Introduction

On a cold Saturday morning in October, 1989, neighborhood residents demonstrated outside Priced-Right Liquors, (not its real name), a tavern and carry-out liquor store on the Near West Side of Chicago. They protested that the store and a 35-room boarding house next door, owned by the same person, were destroying their community. Prostitutes reputedly worked out of the boarding house, and drunks and vagabonds gathered outside the tavern every afternoon and evening. Women complained of being accosted as they walked by, and broken bottles were strewn on the sidewalks and in the gutters for a block in either direction. The first available alley stank of urine. The protests came after a series of meetings between the owner and a local block club had failed to alter conditions in and around his buildings, and repeated complaints to the police had produced no action with regard either to prostitution or public drinking in the area.

The residents of this largely black and Puerto Rican neighborhood struggling to regain some control over conditions in their area were not complaining about conventional street crime, although that is certainly also a problem. Their manifesto pointed out how the tavern owner violated criminal statutes and the building code, but their protest was less about "law" than it was about "order." They tried to negotiate a solution first, because they were concerned with setting things right rather than with getting anyone arrested. Arguing that he was understaffed, the district police commander would not promise to do much more about the prob-
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le; he also voiced the opinion that the courts would not take any arrests very seriously anyway, for they were flooded with "real" criminals. And, of course, building code violations were not his responsibility.

These residents of the Near West Side were confronting a condition which plagues many inner city neighborhoods. This condition which we will term disorder, has a social and a physical dimension. Disorder is evident in the widespread appearance of junk and trash in vacant lots; it is evident, too, in decaying homes, boarded-up buildings, the vandalism of public and private property, graffiti, and stripped and abandoned cars in streets and alleys. It is signaled by bands of teenagers congregating on street corners, by the presence of prostitutes and panhandlers, by public drinking, the verbal harassment of women, and open gambling and drug use. What these conditions have in common is that they signal a breakdown of the local social order. Communities beset by disorder can no longer expect people to act in civil fashion in public places. They can no longer expect landlords to respect the character of their neighborhood. Sometimes, disorder propels people to act—if they are fortunate enough to realize it is both evidence that their community is in decline, and that it will cause further trouble in the near future.

What is disorder? What are its consequences for neighborhood life? Why is disorder seemingly such an intractable problem, and what can be done to counteract it? This book describes the impact of disorder on the forces which underlie neighborhood stability and change and argues that disorder plays an important role in sparking urban decline. Understandably, communities are troubled when such problems as those listed above appear. Some of the activities are clearly illegal, and residents can hope to get the police interested in those problems. Disorders in this category include public gambling and drinking, prostitution, and the sale of drugs on the street. But, violators of other widely-approved standards of public conduct are not so clearly breaking the law. Into this category fall noisy neighbors, accumulating trash, poorly maintained buildings, and sundry problems relating to congregating bands of youths. Still other forms of disorder seem to present intractable enforcement problems despite their unlawful status. A great deal of disorderly behavior falls into such ambiguous legal categories as "disturbing the peace," "loitering," and "vagrancy." Furthermore, many disorders (the main exception being residential vandalism) do not have individual victims, despite their collective consequences. While these disorders often lead to complaints that the authorities "do something," the source of the public's concern often merely the anticipation of disorderly behavior or the possible consequences of growing disorder for the community, rather than a specific criminal incident. Because of the tenuous legal status of such complaints, and the fact that many disorders are not conventionally defined as serious problems, getting the attention of the police or other municipal agencies can be difficult. Sociologist Albert Reiss (1985) of Yale University captured the flavor of disorderly conditions lying near the edges of the law when he dubbed them "soft crimes."

But, legal distinctions and organizational encouragements have little to do with the considerable impact of these problems on community life. In a report issued by President Johnson's Crime Commission more than 20 years ago, Albert Biderman and his fellow researchers (1967) argued that popular impressions of any area derive from the "highly visible signs of what [people] regard as disorderly and disreputable behavior in their community."

