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.

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; lounging 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 also have, and since

2

Disorder and Neighborhood Life
Public Drinking

Across the 40 study neighborhoods, the most highly-rated form of disorder was public drinking. Complaints about drinking typically involved either groups of young people or ‘skid row’ vagrants. None of the study areas included a traditional skid row, yet in some of them many residents rated “people drinking in public places, like on corners or in the streets” as a big problem.

A great deal of public drinking takes place in and around parks nestled in residential areas. The problems thesecreated were described by an informant in the Sheffield neighborhood of Chicago.

I live right on Lakewood, and this playground is across the street. We have a number of teenage guys, and they drink out there, especially during the warmer weather. They park in their cars and vans; they drink; we call the police... The police come, and do nothing at all. How do you keep that playground free for the little kids? [Sheffield, Chicago]

One of the things I learned at a public hearing at which park officials announced their plans for the construction of a neighborhood playground was how threatening a park can be to a neighborhood. Everyone who came was against the idea. Parks are places that no one controls; people do not know come into the neighborhood to use them; youths drink and use drugs there; it is difficult to find legitimate reasons or the means to push undesirable out; you cannot protect or control your own kids there. In disorderly neighborhoods, parks are places you keep your children out of.

Businesses along the arterial highways on the edges of neighborhoods can also create a great deal of trouble for area residents. Customers use their parking places, and drop litter on their lawns. In addition, drivers also gather on commercial strips, often in front of liquor stores and taverns. This was a big problem in the Mission district of San Francisco.

One problem is that there are bars with drunks hanging around on the sidewalks and doorways. That bothers merchants who have businesses around them. Women shoppers aren’t going to go plowing through down-at-the-heel, scruffy-looking individuals who are drunks making cracks at them. They don’t block the sidewalks, but it is a deterrent for shoppers. [The Mission, San Francisco]

The wino types present a problem. You find them smashing bottles on the front steps of houses. Or they are pissing in doorways and stuff like that. They are pretty obnoxious. [The Mission, San Francisco]

Cities traditionally have tolerated public drinking on the fringes of downtown, where drinking coexists with liquor stores, flop-houses, rescue missions, and other well-known features of skid row life. This segregation spares most city dwellers from the problems associated with vagrant drinking, including panhandling, public urination, and the sight of disreputable-looking people rummaging through trash cans and sleeping in doorways. However, many of these areas appear to be on the way out. They stand in the way of downtown expansion, offer cheap land for urban renewal and parking lots, and are being gentrified into fashionable bohemian quarters (Miller, 1982; Lee, 1980; Ward, 1975). Such well-known tourist destinations as Laramie Square in Denver and Old Town Sacramento were notorious Skid Rows; Chicago’s largest skid row is now a glittering middle-class housing complex. While there always is casual outdoor drinking by neighborhood residents, Ward and others speculate that people who frequently skid rows now have dispersed to scattered sites in many cities. There they are more visible—and upsetting—to residents of the areas upon which they descend.

Corner Gangs

Problems with bands of loitering youths tied in over-all importance with public drinking, and presented the most highly ranked problem in a few areas. The Philadelphia term for them is “corner gangs,” a frequent reference in the notes of field observers there. Corner gangs range from casual groupings engaging in a bit of drinking and social conversation to organized fighting squads.

The least threatening corner groups are just a nuisance. They are young, bored, and restless. [Observer: What about the gang hanging out in front of the drugstore?] As far as I know they have no name. They are neighborhood kids and they sometimes make a nuisance of [The Mission, San Francisco]
Disorder and Decline

themselves. Actually they stand there because they have no place else to go. Corner groups stand on corners because there aren't enough places for them to go in a high-density area. They are young, 12 to 15 years old, and have nothing to do. [South Philadelphia]

Older, rowdier corner gangs seem more threatening. Gangs like this were a highly visible problem in West Philadelphia.

[Observer: Are there areas you would avoid because of danger?] 52nd street from about Market to Pine or Spruce, you won't catch me there by myself. Because of the crowds hanging on the corners. There's always men hanging out on those corners. And then the language coming out of there... ah... And then the smoking and drinking. They're either drinking or smoking dope. [What ought to be done?] Put the cops back on the streets walking. Foot patrols. And, don't allow loitering on the corners or outside of places where people have to go in and out. Public places—post offices, stores, restaurants—all of these are places where you see people hanging out and it shouldn't be. [West Philadelphia]

Corner gangs establish their territorial dominance by testing the fringes of the normative order, they control areas where they can cow residents into putting up with their activities.

Sometimes I walk out of my house and start to try to walk down the street, and a gang will cross the street and try to scare me and my mother. A gang used to sit and drink beer and smoke pot in front of our stairs. My mom used to come out and tell them to get off; they would, and then when she would go into the house they'd come back, sit back down, and look at us. Actually we're afraid to walk around in the neighborhood after it gets dark. I stay right in front of the house where my parents can see me. [Wicker Park, Chicago]

Just when a group constitutes a corner gang, and when it poses a disorder problem, are matters of judgment. These groups are troublesome to the community when they persist in activities that are annoying or threatening activities, as is the case when their presence is combined with drinking, drug use, and harassment of passers-by. Police find it difficult to deal with simple "corner loungers" and those they cannot catch with contraband. Mostly, policing of congregating youths consists of driving by, rolling down the window, and telling them to move along. Not surprisingly, they reassemble easily, and often are there the next night as well.

Not all gang activity necessarily threatens community residents. Gangs have traditionally played a role in protecting their neighborhood "turf" against encroachment by near-by ethnic and racial groups. Among our 40 study neighborhoods, this role was taken most clearly by white corner gangs in South Philadelphia. This area, dominated by blue-collar white ethnics, is rimmed by black neighborhoods and dotted with enclaves of blacks in public housing projects. Racial boundaries in South Philadelphia were policed by white youths who kept a careful eye on anyone crossing them.

