

Wesley Skogan

Fear of Crime and Neighborhood Change

ABSTRACT

Crime rates and the quality of life do not necessarily change in direct response to changes in the physical and social characteristics of neighborhoods. Developments that have an indirect effect on increasing crime rates and fear of crime include neighborhood disinvestment, demolition and construction activities, demagoguery, and deindustrialization. Other factors such as government programs, collective neighborhood action, and individual initiatives and interventions help to maintain neighborhood stability. Fear of crime in declining neighborhoods does not always accurately reflect actual crime levels. It is derived from primary and secondary knowledge of neighborhood crime rates, observable evidence of physical and social disorder, and prejudices arising from changes in neighborhood ethnic composition. Regardless of its source, fear of crime may stimulate and accelerate neighborhood decline. Increasing fear of crime may cause individuals to withdraw physically and psychologically from community life. This weakens informal processes of social control that inhibit crime and disorder, and it produces a decline in the organizational life and the mobilization capacity of a neighborhood. Fear may also contribute to the deterioration of business conditions. The importation and local production of delinquency and deviance may also be influenced by perceptions of neighborhood crime rates. Changes in the composition of the resident population may be stimulated by the cumulative effects of fear. Fear of crime does not inevitably encourage or result in urban decline as "gentrification" demonstrates.

Recent research on fear of crime and neighborhood change suggests that neighborhoods change only slowly unless "triggering" events shift them from a position of relative stability into one of demographic and

Wesley Skogan is Professor of Political Science and Urban Affairs at Northwestern University.

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economic flux. Those precipitating events include disinvestment, demolition, and demagoguery plus regional and national economic forces. Once areas begin to decline, "feedback" processes can take command of neighborhood conditions. Problems such as crime, physical deterioration, and social disorder emerge. Resulting increases in fear of crime in turn undermine the capacity of the community to deal with its problems. Fear stimulates withdrawal from the community, weakens informal social control mechanisms, contributes to the declining mobilization capacity of the neighborhood, speeds changes in local business conditions, and stimulates further delinquency and disorder. These problems feed on themselves, spiraling neighborhoods deeper into decline. There is evidence that some areas can break out of this downward spiral, and the examples illustrate the place of crime among the factors that determine a neighborhood's eventual fate. However, there is little evidence that those hard-won victories are common, and in the aggregate the effect of fear on the fabric of American society has been very consequential.

The dynamic aspects of this theory largely are hypothetical, for there has been virtually no research over time on fear of crime in which people are linked to their neighborhood environment. Research using census data and measures of reported crime (which are available across time) suggests that in small urban areas important changes can take place rapidly. Neighborhoods apparently can move from low- to high-crime status within a decade (Kobrin and Schuerman 1981). Fear of crime, residential commitment, and other factors that in theory provide the linkages between aspects of community change and levels of reported crime are better measured by sample surveys. However, most surveys concerning crime problems in cities or particular neighborhoods can provide only a one-time, cross-sectional view of residents' fears and intentions. Further, most of those studies have been conducted since 1965 in northern industrial cities marked by generally declining populations and shifting economic fortunes. Much less is known about crime, fear, and neighborhood change in lower-density southeastern and southwestern cities that have prospered and grown during the same period. Perhaps the small-area social *processes* that link fear and neighborhood change are similar across U.S. cities, with differences among them being confined to the *magnitude* of those problems or the number of neighborhoods affected. This is suggested by the fact that national surveys reveal about the same relations between fear and other factors as do neighborhood studies (cf. Baumer 1985). However,

the generality of research on fear and neighborhood factors to cities of all types is not entirely clear.

Here is how this essay is organized. Section I discusses triggering factors that have a strong influence on neighborhood change. Declining neighborhoods offer an environment in which crime rates and levels of fear change. Neighborhood-level sources of fear of crime are the topic of Section II. In Section III, I examine the effect of fear on community life. Neighborhood decline in the urban setting is not inevitable; factors that are important to reversing the process are described in Section IV. The final section briefly examines some of the consequences of fear of crime for American society.

I. Factors Triggering Neighborhood Decline

Although some studies of fear of crime convey suggestions for theory involving neighborhood factors and change over time (one of the most explicit being Goodstein and Shotland [1980]), few have much systematic data on these points. Moreover, most (like their "crime causes crime" model) seem to assume that a glacial, sociologically inexorable downward slide characterizes urban neighborhoods. It is more likely that the reverse is true, that residential areas are fairly stable social systems, which is why they are identifiable as "neighborhoods." At various times this stability may be upset, but old patterns persist, and generally the future resembles the past. Analytic models of stable systems feature "negative feedback loops," or sketches of mechanisms in the system that react to events, set things right, retard change, and keep most problems within bounds (Przeworski and Teune 1970). In the case of residential areas, these feedback mechanisms can include government programs, collective neighborhood action, and individual initiatives and interventions. However, when things happen that disrupt the processes by which neighborhoods continually renew themselves, real change is set off. If these changes spark feedback forces that are positive rather than negative, they stimulate further changes rather than dampen them. In such areas, one change leads to another. Systems characterized by positive feedback change rapidly. These changes do not necessarily make crime or the quality of life in those areas worse (see McDonald, in this volume), but, when they do, neighborhoods caught up in them can quickly decline.