Those impressions deserve to be taken seriously, for they plainly have objective consequences. Researchers have found that perceptions of disorder have many ill effects on urban neighborhoods. Disorder not only sparks concern and fear of crime among neighborhood residents; it may actually increase the level of serious crime. Disorder erodes what control neighborhood residents can maintain over local events and conditions. It drives out those for whom stable community life is important, and discourages people with similar values, from moving in. It threatens house prices and discourages investment. In short, disorder is an instrument of destabilization and neighborhood decline. The following chapters document these conclusions and take a close look at strategies for dealing with disorder.

THE IDEA OF DISORDER

After more than 70 years of empirical research on the processes involved in maintaining social order, relatively little systematic work exists on its opposite—disorder—other than what we know about common crime. This neglect may be partly due to the limited amount of easily-accessible official statistics on other kinds of dis-
order. It may also reflect the fact that the "order" itself is a slippery concept, once one leaves the well-defined domain of criminal law.

Research on disorder begins with a quest for important distinctions. What is disorder, and what isn't? Grouping building abandonment and public drinking under the rubric of disorder may at first seem too wide-ranging. But what they have in common is how neighborhood residents react to their appearance. Disorders vary in the extent to which they have been scrutinized by researchers—there is a great deal of research on vandalism and housing abandonment, for example, but very little on littering. And how people react to these problems has not been much considered. The present study investigates public responses to two general classes of disorder: social and physical. Social disorder is a matter of behavior; you can see it happen (public drinking, prostitution), experience it (catcalling or sexual harassment), or notice direct evidence of it (graffiti, or vandalism). Physical disorder involves visual signs of negligence and unchecked decay: abandoned or ill-kept buildings, broken streetlights, trash-filled lots, alleys strewn with garbage and alive with rats. By and large, physical disorder refers to ongoing conditions, while social disorder appears as a series of more or less episodic events.

Social and physical disorder are considered here as different problems with different cures; indeed, every problem we discuss has interesting features of its own. But, these differences are not important for many of our purposes, since the disorders in question usually engender the same reaction—be it flight or flight—from neighborhood residents. These reactions, and their larger consequences for urban communities, are what really interest us here.

This book will also present some evidence that disorder needs to be distinguished from the ordinary crime problems facing the same communities. While disorder is clearly associated with common crime, the two turn out to be distinct issues.

Of course, a concept to be useful must also be clearly defined. It cannot encompass every nuance of behavior. Disorder violates widely shared values, but the social order is not defined by everything people agree upon. Order is defined by norms about public behavior, and these norms are only a subset of the manners and morals of the community. They prescribe how people should behave in relation to their neighbors or while passing through a community. This is still not a neat bundle of rules. Unlike criminalology, which avoids many complex conceptual issues simply by pointing to the statute books to classify behavior, the study of disorder necessarily examines conflicts over an uncodified set of norms. The only real difference between crime and many disorders is that politicians have not enacted some widely agreed upon values into law. But, because many norms of public behavior are uncodified, the potential set of standards which may be violated is larger and more amorphously bounded than behaviors prescribed by the criminal law. One of the aims of this book is to work through the untidiness of disorder, and to discover what its true dimensions are.

All claims about how people should behave are subject to the charge that they are "relative judgments. If disorder largely rests in the eye of the beholder," does it simply reflect narrow-mindedness? Does the concept of disorder represent anything other than intolerance for all but conventional middle-class views of how people ought to behave? In the case of common crime, a large body of research indicates that there is in fact a value consensus. People of all races and classes agree we should shun theft, violence, sexual assault, and aggression against children. They give very similar ratings to the seriousness of various kinds of offenses, and they agree to a surprising extent on how stiff the punishments ought to be for violations of the law. The issue of what is criminal has been settled politically in debate over the criminal code, and within law-abiding society there is broad consensus on such matters. These middle-class values are just about everyone's values.

But there is no equally widespread agreement about what is disorderly, and there are conflicting claims. Urban historians report that American conceptions of the appropriate level of public order have changed dramatically over time. At important points in our history these conceptions have been the subject of intense political conflict; this experience suggests that the popular view of disorder is not immutable, and that it has reflected ethnic and class cleavages in society. In addition, urban stoopists argue that city dwellers have a positive taste for disorder, and that it is an aspect of life worth celebrating.