[Observer: Are there any dangerous, unsafe areas in South Philadelphia?] What you have here are all black neighborhoods—where blacks don't go. There are other areas where whites won't go. There are also neutral corridors which are used by both. You are safe as long as you stay in your area... [How do you get this clear-cut division?] There is an all-white gang called "The Counts." They have the blessing and support of their parents and of their community. The job of this gang is to keep the blacks out of the area. The Counts are responsible for most gang killings in the area. This gang is as close to a teen-age vigilante group as one can get. It is a fairly active group as they keep standing on street corners, and if anything comes up, the word goes out that the gang is moving into action. They will strike back against the blacks no matter who the culprit is. When there is trouble, they assume it's the blacks. There is always a show of strength as a response to crime. [South Philadelphia]

Clearly, for white residents of South Philadelphia, these gangs are not "disorderly" at all. Rather, they are an unofficial, extralegal, yet institutionalized arm of prominent parts of the community. They are fighting a rear guard action against neighborhood ethnic succession, adding muscle to more genteel mechanisms for maintaining area stability—such as discrimination in the housing market. As this book was being written, a "turf-maintenance"
murder in the Bensonhurst area of New York City brought new attention to the role of youth gangs in maintaining clear racial boundaries between neighborhoods. While that incident and South Philadelphia’s Counts lie at the extreme, we shall see at several points in this book where vigilance easily translates into racial divisiveness and threats of vigilante action, in places where problems of disorder and crime appear to overlap with threatening racial change.

**Street Harassment**

Street harassment is intimately linked to the problem of littering bands of youths, although it is less frequently cited as a major neighborhood problem. In overt as well as subtle ways, corner gangs exercise control over legitimate users of the streets and sidewalks. When their activities fall short of criminal assault or robbery we class them as “disorderly,” but for their targets this may be too subtle a distinction.

Two major victims of street harassment are women and the elderly. Women report street encounters involving catcalls, lewd comments, obscene gestures, and other forms of harassment. These unwanted intimacies are always annoying, and often offensive and embarrassing. They can lead their victims to avoid areas or activities that expose them to such “street remarks” (Gardner, 1980). Street harassment was associated with public drinking in The Mission.

For a couple of ladies at the meeting, their priority was prostitution, drug addicts and winos, and people who just hang around on corners yelling obscenities at women. You know, like “hey, baby” and all that. These ladies didn’t dig it, these guys hanging around on the corners. [The Mission, San Francisco]

Carol Gardner has focused attention on such forms of harassment, which involve a “breach of the norm of civil inattention between unacquainted persons.” Individually, these breaches can seem to be relatively minor, as in Sheffield:

Mostly it was just people that were annoying, people being obnoxious. But nothing serious. You know . . . when a babe

gets off the El to go home she doesn’t want some drunk making comments to her. [Sheffield, Chicago]

But although many of these encounters are limited to verbal innuendo, the context within which they take place and the threat they communicate have considerable cumulative effects. Other forms of harassment can escalate beyond these street remarks, to overt physical harassment—what Andrea Medea and Kathleen Thompson (1974) dubbed “little rapes.”

I was walking down 24th over there and there were five boys walking down the street towards me. They were spread out the length of the sidewalk so I had to walk through them. I thought maybe I should walk across the street or something but I figured that would just attract their attention, so I just kept walking. Well, they separated when I walked past but one of them all of a sudden reached out and grabbed my breast. [The Mission, San Francisco]

It is easy to harass the elderly. Rifai (1976) reports that in Portland a large proportion of victimizations recalled by the elderly involved nonphysical, verbal harassment by teenagers. In The Mission,

There are always 13 and 14-year-olds pretending to be thugs. There will be a group blocking the street, and an old lady will walk around them. She probably has arthritis, which makes it hard for her to handle the curb, but she has to endure the indignity of it as well as the pain so that she can get around those kids without getting into any trouble. [The Mission, San Francisco]

The elderly also were targets of incidents in South Philadelphia.

Old ladies who come to the community center were harassed by kids out on the street but couldn’t call us for help, so we gave them whistles. They found the whistle was better than a fire horn—easier to handle. The elderly felt the need for that. This is an area where people express a great deal of anxiety. [South Philadelphia]

The elderly are very vulnerable to street crime, which they reasonably fear in areas where they are fair game for harassment. It is not only their money they may lose; they can easily suffer an
injury (like a broken hip) from which they may not recover. Surveys reveal that the elderly are by far the most fearful of crime even though as a group they are the least likely to be victimized. One reason may be their sensitivity to the threat implied by lower-level street disorder, when it is aimed at them.

Other forms of street harassment are much more pointed, and not at all subtle. One function of verbal harassment is to reinforce the racial balance of power in neighborhoods and to maintain boundaries between groups. Street harassment tells people where they do not belong. It can be a tool in the exercise of power; where groups feel dominant, they can act to maintain their status through threats and intimidation. Threats of violence were used to define neighborhood racial boundaries in South Philadelphia.

[Observer: Do you have problems like racial tensions in the community?] Yes. You have all ethnics here. It's just ready to start. As soon as it gets warmer, baseball bats are starting to be used and there is trouble. Now that the school year is almost over, at least the school buses won't have trouble, with white kids honking at them and throwing things, but now they will all be out there. Actually, it's not just kids, you have grown-ups too, honking and screaming and there is a confrontation. The color depends on where you travel.