"Stability" does not mean that things are "the same." Neighborhoods never remain the same. Even in places that on the surface appear tranquil, families move in and out, the building stock ages, and economic

forces continually affect the price and demand for housing. However, if about the same number of people move into a neighborhood as move out, and if they resemble each other, the area can be counted as stable. Areas are stable if the housing stock is continually repaired and renewed and if people can sell and buy or rent homes there at prices appropriate for the structures and the social class of the residents. Stability means that the neighborhood as a social system reproduces itself.

Forces that affect the pace of this regeneration have profound consequences for the viability of communities. The inventory of events that could trigger neighborhood change is very large. Some of them are in the hands of local actors, but others are determined outside. The effect of these on crime and fear is indirect through their effect on an area's population and housing stock. Four key factors that affect neighborhood stability are described below.

Disinvestment. Decisions by landlords and homeowners to repair and rehabilitate their buildings are critical for maintaining the attractiveness of a neighborhood as a place to live. These decisions reflect the value and demand for housing, whether or not buildings have reached the end of their depreciable life, and if they can be sold profitably. An important factor in these calculations is institutional decisions about the viability of particular neighborhoods. When mortgaging institutions and insurance companies refuse to make reasonable purchase or construction loans or to issue policies in certain neighborhoods, this effectively "writes off" those areas (Bradford and Rubinowitz 1975; Urban-Suburban Investment Study Group 1975). "It is a sign for all that the neighborhood is 'going.' Powerful and influential interests have lost faith in it, and that stands as a warning to any home-seekers or commercial investors to look elsewhere if they have the means to do so" (Goodwin 1979, p. 60).

Demolition and Construction. The residential quality of neighborhoods can be severely affected by nearby land-use patterns. The freeway networks driven through the hearts of many American cities in the 1950s greatly reduced the desirability of surrounding neighborhoods. Typically, they were channeled through—and destroyed—low-income, minority neighborhoods, where land was cheaper. This forced area residents into other neighborhoods, a consequence not appreciated by those already living there (Altschuler 1965). The planning and construction activities of government often create what Bursik (in this volume) dubs "artificial neighborhoods" and upset the stability of city

areas of a variety of social class levels. Concentrating high-rise public housing in a few areas has had disastrous consequences for those communities. Even locating a few community-based drug or mental health treatment centers in an area can arouse a storm of protest from residents.

Demagoguery. Key actors profit greatly from the fragility of urban neighborhoods. Cagney real estate agents (known as “panic peddlers”) can reap enormous profits trading on fear. Stirring concern about crime and racial change, they frighten white residents into selling their homes at reduced prices; then the homes are resold at inflated prices to blacks and Hispanics desperate for better and safer housing, a practice often known as “block-busting” (Goodwin 1979). An ambitious politician seeking to build a neighborhood political base can make somewhat different use of the same raw materials.

Deindustrialization. Factory closings, the shift of jobs from the central city to the suburbs, a decline in the number of jobs at a particular wage and skill level, and extralocal economic trends can undermine the locational advantages of particular neighborhoods or the economic well-being of the kind of people who live there. These changes may be slow and evolutionary, but they also can be precipitous; the city of Chicago, for example, lost more than 21 percent of its manufacturing jobs between 1980 and 1983 (Exter 1985, table 2).

It should be clear that the triggering events discussed above all stem from conscious, often corporate decisions by persons in positions of power. They reflect the interests of banks, manufacturing firms, government agencies, and others with large economic and political stakes in what they do. None is individually “sociologically inexorable,” although they obviously may be driven by still larger economic and demographic forces. The volitional nature of these decisions has not been lost on community organizations that have tackled redlining, blockbusting, zoning, and economic development issues, and they highlight the larger—but often invisible—political context in which studies of individual concerns about crime are set. To the extent that those concerns are driven by neighborhood conditions, they can be seen as manifestations of political decisions.

The critical role of these triggering events appears to be their effect on the number and mix of people moving into and out of a neighborhood. The engine of neighborhood change is selective out-migration from the neighborhood (Frey 1980). Few residents will want to live in an area characterized by mounting crime and fear. Measures of both are

strongly related to residential dissatisfaction and the desire to move to a safer place (Droettboom et al. 1971; Kasl and Harburg 1972). However, studies of actual moving—as opposed to dissatisfaction or desire—document the harsh realities of economics and race (Duncan and Newman 1976). A comparison of “movers” and “stayers” in the Chicago metropolitan area indicates that households that left the central city were more affluent, had more education, and more often were intact nuclear families. This was despite the fact that blacks, unmarried adults, and the poor were far more likely to be fearful and unhappy with their city neighborhood. Those who moved out were “pulled” by the attractiveness of safe suburban locations as well as “pushed” by fear and other concerns (Skogan and Maxfield 1981).

Flight from neighborhoods may carry away somewhat less fearful residents, leaving those who are more fearful—but stuck there—to deal with the area’s problems. A few elderly and long-time residents may remain behind after this transition because they are unwilling to move or cannot sell their homes for enough to buy another in a nicer neighborhood. They find themselves surrounded by unfamiliar people whom they did not choose to live with. Loneliness and lack of community attachment are significant sources of fear among the urban elderly (Jaycox 1978; Yin 1980), especially among women (Silverman and Kennedy 1984). Interestingly, it appears that perceived social diversity (measured by questions about whether neighbors are “the same” or “different” from the respondent) has a strong effect on fear only among the elderly (Kennedy and Silverman 1985).