Over time, American society has witnessed what historian Samuel Walker (1983) dubbed a "revolution in public expectations about the quality of life," clearly indicating that what is "disorderly" depends on the historical context. Before the mid-nineteenth century, daily life in American cities was more un-
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plesant than it is today, and almost as insecure. A marked decline began in the 1870s, both in the level of predatory crime and in social problems such as public drunkenness, vagrancy, disorderly conduct, and simple assault (Monkkonen 1981). Urban historian Richard Wade (1969) of New York University offers numerous reasons for this, for example, the emergence of a modern system of social control that featured well-organized municipal police forces, the first social welfare programs, and compulsory schooling. Also, the growing taste for order in American cities (in 1900, urban rates of violence were lower than in rural areas) may well have reflected, not just the demands of industrial life for regular, docile, sober behavior, and a willingness to accept supervision, but also the emergence of new social norms reflecting the conditions of modern city life (Lane, 1980). "Close-packed, mutually-dependent city dwellers appear to have lost their earlier tolerance for interpersonal violence, drunkenness, and truancy. Historical evidence suggests that 'over a long term urbanization had a settling, literally a civilizing, effect on the population involved'" (Lane, 1968).

This civilizing process was not smooth, and the values it represented were partly imposed by force. History suggests that disagreements over norms about order reflect fundamental social cleavages; in other words, "conventional" norms can favor the interests of some over others. After the Civil War, police focused their attention on minor offenses against public order. This led to skyrocketing arrests for public drinking, vagrancy, suspicion, and loitering. Levels of arrests for these offenses peaked about 1870, but after the turn of the century they dropped dramatically. During the unstable period, widespread strikes and a wildly fluctuating economy pushed large numbers of people out of the labor force, and Americans took to the highways and rose the rails in unprecedented numbers. It became the task of the police to bring tramps and unemployed workers back into line. They also imposed conventional norms on the seemingly endless waves of immigrants, who brought with them alien ways of life. Historian Sydney Hammond (1983: 199) argues that many offenses against public order (including public and Sunday drinking, lounging at corners, recreational violence, and consorting with prostitutes) were in fact "working-class leisure-time activities," and that criminalizing them was part of "the task of bringing immigrants into conformity with the labor discipline of industrial society."

The police intervened in civil affairs to keep the bottom layer of society from drifting outside the economic system and forming a "dangerous class" that might threaten the hegemony of industrialists. The claim that a measure of disorder is actually good for us can be found in the writings of urban utopians like Jane Jacobs, Harvey Cox, and Richard Sennett. They illustrate the sometimes shadowy boundary between consensually agreed-upon order and tolerable levels of diversity. Jacobs argues that people choose to live in cities in order to savor the variety and richness of the urban experience. Lively and challenging city life is created by the mingling of people with contrasting life styles. "[City areas with] flourishing diversity sprout strange and unpredictable uses and peculiar scenes. But this is not a drawback of diversity. This is the point, or part of it. That this should happen is in keeping with one of the missions of cities" (Jacobs, 1961: 238). A stimulating neighborhood environment may have collective as well as individual benefits. Jacobs is perhaps best known for her theory that a diverse environment attracts the kind of public attention that keeps it safe. The passing parade draws attention to the street, and encourages its use by the general public both during the day and after dark. "The greater and more plentiful the range of all legitimate interests (in the strictly legal sense) that city streets and their enterprises can satisfy, the better for the streets and for the safety and civilization of the city" (Jacobs, 1961: 44). Our discussion of the impact of disorder on the watchfulness of neighborhood residents will show that both communal watchfulness and individual efforts to promote neighborhood security are undermined when disorder overtakes a community.

Harvey Cox and Richard Sennett both advance variants of the medieval rule that "city air makes man free." Cox, a theologian, endorses the secularism of modern urban society. Cities promote and support unconventional lifestyles, which in his view is a good thing. Urban living provides what he characterizes as "a liberation from some of the cloying bondages of preurban society." It provides people with a chance to be free. "[F]or many people it is a glorious liberation, a deliverance from the saddling traditions and burdensome expectations of town life and an entry into the exciting new possibilities of choice which pervade the secular metropolis" (1965: 47, 49). Cox calls for a "theology of anonymity" which celebrates the ability of secular people to (as would be said two decades later) "do their own thing."

