new (though less secure and rewarding) jobs and low unemployment, and led to an optimism not seen since the post-WWII economy of the 1950s. For inner city residents, the economy did not promise prosperity, security, or upward mobility, but rather, more unemployment, underemployment and substantially less help from local, state, and federal agencies to combat poverty and its effects. But in spite of their marginalized status and bleak prospects, many inner city residents not only forestalled their expected slide into economic ruin and social disintegration, but also confounded the schools of economic, cultural, and genetic determinism that had predicted a steady march toward oblivion. They showed a new vitality, graphically illustrated by precipitous drops in crime and violence.

Yet many scholars, journalists, and policy makers continue to believe that poor people are incapable of helping themselves, much less their communities, and the urge to explain their turnaround on external factors is great. The most popular of these unidimensional explanations is that innovations in policing (especially in the area of technology) are driving the ex-

traordinary transformation of inner city neighborhoods.<sup>117</sup> With great fanfare Mayor Giuliani and the New York City Police Department introduced their "quality of life" campaign as the keystone ingredient in turning the city around. They hammered this message home to the public and the media, but most urgently, to rank and file police officers who were instructed to aggressively pursue even the most petty offense, like jaywalking, riding bicycles on sidewalks, loitering, trespassing, or drinking beer in public. They contended that by concentrating on the "little things, the big things will take care of themselves," but with fewer serious crimes occurring and drug distributors more difficult to catch, police were simply left with the lesser ones. As one journalist had noted,

Statistically speaking, you are more likely to be arrested these days. Although major crimes are down in the city, arrests are up, way up. Under Mayor Giuliani's crackdown on 'quality of life' crimes, the police have arrested 21 percent [sic] more people this year than last year. Mostly for the little things.<sup>118</sup>

While aggressive policing certainly resulted in a reluctance by many people to linger in public spaces, including the reviled "obstreperous youth" who were said to spoil neighborhood civility,<sup>119</sup> it can hardly account for the profound changes which occurred in the daily lives of inner-city residents.

The combination of factors which precipitated inner-city change vary from city to city and neighborhood to neighborhood. In New York City, for example, rapidly declining rates of crime and violence, the hallmarks of this urban renaissance, have been observed in every neighborhood, not simply those where conditions had become intolerable. To disentangle and account for the multiple influences which frame behavior and the choices people make, it is useful to examine the intimate contexts where people learn to become human and construct

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<sup>117</sup> See, e.g., David C. Anderson, *Crime Stoppers*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 6, 1997 § 6 at 47; George L. Kelling & William J. Bratton, *Declining Crime Rates: Insiders' Views of the New York City Story*, 88 J. CRIM. LAW & CRIMINOLOGY 1217 (1998).

<sup>118</sup> Cooper, *supra* note 115, at 1.

<sup>119</sup> KELLING & COLES, *supra* note 116, at 242-51.

their lives—families, social networks, workplaces and communities. Regardless of the constellation of variables which precipitated the startling turnaround observed in inner-city neighborhoods, the capacity of people to alter their everyday lives and confound the “experts” has been highlighted in the current period. After being socially, culturally, economically, politically, and physically stripped, demolished, and deconstructed for more than thirty years, northeast Brooklyn was ripe for rebuilding in the 1990s. In Bushwick, where neighborhood conditions had become intolerable, young people were at the forefront of this effort. They responded to the multiple threats against their daily lives and futures by repudiating those elements which endangered them: unchecked street-level drug markets, out-of-control violence, and hard drugs. The palpable change which washed over the neighborhood beginning in 1993 was initiated and carried through by young residents who, though far from uniform in their responses to those dangers, shared a conviction that they would not succumb to the same fate that nearly erased the preceding generation. In altering their own lives, they shattered the myth that they were powerless against a “criminogenic” environment which was said to mass-produce superpredators, and threw into question the canon that violence must beget violence.

Life in the postmodern global economy is one in which identity formation is less dependent upon the influence of family, neighborhood, race/ethnicity, nationality and history,<sup>120</sup> and more than anywhere else, the inner-city is an empty canvas, an urban frontier where new structures, institutions and conventions are waiting to be built. Where the unprecedented changes that the current generation have begun are going, and whether they can be sustained is uncertain, but the outcome is by no means predetermined. In the face of the many obstacles which inner-city residents must still overcome, our failure to recognize and reward their struggle to build a better world may yet prove the naysayers right.

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<sup>120</sup> See generally GIDDENS, *supra* note 8; MILLER, *supra* note 8.