Demographic changes are significant for the local housing market and even for its very physical composition. If fewer or poorer people want to move in, real estate values shift. A soft demand for housing due to the undesirability of the area can be stimulated by reducing its price and changing standards for tenant selection, but this further affects the mix of in-movers. Schuerman and Kobrin (1983) find that changes in the socioeconomic status of residents of destabilizing areas *follow* population turnover. Income-level decline probably is slowed by the inertia of initial housing prices and the nature of the housing stock. During these periods, the invasion-succession process produces a number of positive benefits for new residents. Since World War II, the flight of the better off to the suburbs, combined with generally decreasing rates of migration into northern industrial cities, allowed blacks and others who remained behind to take advantage of the softer housing market by moving into better-quality buildings in nicer neighborhoods. It was the

value of the overcrowded, deteriorated tenements that *they* abandoned as rapidly as possible that was most affected by early population shifts (Frey 1984).

If residential buildings are fully depreciated for tax purposes, it can be unprofitable to maintain them adequately or even to pay the real estate and utility bills. If there is no demand for them, they may sit boarded up. The arson rate is sensitive to such calculations (Sternlieb and Burchell 1983). Urban residential fires in general are concentrated in cities sheltering the poor, unemployed, renters, minorities (Munson and Oates 1983), and where crime rates are higher (Pettitway 1983). Future investments in a neighborhood appear to be affected by a relatively low level of building abandonment, perhaps 3–6 percent (Department of Housing and Urban Development 1973). It appears that abandonment has increased as migration into many northern industrial cities has slowed to a trickle; the “way station” role historically played by the worst housing in inner-city, mixed land-use areas, which gave it continued economic value, has vanished with the disappearance of new migrants. Where there still is a demand for housing, demographic shifts can be exacerbated by changes in the use of the housing stock. One adaptation to declining real estate values is to intensify its use; large single-family homes can be cut up—often illegally—into multiple-unit dwellings. This further affects the area’s demography.

If an area’s crime rate mounts, it may further reduce real estate values (Frisbie et al. 1977). However, most regression-based studies of the crime-property value nexus find area-level crime rates so highly correlated with other physical and social determinants of property values that the independent effect of crime cannot be estimated. Taub, Taylor, and Dunham’s (1984) survey data indicate that individuals’ market evaluations and investment plans are affected by dissatisfaction with safety, perceived risk of victimization in the area, and actual victimization. Crime affects the upkeep of the neighborhood, and together the two affect perceptions that the neighborhood is going sour and the residents’ desire to move away.

II. The Effect on Fear of Neighborhood Decline

Schuerman and Kobrin’s research (in this volume), using census figures and recorded crime, places demographic change near the beginning of the decay process. Land use, housing, and population changes at first lead shifts in crime rates. The consequences can stimulate even further change, including mounting levels of fear. Neighborhood-level sources

of fear of crime are numerous. They include local victimization rates, rumors of nearby crimes and victims, physical deterioration, social disorder, and group conflict over the control of living space.

A. Victimization and Fear

Several researchers have examined the relation between levels of crime and fear. In one Chicago study, people who reported feeling "unsafe outside after dark" were concentrated in community areas with higher rates of reported crime (Skogan and Maxfield 1981). McPherson (1978) found a general correspondence between fear and official crime rates for residents of Minneapolis. In England, people's ratings of how common various offenses are in their neighborhood rise directly with area-level victimization rates (Maxfield 1984a). When asked to rate the magnitude of various neighborhood problems, Chicagoans who ranked specific crimes as "big problems" in their neighborhood lived in areas with higher rates for those types of incidents. Both relations were stronger for robbery and aggravated assault than for burglary rates. However, burglary is both more frequent than personal crime and more widely dispersed, hitting high-income households as well as the poor (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1983, p. 7). As a result, it stimulates fear in more places and is responsible for "spreading it around" city and suburban areas (Skogan and Maxfield 1981).

The conclusion that people who live in crime-ridden areas are more fearful is not surprising. However, the relation is not as strong as might be expected. There are other sources of fear. Women and the elderly report higher levels of fear and fear-related behaviors, probably reflecting their self-perceived vulnerability to victimization and its more serious outcomes. People are not particularly geographically concentrated along these dimensions, so they provide a kind of background level of fear in virtually every community. (There is evidence that distinctively high levels of fear for the elderly are found only in big cities and not in smaller places; see Baumer [1985]). Some residents of higher-crime areas do not report excessive levels of concern (Lewis and Maxfield 1980; Taylor, Gottfredson, and Brower 1984). The reason may be, in part, one of pluralistic ignorance. People in a neighborhood may not have good individual knowledge of their collective experiences. Most crimes that strike individuals and households or commercial establishments leave no outward sign of their visitation. Area residents know of them only indirectly, through crime statistics, media stories of individual crimes or trends, or rumors. Their own direct victimization experi-

ences typically are few or nonexistent (even in big cities most people are not victimized at all in any recent period) and may be discounted as atypical of their neighborhood (Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo 1978). Thus, although crime is very real, many residents of a neighborhood only know of it indirectly via channels that may inflate, deflate, or garble the picture. The official picture of levels of crime in various neighborhoods may be fear provoking because those figures are known to the public as well as to the police (Garofalo 1981).