In The Uses of Disorder, social philosopher Richard Sennett actu-
have common consequences, this stems in part from the nature of the problems being considered. Certainly, there are conditions in which Jacobs' kind of diversity widely is not only tolerated but even attracts a crowd. Peddlers and street musicians, sidewalk drinking, and dense late-night foot traffic can be tolerable in the right places, just as the antics long associated with Mardi Gras and Halloween are appropriate at the right times. Urbanologist William H. Whyte (1988) argues that they can also be good for business. Whyte observed patterns of foot traffic in retailing areas of Manhattan and came away with the impression that colorful, interesting, festive street life attracts shoppers and encourages people to linger downtown after work. However, we will be examining the impact of less benign disorder—including vandalism, drug dealing, street harassment, physical degradation—in areas that are solidly residential in character. The surveys, field observations, and experiments in policing and community organizing described here cannot test the historians' claim that urbanization and industrialization have shaped people's taste for order, nor the utopian's that urban diversity is preferable to suburb or village life. Our empirical research is necessarily confined to the here and now, and to phenomena that vary from place to place. But the evidence suggests that these disorders are not experienced differently, that people agree on the extent of the problems they face in their communities, and that major economic, social, and lifestyle divisions in urban areas are not reflected in real differences over appropriate levels of order.

DISORDER AND COMMON CRIME

This book is not about common crime—most disorders do not fall clearly into that category. There has been a great deal of research on "garden-variety crime"—murder, rape, robbery, burglary, and the like—and hundreds of studies document how levels of crime vary from place to place. They vary not within a given area to virtually everything. There seems to be no social handicap or environmental pathology that is not correlated with crime rates for cities, neighborhoods, or blocks, including such diverse factors as average building height, the tuberculosis rate, air pollution levels, and distance from the downtown area. From the opposite perspective, some research has also examined the impact
of crime on other neighborhood problems. In these studies crime is treated as the causal variable, one that has consequences for individuals and neighborhoods. For example, high rates of crime are related to inner-city depopulation, declining property values, and high expenditures on the police. We will take a similar perspective on disorder, but an opposite one, that crime is not the primary cause of disorder.

Our concern with common crime is limited to whether disorder is a cause of it. As we shall see, neighborhood levels of disorder are closely related to crime rates, to fear of crime, and the belief that serious crime is a neighborhood problem. This relationship could reflect the fact that the link between crime and disorder is a causal one, or that both are dependent upon some third set of factors (such as poverty or neighborhood instability). In an important article that appeared in The Atlantic Monthly, academic policing experts James Q. Wilson and George Kelling (1982) maintained that disorder actually spawns serious crime. They alluded to a sequence in which unchecked rule-breaking invites petty plundering and even more serious street crime and theft. However, the precise relationship between crime and disorder remains unclear. It is an important question, for research has not identified many neighborhoods that are high in disorder but low in crime; whatever the link between the two is, it is powerful.

According to Wilson and Kelling, disorder undermines the processes by which communities ordinarily maintain social control. Where disorder problems are frequent and no one takes responsibility for unruly behavior in public places, the sense of "territoriality" among residents shrinks to include only their own households; meanwhile, untended property is a fair game for plunder or destruction. Further, a neighborhood's reputation for tolerating disorder invites outsiders to make use of whatever opportunities exist. Areas that tolerate (or cannot effectively counter) rowdy taverns, sex and drug-oriented paraphernalia shops, public drinking, prostitution, and similar disorders, will almost certainly be plagued by crime. Where disorder is common and provides capacities for minimal, criminals will feel their chances of being identified are low, and may be confident that no one will intervene in their affairs. Gambling and drinking lead to robberies and fights; prostitution and drug sales attract those who prey upon the consumers of vice. Wilson and Kelling suspect that a concentration of supposedly "victimless" disorders can soon flood an area with serious, victimizing crime.

We will reexamine Wilson and Kelling's argument in the light of data on levels of disorder and crime in 40 urban neighborhoods, and will focus on the consequences of both crime and disorder on fear of crime, community stability, and the ability of neighborhood residents to do things to protect themselves and their families. We will also document our finding that the effects of disorder on community morale and cohesion are independent of the effects of crime, and that both make a difference. This relationship could provide a rationale for focusing new resources on problems of disorder, for it can no longer be taken for granted that "more cops" and other standard responses to crime problems will deal with disorder as well.