[South Philadelphia]

Another example of harassment linked to ethnic turnover was reported by an older white male from the Wicker Park neighborhood in Chicago. Wicker Park was a traditionally Polish working-class community which in the years immediately preceding our interviews experienced a large influx of blacks and Hispanics. In time, Hispanics—principally Puerto Ricans—became the dominant group in the area.

No place in this area is safe, really. We used to walk from here to St. Al's to church every day. We used to walk back and forth, you know. But not any more. These past four years we can't. We've had to take the bus to St. Stephens.

[Observer: What is the problem between here and St. Al's?] Why, you get shouted at, and people throw things down at you. It's frightening.

[Wicker Park, Chicago]

In another incident in Wicker Park, young men "feeling their oats" had a bit of fun while expressing their new dominance of the area.

She works at night, for the telephone company, and comes home late. She used to ride the bus, but not anymore. Since the neighborhood has changed, she can't walk from the bus stop anymore. A woman who works with her now drives her home to the front door. She calls her husband from work before she leaves, to tell him when to expect her home. I asked her if anything ever happened to make her so fearful? One evening, she responded, after coming home from work in a car full of passengers, some young Puerto Ricans blocked the street and forced the car to stop, and then proceeded to rock the car. The passengers inside were quite helpless and frightened.

[Wicker Park, Chicago]

Such confrontations can reshape important aspects of people's daily lives. Fearful of harassment, they drive rather than walk, avoid public transportation, and go out only with an escort when they can. In the surveys, personal precautions of this type were highly related to neighborhood levels of social disorder. They were also linked to perceptions that neighborhoods were in a decline, and to reports that residents wanted to move away.

Drugs

Another highly ranked problem in these neighborhoods was the sale and use of drugs. Drug-related rumors and the fears they stir up permeated many of the rougher study areas, and our field observers interviewed many people who had first-hand experiences to report.

I came back home one night from work and parked my car outside in the back. I started to come toward my house, and I saw these boys sitting right behind my house. I went back to my car and watched them. They had the powder, the match, the needle. They lit the match and got it ready. They were just going to put it in a vein when I got out and came over and told them to get away. When they saw me they panicked and ran away. I don't want them doing that around here. They could be an influence on my boys.

[West Philadelphia]
I have been seeing drug dealing going on for years. They pull up in a car and one guy goes up the street and then comes back and hands out little packages to all of them. Then they take off. It's been going on for years. . . . Kids use the church steps to smoke pot on. I usually know the kids too, but I don't want to say anything. . . . I'm scared to death to report anything. Never know but what they may come back and get me for telling. [Visitation Valley, San Francisco]

Studies of drug distribution sites—"coping zones"—indicate they are located in poorer parts of town, on busy arterial streets where transit stops, bars, pool halls, and wherever general night-time activity levels are high, and street dealing (and even drug use) therefore is less conspicuous (Fields, 1984; Wiedman, and Page, 1982; Hughes and Jaffe, 1971). No one feels especially responsible for transitory areas like these, so the trade can be conducted without the resistance it might encounter in residential neighborhoods. Users, and most dealers, tend to live nearby, and frequent the areas on a regular basis. During the day they coexist easily with shoppers and other passersby; when approached with the query, "Want some dope?" those who don't studiously ignore them. Wiedman and Page report that peer and police pressure confined to the hours of darkness most of the violent and bizarre behavior that they saw associated with the drug business. In Fields' "weed-slinging" (marijuana-selling) area, drug dealing was but one of many illegal enterprises going on; the area was an open-air bazaar where dealers and users were joined by youths buying and selling stolen goods. They all drank and socialized in a festive way, to the sound of loud portable cassette players. In other cities, certain drug-dealing blocks operate like fast-food restaurants—driven through customers (some apparently from the suburbs) get curb-side service—while the whole operation is guarded by young lookouts at each end of the block. Near one of the study neighborhoods (Chicago's Edgewater, where I live), the community's solution to this problem was to demand that the phone company take out the phone booth on the corner, so that suburbanites could not call in advance to place their order. The phone company did so, and cocaine dealing on that block dried up.

Rumors concerning drug sales and use in residential areas are disturbing for a variety of reasons. People fear the crime which they believe goes along with drug use. They know that some of the customers finance their purchases through burglary and theft. They also feel that drug users are unpredictable, threatening, and cannot be counted upon to even be rational criminals—they do crazy things, and are unnecessarily violent. Most of all, like this resident of South Philadelphia, they fear that their children will become involved:

The young people need money for drugs. They will do something violent to get the money. There are also drug pushers here who hook the kids and make a fortune that way. There used to be one very rich pusher who lived here—he had a green Cadillac; his nickname was the Jolly Green Giant. It's like a trademark. When the kids saw the car they would run to meet him, as if it were an ice cream truck. [South Philadelphia]

We have a pusher in my neighborhood—he comes right up my street, a regular huckster, no sense of shame. He is a young man who delivers vegetables from a truck. He also has drugs at the back of the truck. All the kids know him. He has a loudspeaker and you can hear him two blocks away. He specializes in selling pot to very small kids. [South Philadelphia]

Our informants were frightened and angry when drug dealers and users took over corners, parks, and other public places, closing them to respectable users while at the same time tempting the young and generating neighborhood crime.