B. Secondhand Information

Research suggests that the most important secondary sources of information about crime are neighborhood based, produce fear levels that are somewhat at odds with the real distribution of crime, and provide a mechanism that may accelerate neighborhood decline. People make extensive use of information gathered secondhand through social networks. Surveys of dense neighborhoods in industrial cities indicate that neighbors talk frequently about crime and that, as a result, large proportions of them know people in their vicinity who have been victimized. In one study of three such cities, fully 48 percent of those interviewed knew a local robbery victim. In contrast, city victimization surveys indicated that only 5.5 percent of residents had been robbed in the past year (Skogan and Maxfield 1981). Little is known about the frequency with which residents of low-density, automobile-oriented, air-conditioned cities of the South and Southwest participate in such neighborhood-oriented rumor networks.

Talking with neighbors about crime and knowing local victims appears to affect levels of fear and individual estimates of the risk of victimization (Bishop and Klecka 1978; Tyler 1980; Lavrakas, Herz, and Salem 1981; Skogan and Maxfield 1981; Greenberg, Rohe, and Williams 1982). People also tend to talk about serious violent crimes rather than more typical property offenses. There is evidence that individuals who hear about people like themselves being victimized rather than about victims with a different demographic profile are even more fearful (Skogan and Maxfield 1981). Crime messages can spread fast in tight-knit communities; Lawton, Nahemow, and Yaffe (1976), in their study of elderly residents of a low-income housing project, report that one-half could describe a crime against a fellow tenant. Ironically, neighborhoods with well-developed social ties, extensive communication networks, and an active organizational life, which can spread such stories widely, also tend to enjoy lower levels of victimization.

It is adaptive and efficient for people to use indirectly acquired information to judge their risks and make decisions about what to do about crime, for it is an infrequent, yet potentially high-consequence, event. Rumor networks (unlike the mass media) are informative about local events and conditions. They can convey messages of personal significance, and there is evidence that their messages are integrated into people's views of their immediate environment (Tyler 1984). However, they may work most effectively in areas where the events about which stories are being spread actually are less frequent. As we shall see below, the consequences of this may be considerable.

C. Deterioration and Disorder

Unlike most serious crimes, which are widely experienced only secondhand, there are neighborhood conditions that provide readily observable evidence of the extent of local decline. They are visual signs of physical deterioration and social disorganization: junk and trash in vacant lots, boarded-up buildings, stripped and abandoned cars, bands of teenagers congregating on street corners, street prostitution, panhandling, public drinking, verbal harassment of women, open gambling and drug use, and other incivilities (Hunter 1978; Gardner 1980; Lewis and Maxfield 1980; Taub, Taylor, and Dunham 1981). More than fifteen years ago, Biderman et al. (1967) argued that people's major impressions about area crime are derived from "the highly visible signs of what they regard as disorderly and disreputable behavior in their community."

Many surveys asking about the extent of these problems have found that the answers are closely related to fear of crime and to perceptions that serious crimes are neighborhood problems. Some research suggests that visible disorderly activity by people has a greater effect than does deterioration but that both independently are important determinants of fear and some fear-related behaviors (McPherson, Silloway, and Frey 1983). This parallels Hunter's conceptual distinction between "social" and "physical" signs of incivility. Deterioration and disorder can be discomforting and run counter to many adults' expectations about proper public conditions (although, of course, they will vary in their tolerance of such situations). They may take them as signs of the disintegration of the standards that guide local public life. The anxiety that deterioration and disorder generate among area residents can be a constant psychological irritant. Stinchcombe et al. (1980) and Hunter (1978) argue that such conditions are one of the most debilitating

sources of fear. They are associated in the minds of many with the level of area crime, and their presence is taken as an early warning of impending danger. If they are common, the warning flag flies constantly.

The effect of deterioration and disorder may be conditioned by other factors. Taylor, Schumaker, and Gottfredson (1986) find that physical decay (measured observationally) has its greatest effects in blue-collar rather than in poor or more well-to-do areas of Baltimore. In wealthy areas, instances of these problems may be ignored as atypical and nonthreatening, and residents of poor areas have many things to worry about. However, in moderate-income areas of the city, where market conditions for housing are insecure, residents may be more sensitive to such barometers of decline. This may account as well for the high negative correlation between indicators of decay and neighborhood confidence found in those areas.

Wilson and Kelling (1982) also argue that disorder actually spawns more serious crime as well as erodes the commitment of stable, family-oriented residents to the neighborhood. They allude to a "developmental sequence" by which unchecked rule breaking fosters petty plundering and even more serious street crime and theft. The nature of the relation between crime and disorder is still unclear, and Maxfield (1984*b*) illustrates how perceptions of crime and disorder are differentially related to fear, depending on their absolute level. However, several studies report high correlations ($+ .45$ – $+ .60$) between area-level measures of crime and perceived disorder. That there are few high-disorder, low-crime neighborhoods suggests that the effect of one condition on the other is either quite powerful or that the relation is due to their strong joint association with some other set of factors.