**DISORDER AND COMMUNITY CHANGE**

One of our major concerns is the impact of disorder upon neighborhood decline. Most neighborhoods are stable social systems, which is why they are identifiable as "neighborhoods," with names that serve as useful labels, sometimes for generations. Their present condition generally resembles their past. At various times this stability may be threatened, but old patterns persist. Analytic models of such stable systems feature "negative feedback loops," or mechanisms which react to destabilizing events, set things right, retard change, and keep most problems within bounds. In residential neighborhoods, these feedback mechanisms can include both unconscious and conscious efforts at community renewal. Through individual initiatives and collective action, residents of stable areas find ways to fight unwanted change and preserve their community's character.

The unconscious forces largely reflect the housing market. Numerous and uncoordinated efforts by property owners to rehabilitate and upgrade their buildings can create Rider-Decay. Consequent action may be inspired government and police programs and community organizations. In stable neighborhoods, an emergent disorder problem—say, the appearance of after-hours drinking in the alley behind a tavern—would swiftly disappear as these feedback mechanisms exerted their influence. Residents would demand po-
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lence action, meet with the tavern owner and perhaps threaten to challenge his liquor license, organize teams to drive through the alley with their headlights set high, spotlight the alley from their backyards, and even march (as we saw at the beginning of the chapter) to draw attention to their cause.

"Stability" does not mean that things remain the same, of course. Dynamic social systems never rest. Even in places which on the surface appear tranquil, families move away, buildings age, and macro-economic forces continually affect the price of housing. However, if approximately the same number of people move in as move out, and if the new arrivals resemble those who left, the area can be counted as stable. Areas remain stable when the housing stock is continually repaired and renewed, and when people can sell and buy or rent homes there at prices that are appropriate to the quality of the structures and the social class of the area's residents. "Stability" means that the neighborhood reproduces itself as a social system.

However, dramatic changes can ensue when the process of neighborhood renewal is disrupted. Numerous factors can trigger that disruption, including large-scale construction and demolition projects undertaken by local governments; disinvestment by mortgage lending institutions; block-busting efforts by real-estate entrepreneurs who buy homes cheaply from fleeing whites, and resell them dearly to newcomers desperate for good housing; demagogic politicians capitalizing on the racial fears which fuel "white flight"; and the impact of regional and national economic forces on interest rates and local employment (see Skogan, 1986a).

Unstable systems lack steering mechanisms capable of making mid-course corrections. When stabilizing mechanisms fail, other forces can be loosened which accelerate further changes rather than slowing them. This occurs when systems characterized by this kind of "positive feedback" can change rapidly. The changes do not necessarily increase crime or lower the quality of life in those areas. Neighborhoods undergoing rapid gentrification or extensive upgrading of housing are both examples of destabilized systems that improve rapidly once they pass a critical threshold of investment by early "pioneers." However, when they go wrong, neighborhoods can decline quickly, and as we shall see, disorder comes to play an important, independent role in stimulating this kind of urban decline.

Once a community slips into the cycle of decline, feedback pro-

cesses rapidly take control. The problems that emerge can include more serious forms of disorder, as well as escalating crime—consequences that further undermine the community's capacity to deal with its problems.

For residents, disorder and crime lead first of all to withdrawal from the community. Daily experience with disorderly conditions creates anxiety: the prospect heightens fear. When communities finally become unpleasant to live in, and encounters leave people feeling uneasy and unsafe, many residents choose to leave (Smith, 1988). Studies indicate that neighborhood crime problems are strongly related to residential dissatisfaction and the desire to move (Kasl and Harburg, 1972; Droettboom et al., 1971). However, moving is selective. Families and members of the middle class tend to leave first, often to be replaced by transient individuals (Stark, 1987; Frey, 1988; Duncan and Newman, 1976). Those who cannot leave physically, withdraw psychologically, finding friends elsewhere or simply isolating themselves (Kidd and Chayet, 1984). Such withdrawal tends to reduce the supervision of youths, undermines any general sense of mutual responsibility among area residents, and weakens informal social control. Withdrawal also undermines participation in neighborhood affairs, presaging a general decline in the community's organizational and political capacity. More, it contributes to the deterioration of local housing and business conditions, neighborhood elements that have already been affected by population change. Fewer people will want to shop or live in areas stigmatized by visible signs of disorder; these problems feed upon themselves, and neighborhoods spiral deeper into decline. Leo Schuerman and Solomon Kohrbin (1986), sociologists at the University of Southern California, have tracked communities in Los Angeles over a 20-year period; they find that, in the worst areas, crime has shifted from being an effect of social and economic conditions to being a cause of those conditions as well.