The most dangerous area in my community is around the park. Members of gangs spend their time there and there is a lot of drug pushing going on there. . . . It is very dangerous even in broad daylight. Not too long ago a friend of mine was almost shot because they thought he was a member of a gang. Another girl was jumped by this dude because he mistook her for his wife. Man, all kinds of crazy things happen in this little park. [Wicker Park, Chicago]

All those kids from the schools from around here came to this street because one of the biggest dealers was living here. Oh, we knew who it was. Those kids would come and sit
out on the stoops and check out all the houses. They’d sell their drugs and smoke them and whatever else they do. You know it was so bad you couldn’t walk out on the street at night. [The Mission, San Francisco]

Here we see again the problems presented by public places. Ordinary citizens usually do not have legitimate grounds to intervene in events taking place in parks, and when drugs are involved it is believed that there are special dangers in intervening. In a disorganized and demoralized place like the Mission, out-of-control kids even successfully challenged residents for control of their front porches.

Noisy Neighbors

Some of the street life that is characteristic of disorderly neighborhoods involves significant criminal intent (for example, drug sales). Other disorders (including street harassment) probably are malevolent at least some of the time. Some simply reflect conflicts over what James Q. Wilson (1968) called “standards of right and seemingly conduct.” People can have different views about the appropriate use of public space, as in these two examples:

The filthy streets—garbage everywhere! The youngsters sit on the steps at all hours during the night smoking reefer. They smell so strong you can get high just passing by. They also litter the sidewalk with greasy fish bones and French fries and ketchup. Oh, it is terrible. Then there is also that loud music that they play, right on your doorstep. [Woodlawn, Chicago]

We have problems like the bongos. Some young Latino bongo players have adopted Dolores Park as their practice area. . . . The area around there is a middle income residential area. You know—nice, well-kept homes—and the people around there are complaining about the noise and trying to get the area organization to drive them out of there, but the bongo players think they’re entitled, and they’ve made a kind of power issue out of it. [The Mission, San Francisco]

Another example of this is complaints about “noisy neighbors,” which fell near the middle of our list of social disorders.

Disorder and Neighborhood Life

The kids were playing ball and bouncing the ball off our wall. Can you imagine what it’s like trying to sleep with that noise? Bang. Bang. I was inside sleeping because I worked night shift that week. My father said, “OK, boys, that’s enough.” They got real mad and said, “He called me ‘boy.’” [Logan, Philadelphia]

These confrontations can mirror lifestyle preferences. The conflict may be between intense users of public space—“stoop-sitting” families, or men repairing their cars at the curb—and those who prefer more private activity. Outsiders who do not know the rhythm of life in a community also can mistake the intensive use of public space for disorder. Where there is real conflict it can reflect the temporal rhythms of different workplaces. In cities, not everybody lives on the same schedule. Disputes over noise and loud parties often occur between families of 7:00 A.M. to 3:30 p.m. factory workers and 3:00 p.m. to midnight building janitors and food service workers. The latter often can be seen “hanging around” during the day, perhaps appearing shiftless and threatening to those whose lives follow a more traditional work schedule.

New Forms of Disorder

In the last few years a new problem has come to public attention: the disorderly appearance and activity of apparently homeless and seemingly mentally ill street people. In the heart of many great cities it is common to see people sleeping on hot-air grates or under layers of cardboard boxes; shopping-bag ladies carrying their worldly possessions; and men and women dressed in layers of dirty, tattered clothing scrounging through waste receptacles in search of cans and cigarette butts. Many who observe such highly visible street people infer that homelessness and mental illness go together. This makes them understandably edgy when they come across the mutters, cursers, and ranters who wander along many downtown streets. Yet, studies of shelter residents indicate that homelessness is also a real economic phenomenon. The difference between these two assessments may be due to the fact that homeless women, children, and those who are desperately poor are much less visible than denizens of the street. However, the extent of mental illness among the homeless generates more disagreement than most other topics, for it lies at the heart of the
politics of the issue. A recent study by sociologist Peter Rossi (1989) concluded that between one-quarter and one-third of homeless people suffer from chronic mental illness, a proportion much higher than may be found in the poor population as a whole. The surveys examined here, which were all completed by the mid-1980s, did not ask about these problems. Thus, our reliance on measures of what has been judged disorderly in the past does not address questions concerning the impact of these "new" social disorders, and of others yet to emerge.

COMMERCIAL SEX

Research in street prostitution and "adult entertainment" establishments has generally been confined to prominent red-light districts. These are typically located on the edge of the downtown, in lightly populated areas with a great deal of street traffic. They offer a range of opportunities for excitement, as they always have. Today's topless bars, film and video stalls, and live sex shows were yesterday's burlesque parlors and taxi-dance halls; yesterday's brothels now masquerade as massage parlors. Street-walking has changed a lot less (Symanski, 1981; Shumsky and Springer, 1981; Reckless, 1932). Historically, cities controlled the extent of the excitement through segregation. Brothels, burlesque, gambling, and late-hour drinking were conformed—with appropriate payoffs to police and public officials—in particular areas of town. Chicago's most prominent vice district, the Levee, was founded on the South Side when a coalition of Protestant revivalists and political reformers managed to drive these activities out of the heart of downtown. Even today, red-light districts are officially tolerated in a few cities; they include Boston's famous "Combat Zone," and "The Block" in Baltimore. Other unofficial but well-known red-light areas include San Francisco's Tenderloin, Chicago's Rush Street, and New York's Times Square.

Street prostitution also flourishes away from downtown, along busy arterial streets in poorer, transient, and heterogeneous areas, and there it becomes a disorder problem. Away from the red-light area, prostitutes rely on a distinctive dress and demeanor to advertise their availability; they frequently wear platform shoes and hot pants, and wave in friendly fashion at passing cars. Residents of neighborhoods behind the arterials are likely to encounter newly-acquainted couples transacting their business in parked cars, or in the vestibules and hallways of apartment buildings. They are particularly distraught when their children are exposed to the problem.