D. The Built Environment

There is some evidence that the physical composition of the housing stock may wield independent influence on fear. Newman (1972), Newman and Franck (1980), Maxfield (1984*a*), and others, reviewed in Greenberg, Rohe, and Williams (1984), report that fear of crime is higher among residents of high-rise buildings and large flats than among those living in smaller buildings. Residents of low-rise and less congested areas have a stronger sense of territoriality as well (Taylor, Brower, and Drain 1979). High-rise living seems to be related to feelings of alienation and powerlessness, although it is not clear that people do not "self-select" themselves into such environments. Several randomized experiments do indicate that building size affects neighboring

and the strength of neighborhood ties (cf. Greenberg et al. 1984). Such effects may differ by subgroup; my unpublished calculations suggest that elderly persons living in larger buildings are more fearful than others, controlling for a number of important determinants of fear and group conflict.

E. Group Conflict

A final source of fear, and a traditional engine of neighborhood change, is group conflict over the control of neighborhood "turf." As various racial and ethnic groups grow or shrink in size, their demand for living space follows. This threatens change, which can be translated into concern about crime when contending groups differ in class, family organization, and life-style. To a large extent, neighborhood succession takes the form of spillover or invasion from one area to the next (Aldrich and Reiss 1976). When the encroaching community is a crime-exporting area, residents of nearby crime-importing areas are more fearful (Greenberg et al. 1984). Often the newcomers are younger and have more children than do the old-timers, so intergenerational conflicts about public deportment overlay other differences between them. Merry (1979) reports that neighborhood crime can sometimes be an extension of such conflict. In her anthropological study of a housing project, black, white, Hispanic, and Asian residents viewed each other with suspicion. No individual or group enjoyed any overarching moral authority, and there were no mechanisms for informally resolving disputes among residents who crossed ethnic lines. Instead, disputants sometimes resorted to violence to settle them.

Noncrime factors are, of course, at work as well. Talk about the threat of crime can serve as an outlet for other concerns in neighborhoods undergoing racial change. Taub et al. (1984) found a strong correlation between fear and white Chicagoans' beliefs about black neighborhood succession, crime rates, and property values. Working-class whites in particular believed that the movement of blacks into a neighborhood brought with it higher rates of crime. This belief was reflected in their evaluations of the market value of homes in their area. The same study found that two measures of fear (fear of walking alone at night and dissatisfaction with area safety) were negatively related to whites' estimates of the ability of their neighborhoods to resist racial change and positively related to levels of prejudice against incoming black families. And fear was a strong correlate of their desire to move out of the neighborhood.

Outsiders who are in the process of violating a community's space can threaten a broad range of values and conjure up many stereotypes about their behavior. Market forces battle discrimination, politics, and even collective violence in determining how rapidly the demand for housing by expanding groups is translated into shifting residential patterns. They usually win out in the conflict over living space in American cities, although sometimes local skirmishes can delay that victory, so change of this sort seems inevitable (Molotch 1972; Goodwin 1979).

III. The Effect of Fear on Community Life

Fear has further consequences for communities. It can work in conjunction with other factors to stimulate more rapid neighborhood decline. Together, the spread of fear and other local problems provide a form of positive feedback that can further increase levels of crime. These feedback processes include (1) physical and psychological withdrawal from community life; (2) a weakening of the informal social control processes that inhibit crime and disorder; (3) a decline in the organizational life and mobilization capacity of the neighborhood; (4) deteriorating business conditions; (5) the importation and domestic production of delinquency and deviance; and (6) further dramatic changes in the composition of the population. At the end lies a stage characterized by demographic collapse.

A. Withdrawal

One of the most significant consequences of fear is physical withdrawal from community life. Fearful people report that they stay at home more often, especially after dark. When they do go out, they carefully avoid coming into contact with strangers or potentially threatening situations, and they confine their path to the safest times and routes possible. They do not talk to people they do not know, and not getting involved seems a wise course. Among women, in particular, adoption of such defensive tactics is related to levels of neighborhood disorder as well as to perceived risk of victimization (Riger, Gordon, and Lebailly 1982). In its best light, this can result in a form of "ordered segmentation" of the community that enables diverse and potentially conflictful people to share the same turf without coming into contact (Suttles 1968). However, the effects of fear extend further.

There are other psychological and behavioral consequences of fear. People feel powerless, impotent, and vulnerable in the face of crime. They are passive in response to events around them, for fear generates a

kind of "learned helplessness" (Kidd and Chayet 1984). High levels of perceived crime and disorder appear to undermine people's belief that problems can be solved locally. It increases their feeling of personal isolation and spreads the perception that no one will come to their rescue when they find themselves in trouble (Lewis and Salem 1985). Not surprisingly, fear does not stimulate constructive, preventive responses to crime (Lavrakas 1981; Tyler 1984). Surveys and experiments indicate that fear reduces people's willingness to take positive actions when they see crimes, including simply calling the police. The reduction in the number of legitimate users of the streets caused by fear, coupled with the unwillingness of bystanders to intervene because they are afraid, can create easy opportunities for predators.