The population drops precipitously in areas on the edge of collapse. Street prostitutes move in, for the trade depends on customers feeling they can cruise safely. Uncollected litter blows in the wind. In cold weather, men gather around fires in trash cans. Unattached males, the homeless, and the aimless live in seedy residential hotels and flophouses, or squat in boarded-up buildings. Taverns are the only commercial establishments open after dark. Abandoned buildings serve as "shooting galleries" where
of discovering the problems and priorities of local residents. As many of the concerns of neighborhood residents would involve events and conditions not clearly within the purview of the criminal law, this would inevitably lead the police into uncharted territory, where their training and experience would not offer them much of a guide to action. In the course of maintaining order, it would also call for them to make important discretionary decisions. Wilson (1968) himself has spelled out how efforts by police to maintain order can become a source of racial and class discrimination, when the definition of who is “orderly” lies largely in the hands of the police.

It is the nature of disorder that many problems fall outside the traditional police mandate, but an accumulating mound of evidence from research on police since about 1980 (e.g., Sherman, 1986, and Skolnick and Bayley, 1988) suggests that there are strategies that can bring police closer to the people. Collectively known as “Community Policing,” these strategies include foot patrol, team policing, administrative decentralization to local storefront offices, and other efforts to build two-way communication into neighborhood police work. When they succeed, such programs function in two ways: they open informal channels for the flow of information and demands for action from the people to the police, and they facilitate police action on that basis. These programs differ from traditional police-community-relations units. In the main, community relations bureaus have been concerned with education efforts in schools, with representing departments in meetings, fielding questions, and engaging in public relations efforts. Community Policing is a line rather than a staff responsibility; unlike traditional bureaus, the officers involved in community policing have the capacity to respond in significant ways to neighborhood problems. Also, reflecting our concern with disorder, effective Community Policing requires that this information flow and action be broadly focused, and not just “crime”-oriented.

The several innovative Community Policing projects we examined in Houston and Newark involved foot patrol, neighborhood storefront offices, community organizing by police officers, and local newsletters. These projects were evaluated by a team from the Police Foundation and Northwestern University, which found good evidence that Community Policing can significantly reduce disorder. The programs were highly visible and very well received.
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motion, residents reported lower levels of social and physical disorder, less fear of crime, and greater confidence in the police. In Newark, Community Policing could be contrasted with a traditional enforcement program aimed at suppressing street disorder. Aggressive street sweeps, roadblocks, foot patrol, and crackdowns on disorder on mass transit also reduced street disorder there, but unlike Community Policing, they had no additional benefits.

However, there was also disturbing evidence that the benefits of Community Policing were largely reserved for white and better-off residents of the target communities. Evaluations indicate that they had knowledge of the programs and participated in them, but that minorities and the poor did not. Thus, most of the desirable results were confined to one segment of the community. This evident “class bias” could be traced to the way in which Community Policing activities were organized. In order to move quickly, police in most of the areas allied themselves with existing community organizations, often finding it easier to work with homeowners in the better parts of the target neighborhoods. The consequence was that equal distribution of benefits goes against some of the assumptions of Community Policing. It can be risky for police to open themselves to “input” in communities that are diverse, for it appears that when police move beyond enforcing the criminal code, and become involved in negotiating the character of local order with other community elements, policing becomes a more overtly political process.

Community Organizations and Disorder. During the past decade there has been a great deal of interest in remobilizing communities to deal with disorder and crime on their own. An increase in disorder and crime reflects the declining strength of informal control in urban neighborhoods that are caught in the cycle of decline; hence, the logic goes, efforts to reinvigorate informal control mechanisms may reverse the trend to disorder. While there may be other means of doing this (by attacking unemployment for example, or upgrading the schools), organized community groups have emerged as a means for reshaping the destiny of threatened urban neighborhoods.