A closely-related problem arises when "legitimate" sexually-oriented businesses operate in residential areas—residents are unhappy about it. The most severely affected of our 40 study neighborhoods was the Mission in San Francisco, located just across Market Street from the Tenderloin. Residents frequently brought up its impact on their children:

Why should it be in our neighborhood? Why don't they put it near their homes? ... Children have to walk by on their way to school, and they see that sort of thing. Certainly it's not out in the open, but it's not too hard to peek in as you walk by. We don't want our children exposed to that sort of thing. [The Mission, San Francisco]

Since many sex-oriented enterprises are in fact legitimate businesses, their opponents cannot rely on the police to control their operation. It takes organization and considerable political savvy to bring that about:

We talked to the bookstore and movie operators and told them we didn't appreciate their operation here and the element they draw to the neighborhood. And we've done what I guess you could call informational picketing or walk-lys. And we've gone to the police and public officials and asked them to sign agreements not to rent to such businesses. ... Our real concern is that it lowers the level of the quality of life to have these sort of businesses around. They're gaudy and ugly and vulgar and they attract the sort of people who enjoy that sort of thing. [The Mission, San Francisco]

Residents of ten neighborhoods were asked about "pornographic movie theaters or bookstores, massage parlors, or topless bars," and in six others they were also quizzed about "adult theaters and bookstores." (The questions about adult entertainment establishments were included in the Houston surveys because I couldn't help noticing beer halls in several neighborhoods, with flashing neon signs announcing "Naked Girls Dance"!)

Adult bookstores, movies, and other sexually-oriented businesses
were ranked as problems in the same neighborhoods where prostitution flourished. They are equivalent to the "vice resorts" which accompanied prostitution in the past. In his study of the location of brothels and streetwalkers in Chicago in the early 1920s, Walter Reckless (1926) found them alongside "saloons, gambling dens, fortune tellers, dime museums, and lady barbers," and noted their particularly close correspondence with the dislocation of burlesque theaters. Adult entertainment continues to be associated with other kinds of problems, as in West Philadelphia:

There's a bar, the Foxy Lounge, on the corner. The people on Frazier Street are upset about it. They have go-go dancers half naked. Minors are being served—they're 13, 14, 15 years old. They get older kids to bring out the beer and give it to them. . . . And I heard there was dope sold there too. [West Philadelphia]

Street prostitution and sexually oriented businesses were not among the most highly rated problems in our areas. An examination of disorder in these neighborhoods indicates that patterns of street prostitution and the prevalence of commercial sex establishments are different from the others. These problems go together distinctively; a few areas scored high on both, while most reported having few problems with either. They also were not related to other kinds of disorder. These problems did not bother the same set of people who had experienced concern about the others. As a result, this cluster of problems will be considered separately in the following chapters.

PHYSICAL DECAY

Unlike social disorder—which often involves specific events or activities—physical disorders are enduring, day-to-day aspects of a neighborhood's environment. Some of these disorders are illegal, but most are not. Legal disorders involve "perpetrators" rather than "offenders," for many of them are simply acting in a businesslike way to maximize profits on lawful investments, and minimize the effort they put into preserving the commonweal. However, all disorders leave visible marks on the community, marks that stigmatize it in the eyes of residents and outsiders alike.

We found considerable variation in the extent of decay. The study areas ranged from communities blotted by derelict or abandoned buildings and clawed-out vacant lots to heavily gentrified neighborhoods where aggregate housing values might rival the Gross National Product of some small nations. Everywhere, vandalism was the most highly ranked problem, followed closely by litter and trash, garbage handling, and junk-strewn vacant lots. Dog litter also was pervasive; no neighborhood gave it a low rating. Building abandonment was not much of a problem in some places, and fell near the bottom of the list overall, but there were also neighborhoods where abandoned buildings and junk-strewn vacant lots were the most highly rated problems.

Vandalism

Vandalism is a common fact of life in many neighborhoods, and indeed it was the most highly rated kind of disorder. Legal definitions of vandalism use words like "wanton," "willful," and "malicious" to describe the damage it entails. Individual offenses may be minor; the difficulty is that their effects persist and often accumulate. Vandalism upset, dent, smash, slash, and spray-paint their targets, which may be street signs, vending machines, park facilities, schools, or businesses. Relatively little vandalism is directed at private homes. Even in high-rise public housing, most vandalism is aimed at common space rather than at individual apartments (Mawby, 1984; Wilson, 1978). Unclaimed and impervious space is the favored target of graffiti artists (Ley and Cyriakowski, 1974). In one survey, fully one-half of the vandalism involved parked cars (Chambers and Tombs, 1984). Schools, bus shelters, and other public facilities are also frequent targets. This damage may be the most enduring, for bureaucratic snarls often delay the repair of public facilities.

There has been more research on the perpetrators of vandalism than on any other form of disorder, probably because most offenders are young and relatively easy to reach through classroom questionnaires. Their own reports reveal that vandals have little parental supervision and are poor achievers in school. They typically get into various kinds of trouble and frequently associate with other trouble-makers. A great deal of vandalism is carried out by bands of youths. The fact that young vandals operate in groups suggests that they gain prestige among their peers by showing off and
Disorder and Decline

taking risks. Vandalism comes from poorer, high-density residential areas where there are many children, and they inflict most of their damage close to home (Mawby, 1984; Webb, 1984). (See also Gladstone, 1978; Wilson, 1978; Cohen, 1973.) They have diverse motives for selecting their targets. Some vandalism is tactically in origin; in Chicago’s Sheffield, graffiti was often used by gangs to mark out their turf:

At a community meeting, someone asked... if anyone knew anything about the “Born Angels,” a new gang in the area. There is spray paint all over. They used to just do the sides of buildings, but now they have graduated to cars. You can see “B-A” all over. [Sheffield, Chicago]

Rival gangs vying for control of the contested turf often inscribe “obscene amendments” (Ley and Cybriwsky, 1979) to the marks of others, proclaiming their dominance. Graffiti also marks the borders of racially defined neighborhoods. Ley and Cybriwsky (1974) report that graffiti that aimed racial epithets and obscenities at newcomers were common along “zones of tension” between diminishing white and growing black areas of Philadelphia, marking the spots where breeches were occurring in the walls between blacks and whites.