B. Informal Control

Fear also decreases the spatial radius that individuals feel responsible for defending. "Territoriality" is a set of attitudes and behaviors regarding the regulation of the boundary that surrounds people's personal and household space (Taylor et al. 1980; Brown and Altman 1981). When that boundary is expansive, individuals monitor more strangers, youths, and suspicious sounds and activities. Where territories encompass only people's homes and families, untended persons and property are fair game for plunder. Territoriality thus is an important component of the larger process of surveillance and may be an important mechanism for controlling crime. Surveillance entails both "watching" and "acting." Acting is facilitated by personal recognition, shared standards about appropriate public behavior, a sense of responsibility for events in the area, and identification with potential victims.

There is some evidence (summarized in Shotland and Goodstein [1984]) that crime is encouraged by low levels of surveillance of public places and reduced by people willing to act to challenge strangers, supervise youths, and step forward as witnesses. Research on "crime prevention through environmental design" (Newman 1972) focuses in part on how subtle features of the built environment facilitate surveillance. Its effect on levels of crime is as yet ill-understood (Murray 1983; Taylor et al. 1984), but people feel less safe in low-traffic, unsupervised, less visible locations where no one would intervene if there were trouble. Fear seems dampened by the availability of social support, including that offered by neighbors and the police (Sundeen and Mathieu 1976). "The perceived availability of helping resources in the neighborhood . . . has the effect of reducing fear, particularly among

those living in a threatening environment. . . . The perception that assistance is available from neighbors when needed may act as a buffer between the individual and the environment" (Greenberg et al. 1984, p. 88). Such conditions may be less common in high-fear communities, and more fear can lead to even less foot traffic, smaller territories, and less watching and intervention.

Beginning with Maccoby, Johnson, and Church (1958), there has been a great deal of research on the effect of the strength of "local social ties" on interventions (or intentions to intervene) of a variety of kinds, especially to control juveniles. The effect of local social ties is strong but is particularly affected by fear. In stable neighborhoods, residents supervise the activities of youths, watch over one another's property, and challenge those who seem to be up to no good. Neighborhood change brings to the neighborhood newcomers, changes in patterns of street life, and unpredictable people. This further redounds to the disadvantage of such areas through the effect of dense social relationships on fear. Surveys often find that the strength of local social ties is a strong and independent correlate of feelings of safety. They have such further consequences as increasing the scope of individual territoriality, cementing identification to one's area, and encouraging participation in organized community activity (Hunter 1974; DuBow and Emmons 1981; Taylor et al. 1984).

C. Organizational Life

Both fear and demographics work against organized community life in neighborhoods caught in the cycle of decline. Research indicates that fear does not stimulate participation in collective efforts to act against crime; rather, it often has the effect of undermining commitment to an area and interest in participation (Lavrakas et al. 1981). Where fear promotes suspicion in place of neighborliness, it can be difficult to forge formal linkages between residents to attack neighborhood problems.

When neighborhoods spiral into decline, demographic factors related to participation in community organizations can shift unfavorably. In-movers tend to be harder to organize; they are renters, single-parent families, the poor and less educated, younger and unmarried persons, and nonfamily households. They report having little economic or emotional commitment to the community and usually expect to move again.

As a result of these demographic changes, the mobilization capacity of the area—affecting the ability of residents to effectively demand that

landlords and governments act on their behalf—is diminished. Where that capacity is strong, organization can combat community deterioration and disorder. One important function of community organizations is to convey the image—to residents and outsiders alike—of a mobilized community that will resist unwelcome change (Unger and Wandersman 1983). Organizations can restore or reinforce a local value consensus and emphasize the shared interests of people living together (DuBow and Emmons 1981). Where informal organization is limited, there may be few other mechanisms for generating community cohesion around the issues of crime, disorder, and decline. For example, Cohen (1980) finds that street prostitution flourishes only where community consensus is weak and there is no organized resistance to deviant public behavior.

Another role of neighborhood groups is to extend face-to-face contacts between residents and generate optimism about the future of the area, both important factors facilitating crime-prevention efforts (DuBow and Emmons 1981). Perceptions registered in surveys that neighbors help each other are an important source of morale in urban communities and seem to stimulate a variety of positive actions against crime (Lavrakas 1981). Participation in neighborhood organizations seems to stimulate homeowner investments as well (Taub et al. 1984). However, in neighborhoods in decline, mutual distrust and hostility are rampant, and antipathy between newcomers and long-term residents prevails. Residents of poor, heterogeneous areas tend to be more suspicious and feel less commonality with one another (Taylor, Gottfredson, and Brower 1981; Greenberg et al. 1982; Taub et al. 1984). Greenberg (1983) concludes that crime prevention programs requiring social contact and neighborhood cooperation are less often found in heterogeneous areas and those with high levels of fear. This is perhaps why Titus's (1984) review of neighborhood burglary programs found that participating areas had lower levels of crime. The best hypothesis probably is that the relation between area levels of fear and collective neighborhood responses to crime is curvilinear, with participation lowest in the low-fear areas (few problems) and the high-fear areas (too many problems) and highest in the middle.

D. Delinquency and Disorder

A further consequence of individual passivity, weak informal social control, and collective incapacity is that neighborhoods caught in decline lose the ability to control problems caused by youths living in the

area. They may import problems, attracting crime and disorder from the outside.