Dan Lewis, Jane Grant, and Dennis Rosenbaum (1988), crime researchers at Northwestern University, have summarized the theory behind community-based strategies for reversing neighborhood decline. They found that organizations typically attempt to control disorder and crime through activities that make people aware of neighborhood threats in their homes, encourage voluntary activity, and that stimulate actual participation in them; that enhance feelings of efficacy about individual and collective action, and also increase personal responsibility for these actions; that stimulate actions to regulate social behavior in the neighborhood by promoting feelings of “territorality” and a willingness to intervene in suspicious circumstances; that act to prevent victimization via individual and household crime prevention efforts; and that enhance neighboring, social interaction, and mutual helpfulness.

Community organizers have devised a variety of tactics to promote these ends, including inspirational meetings, block-watch groups, neighborhood patrols, property marking, home security surveys, escort services for the elderly, educational programs, leafletting, and marches to “take back the night.” The monumental problems involved in making such efforts are detailed in Chapter 6, where we examine two efforts to mobilize communities in Chicago and Minneapolis to tackle neighborhood problems. The Chicago project involved established, successful, professionally staffed community organizations that had previous experience on housing, land use, and community economic development. The Ford Foundation sought to gauge the effects of turning the expertise of such groups to the problems of crime and disorder, and the Lewis, Grant, and Rosenbaum team evaluated their success in doing so. In contrast, the city of Minneapolis attempted to create new block clubs in previously unorganized areas. While plainly a more problematic venture, it was perhaps more likely to benefit disenfranchised neighborhoods. Professional organizers spent two years building networks of block clubs in 21 target areas, while a research team from the Police Foundation and the Minnesota Crime Prevention Center evaluated their efforts.

Unfortunately, neither of these programs showed much success. In Chicago, local organizing efforts actually increased fear of crime. In every case, most residents of the target communities were aware of the programs, and a significant number were involved in activities similar to those described above; but this awareness and involvement had no measurable effect on crime. The evaluations concluded that community-based programs are very difficult to launch in low-income, heterogeneous, high-turnover, high-crime neighborhoods. Whether the programs were self-initiated or fostered by outside agencies, the hope that the more these programs were needed, the less successful they were. This was true even though the organizing effort was disproportionately directed toward neighborhoods in need. The success of the Chicago...
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Minneapolis projects challenges some of the underlying assumptions of the community-based approach to controlling disorder and crime. As happened with some of the policing projects, there was evidence that those neighborhood residents who were better off were more likely to gather whatever benefits the programs were able to deliver.

Will Anything Work? While much of this book could appear to be yet another ‘nothing works’ report on social policy, this would be inaccurate with respect to Community Policing. There is no doubt, however, that I am skeptical of traditional community approaches to controlling disorder. The concluding chapter extends the policy net somewhat more widely, and describes other promising ways of tackling disorder; these include developmental strategies that could empower communities to regain control over local conditions. These are, in my view, the most promising, and these approaches remain untested. And if one message can be drawn from evaluations of policing and community organizing programs described in this book, it is that well-meaning programs may not work, and may even have unwanted consequences. It seems as if one of the ‘iron laws’ of policy evaluation is that, the more we know about a program, the less confidence we have in it. This should not be a surprise, since American public policy tends to be formulated and applied in a context that ensures that most of it will have only a marginal effect on significant problems. There are no ‘silver bullets’ in social policy because a theme we will take up in Chapter 7 the political system deprives them, the social system rejects them, and the legal system protects us against them. Our nation’s cultural and political diversity, coupled with its strong orientation toward individual rights rather than collective responsibilities, should deter us from expecting too much in the way of engineered social change. Even so, the programs we examine here, while not all successful, do merit serious consideration.

A BRIEF LOOK AT THE DATA

The Surveys. Parts of Chapter 2 and all of Chapters 3-6 rely heavily on surveys of selected urban neighborhoods. Most research on crime-related neighborhood problems has employed official offense or arrest data and census figures for blocks or census tracts. However, these statistics greatly underrepresent and somewhat distort the true distribution of many types of crimes, and police records are totally inadequate for helping us understand disorder problems, since such problems by their nature largely escape formal action.