Damage that looks like vandalism can be a tactical byproduct of another crime, one which leaves a visible stain on the neighborhood. In Wicker Park,

Auto burnings are a real problem. People steal cars and strip the tires, radio, etc., and burn the rest of it. They figure if they burn it the city will haul it away. We once found a Volvo lying on its side with gas poured out of the tank on the ground. We turned it right again and soaked it down, but the cops didn’t take it away. Two hours later we got a call—someone had burned it. [Wicker Park, Chicago]

Vandalism also can be vindictive in nature. Some vandals seek revenge against their real or symbolic enemies or sources of frustration. The vindictive nature of some of these acts is suggested by studies of school vandalism, which find that overcrowded and deteriorating buildings, with obsolete facilities and equipment and low staff morale, are the most commonly damaged (Cohen, 1973). In the Woodlawn area of Chicago, one informant indicated that vindictive vandalism was “kind of a practice” because rents were just getting ridiculous, and a lot of people couldn’t afford to pay that rent, especially when no repairs were being made and the service in the buildings was lousy anyway. She mentioned a building that used to be in real good repair. But what happened was done by the residents of the building. The landlord was going up on the rent and the residents were really upset about it because none of them could afford to pay for it. So when they had to move out of the building, they came back and just totally destroyed the building. They tore out all the electrical work, they broke all the windows in the building. The landlord? She guesses he just got tired of trying to fight them, and just gave up. [Woodlawn, Chicago]

Vandalism can be an expression of intergenerational conflict. Retaliatory vandalism (swiping from “trashing” lawns to setting fire to garages) is one way for youth to lash back at adults who complain about their behavior. This can happen anywhere, but in neighborhoods marked by racial or ethnic transition, younger residents often come from.encroaching groups. As a result, perceptions of boisterous (or malicious) mischief on their part, and adult reactions to it, reflect lifestyle and cultural differences between older and newer residents of the area.

[Observer: That’s a beautiful garden you have.] Yeah. Except they destroyed everything. Those little back—

[They came in and tore up the chard and the potatoes. See that tree over there? It always has fruit. Well, these little black kids just come in and tore everything up. They are all kids, too! The other day I saw a little one about 13 or 14 and said, “why don’t you ring the bell and ask me for some. I’d be glad to give you some.” They just said, “you mother f—- whitey.” Blah, blah. It makes me sick. [The Misson, San Francisco]

A final explanation for the spread of vandalism is that it is “infectious”—where it appears and is not quickly ensues, its presence stimulates still more vandalism. The contagion theory of vandalism is widely acknowledged, as in West Philadelphia:

I asked at the corner bar how they kept their place so clean. They showed me. Inside behind the bar is a bucket of paint and brushes. As soon as the kids mark the outside, they...
come out with the paint and paint it over, right away. That’s the only way. [West Philadelphia]

But even rapid repair does not always halt the assault, and some finally give in:

Like the house across the street. They had new siding on the building. But kids wrote all over it with paint. So they had it repainted, but they came right back and wrote on it again. So people feel defeated; it just doesn’t pay to fix things up if it’s going to be damaged the next day. [Wicker Park, Chicago]

Research suggests that even accidental damage or normal wear-and-tear may stimulate vandalism if it is not repaired (Webb, 1984). Apparently, visible disrepair undermines inhibitions people may have against leaving their mark. The inhibition level may vary by neighborhood. Philip Zimbardo (1970) conducted an experiment to test this proposition when he purposely “abandoned” similar cars in New York City and near the Stanford University campus in California. He found that the anonymity provided by New York City encouraged the rapid destruction of the car after he initially “strolled” its identity by removing the license plates and leaving the hood raised. However, the destruction of the other auto took longer, and it was also necessary to “provide more extreme, reversible cues” (Zimbardo is a psychologist) by initially smashing it up a bit. One consequence of the contagion effect is that publicity about vandalism—even anti-vandalism campaigns—may have the unwanted effect of encouraging even more of it (Whittingham, 1981; Cohen, 1973).

Dilapidation and Abandonment

The presence of abandoned buildings may be the most dramatic indicator of a neighborhood’s unhealthy condition. Abandonment is a clear signal that in that area it is no longer worth the effort to keep housing or businesses open. Neighbors fear the consequences of even low levels of abandonment, which are numerous.

An “abandoned” building is off the market; it is not just awaiting sale. Rather, the heat and electricity have been cut off, it is not being maintained, the property taxes are not being paid, and sometimes the owner has officially relinquished title to the city or the mortgage holder. If the neighbors are lucky the building is securely boarded up, but sometimes it is put to disorderly uses.

Large-scale housing abandonment is a relatively new phenomenon in American cities. Until the mid-1950s, relatively few residential buildings were abandoned, and they were the most outmoded segment of the housing stock. Often they were without private baths or kitchen facilities, and through abandonment they dropped out of the housing market. However, there has been a tremendous increase in the abandonment of sound, modern buildings since then. The reasons are many, for the deterioration and abandonment of housing stock in America’s central cities is intricately interwoven with a broad spectrum of urban problems.