Rising victimization rates can be especially unsettling when they are due to an increase in the local prevalence of *offenders* and not just offenses. A question about who people thought caused local crime was asked in the U.S. Census Bureau's surveys of twenty-six big cities. It reveals that people are more fearful than otherwise when they believe that it is people from within the neighborhood rather than outsiders who are responsible for local crime (my unpublished calculations). This concern is a corrosive one, for it undermines trust among neighbors. It certainly violates one of the assumptions behind Neighborhood Watch and other programs that attempt to promote mutual cooperation to prevent crime—it may not seem wise to inform the neighbors that you will be out of town when it is their children whom you fear (Greenberg 1983).

Wilson and Kelling (1982) argue that a reputation for being tolerant of social disorder also serves as a neighborhood invitation to outside troublemakers. Areas that tolerate (or cannot counter) rowdy taverns, dirty bookstores, public drinking, prostitution, and other incivilities will quickly attract street robbers to prey on the trade. Thieves will sense the limited surveillance capacity of the area and that it presents easy pickings for burglars.

E. Commercial Decline

One barometer of trends in urban neighborhoods is commercial activity. Because they are located on major streets and intersections, small retail shops are one of the most visible features of a community, so their appearance and character may help determine those trends as well (McPherson et al. 1983). Research by Aldrich and Reiss (1976) and McPherson (1978) indicates that disorder and crime hurt small retail establishments by affecting their profitability and not by direct victimization, so business factors are critical. When an area enters the cycle of decline, there will be fewer prosperous shoppers, outsiders will not come into the area to shop, and fewer customers of any kind will be out after dark. Existing stores may close because the market they once served no longer exists. Others may change their hours, prices, and types of goods in order to stay open. Convenience stores stocking fewer goods at somewhat higher prices grow in number.

In neighborhoods with a reputation for disorder, economic forces will favor bars, seedy transient hotels, X-rated movie theaters and book-

stores, and massage parlors (Cohen 1980). The trade these attract, along with groups of unsavory males drinking (and urinating) in nearby side streets and alleys, will further decrease the desirability of the area for families and others with a lower tolerance for deviance. In areas in decline, increasing numbers of shops will stand empty or be converted to nonretail uses (karate parlors, evangelistic churches, social clubs, and the like).

F. Collapse

Finally, the effect of all these processes can rebound in the form of even more dramatic changes in the population composition of an area. Where levels of fear are extreme, neighborhoods collapse and are transformed into entirely different, nonresidential places.

After a while, their history of crime and disorder becomes the driving force in the population composition of areas deep in the cycle of decline. The affluent are long gone, but now women, children, and the elderly shun those areas. As in large parts of Woodlawn (Chicago) and the South Bronx (New York City), such a high tolerance for risk is required to live in these places that the population drops precipitously. Disorder can continue to occur, but there is virtually no "community" remaining to define it as a problem. Unattached males, the homeless, and the aimless live there in boarded-up buildings, seedy residential hotels, and flophouses. Skid row saloons are the only commercial establishments open after dark. Abandoned buildings become "shooting galleries" where drugs are distributed and consumed. Street prostitution will have moved elsewhere, however, for it depends on customers feeling that they can cruise an area safely (Cohen 1980). As collapse approaches, residential and commercial buildings in the area stand empty or are demolished, and arson becomes a common problem. In Newark, for example, vacant residential buildings burn at four times the city's overall rate; the rate for vacant commercial structures is even higher (Sternlieb and Burchell 1983). Vacant lots thus multiply, filled with the rubble of demolition. The crime count can even drop in such areas because there are dramatically fewer people to be victimized. When collapse spreads, cities develop hollow cores where the worst areas have burned. They have reached the bottom of the cycle of decline.

IV. Reversing the Process of Decline

Despite the power of the social forces reviewed above, shifting into decline is not the inevitable fate of urban neighborhoods, even where

fear is high. They can go "up" (in common parlance) as well as "down," both through gentrification and through "incumbent upgrading" (cf. McDonald, in this volume). Concern about crime is merely one feature of urban life, and it is not necessarily the most important determinant of decisions to move or to invest in an area. Taub et al.'s (1981, 1984) studies of fear of crime and real estate prices in Chicago neighborhoods suggest that fear has substantial negative effects on moving and investment decisions only if other neighborhood factors are pushing in the same direction. If they are, people who live there view crime as a leading indicator of community decline. Among white Chicagoans, for example, fear was related to the perception that investment in the neighborhood was risky among only those who thought their area was racially unstable. In generally deteriorating areas, crime takes on great significance as a sign of neighborhood decay, and people who live there report feeling helpless in the face of the large-scale social forces that seem to be working against them.

However, factors other than concern about crime are important in determining the demand for property or rental housing that pushes real estate values up or down. These include closeness to the downtown, the quality and style of the housing stock, access to amenities and transportation, and the availability of loans. When other factors are positive and (especially) when property values are appreciating, residents find ample reason to be satisfied with the area, and they tolerate surprisingly high levels of crime. The same seems to be true for small retail businesses in urban residential areas. McPherson et al. (1983) found that even in disorderly, problem-ridden, high-crime areas, owners were more likely to plan to remain in business and make future investments if they believed the future of their market area looked bright and if they were optimistic about local development efforts. Concern about crime does not in itself determine levels of investment, the confidence of residents in the future, or property values. Rather it is one strand in a bundle of features that make up a community's character. Where people are optimistic about the bundle as a whole, crime counts for less.