To counteract this problem, most of our research is based on interviews with city dwellers. The data utilized in Chapters 2-4 represent the combined results of surveys of 40 residential neighborhoods; they were conducted as part of five different studies of neighborhood crime problems between 1977 and 1983. Such surveys help overcome the limitations of police figures on crime, since the interviewers went directly to people’s doorsteps and inquired about their victimization experiences. They were also asked about the extent of various forms of disorder in their immediate area, as well as their satisfaction with the neighborhood; whether they intended to move; their fear of crime; and other questions directly related to theories about neighborhood and change. Slightly under 13,000 adults were interviewed in all.

The responses were collated to produce statistics at a neighborhood level. While measures of important neighborhood factors were not exactly comparable, they were assembled for most of the 40 areas. The appendix describes how the statistics were combined to form neighborhood measures, and also describes the 40 neighborhoods surveyed. They were diverse with respect to race and class, and the extent to which they were troubled by disorder and crime. Four of the six cities studied—Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Newark, New Jersey—are Northern industrial cities marked by racial transition, declining populations, and shifting economic fortunes. Two others—Atlanta and Houston—represent the Southeastern and Southwestern cities that were expected to grow during the 1970s. The data are limited by their emphasis on inner cities. Although suburbs are not immune from disorder—most big cities in the East, Midwest, and Mid-Atlantic regions have old, dense-in suburbs facing similar problems—the emphasis in the data is on inner cities. This book also concerns itself exclusively with residential neighborhoods; it does not deal with the issue of disorder in declining or rebounding downtowns or in nightclubs districts; and it is not about subways. However, there were no strong city-specific patterns in the areas examined here. They differed mainly with respect to the level of disorder—with
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Newark often coming out worst—but they did not differ with regard to how disorder and crime were related to social, economic, or environmental factors. Thus, it seems likely that the patterns identified here would apply to other big cities as well.

Chapters 5 and 6 are based on surveys of selected neighborhoods in Chicago, Minneapolis, Houston, and Newark. These surveys were fielded to help evaluate special policing programs and community-organizing efforts. In each city, neighborhood residents were interviewed both before the projects began and after they had been in operation for some time. Each evaluation involved program target areas and sets of matched comparison neighborhoods. No new programs or activities were undertaken in the comparison areas, in order to provide benchmarks against which to compare changes over time in the program areas. The programs all involved several organizing or policing tactics, and between them they provide rigorous tests of the viability of such efforts for intervening in the process of urban decline.

Field Observations and Interviews. Chapter 2 makes extensive use of observations and interviews by field researchers working in 10 of the 40 study neighborhoods. These 10 neighborhoods (4 in Chicago, 3 in Philadelphia, and 3 in San Francisco) were canvassed as part of a Northwestern University study of how individuals and community organizations react to crime problems. The site observers noted conditions and events in the study neighborhoods over a one-year period, and conducted hundreds of unstructured interviews with community residents, organization leaders, merchants, police officers, and local officials. This field research was completed just before surveys were conducted in the neighborhoods. The teams recorded some 10,000 pages of field notes; they are the source for the quotes and observations concerning disorderly conditions.

2

Disorder and Neighborhood Life

What is disorder and what are its implications for neighborhood decline? Visible social disorder provides direct, behavioral evidence of community disorganization, and the most highly-ranked neighborhood problems fell into this category. Survey respondents ranked public drinking highest, followed closely by loitering youths, and reports of drug use. There was considerable variation, of course; in some areas they were not regarded as problems at all, while elsewhere they were ranked as very serious. Problems with noisy neighbors were rated less highly, and various aspects of street life, including panhandling and harassment, were considered minor annoyances everywhere. While very few people thought panhandling was a major problem in their area, it was strongly linked with concern about public drinking: loitering drunks, and being solicited for small change, turn up as problems in the same places. Neighborhood concern about street prostitution and sexually-oriented enterprises varied considerably, ranking low in most places but toward the top in a few. These are problems that neighborhoods either do or do not have, and since those that do are quite different from the others, they are considered as a separate cluster of problems.