Briefly, abandonment reflects the structural depression of central-city housing markets, especially those tied to Northern industrial “Rust Belt” economies. The flood of immigrants, first from Europe and then from the American South, that stretched the housing supply in those cities to the limits has now subsided. Population growth (which fuels demand) has recently been largely confined to the suburban ring. City-suburban and class and racial segmentation has brought to inner cities a concentration of those who can least afford newly constructed units or support a housing rehabilitation market. This in turn discourages investments by landlords, banks, and insurance companies, who can often shift their capital to safer, more profitable locales. Finally, a number of federal policies—some explicitly concerned with housing, and others indirectly affecting the housing market—have made the situation worse. Government-sponsored FHA and VA mortgage loans stimulated suburban development after World War II, a move made possible by new, federally funded highways. Federal subsidies and tax policies favored new construction over rehabilitation.

The depression of the housing market can reduce the true worth of aging inner-city buildings to below their insured value; as a result, burned as well as simply vacant buildings dot the urban landscape.

We have an abandoned house that’s full of trash. It’s falling apart; there are rats in the attic, they come out on the ground. I can’t let my children go outside around my own block for fear they will be bitten. [West Philadelphia]
Tramps sleep in abandoned buildings, and squatters may move in more permanently:

They get in there and use the house. What’s to stop them? There’s a bunch of them who sit on the front porch of a vacant house, just up the street. They sit out there and drink wine. They play the radio and make all kinds of noise all hours of the night. They say all kinds of things to people. 

The poor woman in the house next to that is afraid to sit on her front porch. See, there she is now [pointing]. She’s sitting on the back porch. That old coupe never sits out on their front porch; they’re afraid to do it. [West Philadelphia]

Frequently, empty buildings are heavily vandalized, for no one is protecting them or repairing the cumulative damage. An empty building can be stripped of valuable copper plumbing, electrical fixtures, and architectural ornamentation. The neighbors also fear it will be set afire:

Children broke in and tore the wiring out. There was a party. I saw children in there with matches. There could be a fire and all the houses next to it could go up in flames. [Logan, Philadelphia]

Buildings do not have to be abandoned to become notorious as “shooting galleries” where drugs are sold and used, but empty buildings often acquire that reputation. Abandoned buildings also may serve as a hangout for local predators, and people are afraid to walk near them:

The kids here are dangerous. Do you see this vacant building? The neighbors are asking the city to knock it down. It’s been boarded up, but the black kids break in, hide in there, then at night they jump out and attack people on the street. [South Philadelphia]

Problems will severely dilapidated buildings may fall somewhat short of abandonment, but reflect the same market forces:

The landlords were doing nothing. We were fixing the buildings up for the damn landlords. So you would have to pay the rent, pay for the maintenance of the property, and paint it. This is what you had to do if you wanted to have a little decency in the house. Every time you fixed it up the landlord would raise the rent . . . . The people tried to pressure the landlords to fix a toilet, to fix a window, and the slumlords just said to hell with it. They just rent out and collect the profits . . . . It gets worse and worse. Mobility in the area gets greater. [Wicker Park, Chicago]

The cumulative impact of dilapidation and abandonment will depend upon how many buildings stand deteriorating or empty. Like vandalism, abandonment may in part be self-generating. Two studies by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) during the 1970s indicated that abandonment is contagious. Scattered abandonment is bad enough, but concentrated abandonment speeds the withdrawal of investment capital and promotes the collapse of a neighborhood’s housing market (Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1973a). While it may begin with the worst structures in an area, abandonment can undermine the attractiveness and profitability of sound buildings nearby. The tipping point appears to be low—better-off residents begin to move from an area, and potential investors become concerned, even when as few as 3 to 6 percent of buildings stand abandoned (Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1973b).

The extent of visible abandonment partly reflects local policy. Chicago moves fairly quickly (as municipalities go) to tear abandoned buildings down, so its worst-off neighborhoods have many junk-filled empty lots. On the other hand, Newark—a city with a high abandonment rate—long has pursued the strategy of boarding up rather than immediately tearing down abandoned buildings. Newark has done this because demand for housing by the poor remains high; the city hopes that future federal programs, and subsidized rents that poor people can afford, will make it possible to rehabilitate structures that now stand abandoned. Meanwhile, there are a large number of abandoned buildings all over the city, and during the early 1970s a substantial proportion of Newark’s reported crime took place in or near them (Sternlieb and Burchell, 1973).

Rubbish

Other forms of physical disorder may undermine the morale of residents and signal that a neighborhood is out of control. Building
deterioration and abandonment may be the most substantial sign of physical disorder, but in the 40 neighborhood surveys one of the most frequently cited problems was the widespread presence of litter and trash on streets, sidewalks, and alleys, and mounds of discarded appliances, torn mattresses, and other junk in yards and vacant lots. The manner in which residents dispose of their garbage—a related problem—was also identified as causing relatively high concern.

Problems of this sort present unusual difficulties, for they are an example of the “free rider problem.” While every member of a community may enjoy the benefits that flow from the extra effort required to keep a neighborhood looking nice, there are few ill consequences for any individual who takes the easy route in disposing of debris—as long as everyone else does it the proper way. But of course they do not. The amount of debris that accumulates is a function both of how fast it is put down and how fast it is picked up. Like vandalism and abandonment, littering appears to be contagious. Observations of city blocks indicate that, controlling for other factors (including age—youths are by far the most frequent offenders), the presence of debris in an area seems to stimulate yet further “trashing” of the environment (Finne, 1973). A large volume of trash strewn around a neighborhood partly reflects upon the level of city services, for it is obviously not being picked up; but if the pick-up effort is at a reasonable level, an accumulation of trash signals disorder problems. In West Philadelphia it was a sign that kids were out of control!