This does not mean that residents of higher-crime, but appreciating, areas are not personally fearful. McDonald (in this volume) summarizes several studies indicating that residents of inner-city gentrifying neighborhoods *are* fearful of crime; the difference is that they are willing to tolerate that condition despite their ability to move elsewhere. One reason they can do so is that residents of gentrifying areas often are

childless and thus able to ignore a number of local problems, including school safety. A survey in poor neighborhoods in Philadelphia found that the safety of their children in and on the way to school was the number one crime-related concern among parents. Interviews with their children revealed that they also saw schools as dangerous places (Savitz, Lalli, and Rosen 1977). Economically advantaged areas also may succeed in steering more city resources into building the stock of local amenities that underlie appreciating property values. "Rehabbers" often prove to be effective petitioners for better services, including police protection, and they understand how to change neighborhood dynamics by stimulating negative rather than positive feedback processes. This means, first, dealing with population turnover. Taub et al. (1984) found that defensively "stabilizing the real estate market" was the first concern of community organizations in the Chicago neighborhoods they studied and that "[m]ost of the strong community organizations considered in this book arose in response to impending or actual racial change" (p. 184). At best, they found that this was accomplished by self-consciously promoting the virtues of racial integration and by appealing to class interests instead. They also found that neighborhood efforts to reverse tendencies toward decline primarily were successful when supported by large but immobile corporate actors (e.g., hospitals, banks, and universities) with a sunk investment to protect.

V. The Systematic Consequences of Fear

This essay argued first that neighborhoods change only slowly and proposed that critical triggering events and conditions shift some of them from relative stability into a state of demographic and economic change. Those precipitating events include disinvestment, demolition, and demagoguery plus regional or national economic forces out of the hands of local decision makers. Once areas slip into the cycle of decline, feedback processes take control of neighborhood conditions and increase levels of fear. The problems that emerge include crime, physical deterioration, social disorder, and group conflict over the control of neighborhood turf. Fear in turn undermines the capacity of the community to deal with these problems. It stimulates physical and psychological withdrawal from the community, a weakening of informal social control mechanisms, a decline in the organizational life and mobilization capacity of the neighborhood, deterioration of local business conditions, and further disorder and crime. These problems feed on themselves, spiraling neighborhoods deeper into decline. As Schuerman and

Kobrin (in this volume) report, in the worst areas crime shifts from being just a "dependent" variable to being an "independent" variable as well in areas characterized by twenty years of decline. At the extreme end of the cycle, they may no longer be recognizable as neighborhoods but take on an entirely different social function.

There is a great deal of interest in identifying which neighborhoods are entering the cycle of decline. Schuerman and Kobrin (in this volume) have some hope for what they dub "emerging crime areas." These are middle-aged rather than old residential areas, with changing populations but substantial pockets of middle-class residents. Here they recommend "deceleration of demographic and socioeconomic change." Wilson and Kelling (1982) focus on "the ratio of respectable to disreputable people" in an area to foresee its fate. Neighborhoods not too far past their tipping point are those with substantial levels of legitimate street use and a critical mass of residents interested in keeping the area in good repair. Schuerman and Kobrin argue that areas deeply in the cycle of decline—characterized by at least three decades of high crime—are lost territory to the rest of society. Wilson and Kelling would seem to write off places somewhat more quickly. They all favor triage, consigning areas mired in crime, disorder, and fear to some urban scrap heap—although, like nuclear waste, neighborhood problems have a half-life that will scar those who wander too close to them for the foreseeable future.

Individually disastrous as the cycle of decline is for the areas involved, when aggregated at the metropolitan level they are collectively even more important. They help explain (but do not completely determine) some central features of contemporary urban life. The most important of these is "white flight" from central cities. The massive and racially selective suburbanization of the United States following World War II may be the most consequential effect of crime on American society. The suburban ring often dominates the political balance of power in many urban states. Socially, it has driven another cleavage between whites and blacks, browns, and Asians, who uneasily huddle together at the core; urban areas have divided into what Farley et al. (1978) dubbed "chocolate cities" and "vanilla suburbs." There has been a corresponding pattern of disinvestment in inner-city areas. This includes a mammoth outward shift in the location of jobs and concomitant changes in the ratio of services to taxes, which favors suburban over center-city locations. The growth of shopping centers at the expense of central business districts has eroded city tax bases. Further,

there is evidence that suburban rings cast a shadow back over the cities they surround. For example, the extent of suburbanization is correlated with higher central-city tax burdens, partially because of the volume of services and the maze of roadways required by those living outside the taxing jurisdiction of the city (Kasarda 1972).

Thus, partially as a result of fear, American society is faced with the concentration in inner cities of structurally unemployable public service consumers who are excluded from economic and social developments in the mainstream. (Another source of this tendency toward concentration has been the increasing flow of younger, more affluent blacks into the suburbs; see Frey [1984].) Many cities are threatened with becoming dumping grounds for those locked out of other sectors. There is some evidence of a modest reversal of these processes, with a return to the cities affecting areas with location advantages and housing suited to affluent, childless households (Laska and Spain 1980). Gentrification can force up rents, increase the value of land, and upgrade the housing stock in small areas through economic pressures that act just in reverse of the more familiar trends described above (McDonald, in this volume). However, there is no evidence that the pace of such developments is outstripping the hollowing out of many city centers.

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