The kids are destructive. At the park I brought over a large barrel with the word “jail” written on it. The kids just rolled it around. When I went back a few days later, it was gone. So I gave up. The kids are so destructive! Just the other day I caught a boy picking up bottles and smashing them on the street. [West Philadelphia]

As with vandalism, people who complained to the field interviewers about littering often described the problem in terms of the unseemly behavior of encroaching groups. In Wicker Park, The Puerto Ricans are dirty... they throw garbage out of their windows, they don’t put trash into trash cans, they throw it all over the alley, they don’t keep up their property, it used to be a beautiful neighborhood, but it is all changed...

I was talking to [a friend] when I first met him, and he said that the people in the Mission, who are mostly Latinos, have a feeling that the Mission is a dirty place to live in so they go on putting their garbage on the street without considering the consequences of what they are doing. Like the building across from here, everyone knows it is an eyesore. Kids throw things out the window and they live there. Nobody has ever gone to their parents to ask them to restrain their kids. And they are throwing all kinds of shit and trash all over the place. [The Mission, San Francisco]

A second theme is demoralization; littering problems are taken as symptomatic of the widespread sense that no one in the neighborhood cares about it:

There are papers all over the place: people dump garbage; it’s just a mess [Question: Why is that?] People want to save money so they don’t do what they should. There is also a lack of city services. People don’t care. There is not much pride in property. People are just letting their houses go. With absentee landlords who don’t care, people say, why should we worry? [The Mission, San Francisco]

A teacher in San Francisco recounted his reaction to decaying conditions around his school:

[I]The place is always dirty. Wherever you go there is garbage and litter. The district is always cutting back on maintenance crews. Those guys work their ass off, and still they can’t keep up with all the dirt and vandalism. The schools are asking to be defaced. Nobody cares about their school when everyday you see it dirty. ... You come to school in the morning and you see it dirty and you don’t want to spend any more time than you have to. [Question: Is there a school to the neighborhood?] You bet. It extends to the neighborhood. Houses are defaced, cars ripped off, houses are burglarized. The Board [of Education] receives a lot of homeowners complaints. [The Mission, San Francisco]

Responsibility for trash and garbage problems does not necessarily lie just with the residents of the area. Businesses do their part also:

There’s a problem with a fish store on the corner. [I]Just

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community was deeply troubled. As one of our observers described it,

[Most of the stores along 63rd Street were just empty shells. The interiors had either been torn out or they were plagued with fire or vandalism. We passed several buildings that were falling down, and next door to these buildings I noticed a second-hand store. A man was busy outside of the building putting bars on his store. [Woodlawn, Chicago]

Thus in addition to its effects on the morale of residents, disorder signals about neighborhood problems to potential residents and investors. Is this a good area to move into? Will my mortgage be safe here? The answer to these questions is partly in the reputation a neighborhood develops among outsiders: how it looks can play a large role in the development of those perceptions. Confidence is hardly bolstered by the spread of boarded-up buildings, burned-out storefronts, poorly maintained homes and lawns, garbage spilling out of waste cans, and junk and trash strewn about. Such areas will also not attract shoppers or potential employers, to the further detriment to the community. In short, where things begin to look bad, the economic factors which underlie neighborhood stability can take a turn for the worse.
throws his old fish heads and trash on the other side of the railroad fence there [pointing]. He keeps his fish overnight in an old van that isn’t refrigerated and the rats can get right in there. They are getting to be pretty big [she spreads her hands about a foot apart]. It was getting so that the people who live right there in the house nearest the store couldn’t even sit on their front step. [Logan, Philadelphia]

Waste problems arise routinely in residential neighborhoods that lie behind commercial strips. A study of the relationship between residential neighborhoods and nearby commercial areas by McPheron, Silloway, and Frey (1983) found that residents regard as major problems the trash, noise, after-hours drunkenness, and other fallout from nearby stores and taverns. In Chicago, which is represented by 17 neighborhoods in this study, the city does not collect garbage from residential buildings with more than 4 units. Instead, the owners of larger buildings must employ a private pick-up company, whose crews come in less often when the profliability of buildings declines. Finally, as disposing of refuse becomes more difficult as well as costly, “fly dumping” plagues some neighborhoods. Contractors with construction debris to dispose of, or manufacturers faced with mounting inventories of noxious or even toxic wastes, may find it expedient to open the back of their truck in a vacant lot and pass the cost of removal on to someone else.

A final problem—rats. Concentrations of abandoned buildings, junk-strewn vacant lots, and unbundled garbage provide hiding places and levels of nourishment that ensure heavy rat infestations. Studies in Newark and elsewhere have documented that complaints about rats and reported rat bites are highly correlated with other forms of physical decay, including trash, discarded appliances, abandoned buildings, and uncovered refuse containers (Margulis, 1977).

THE CONSEQUENCES OF DISORDER FOR NEIGHBORHOOD LIFE

The disorders described here had several things in common. All involved public displays of incivility, for the concept of disorder does not stretch to cover such private problems as intra-family conflict. They may or may not have been illegal (a lot of them involved unruly youths), but whatever their legal status, these disorders were an affront to widely supported community values. They were all directly attributable to individuals (or gangs), and most could not be excused by writing them off to large-scale social forces or bureaucratic nonfeasance. The sole exception may be the rubbish problem, but research suggests that the rate at which people litter varies more from place to place than the rate at which street cleaners pick it up. Finally, many (but not all) disorders are produced by people who are themselves considered disreputable or vaguely threatening.

Two frequently expressed consequences of disorder were anger and demonization. The anger came from being crowded out of community life. Residents of disorderly areas find it uncomfortable or even dangerous to be in parks, in shopping areas, or even on the streets near their homes. This seems unfair, and they are indignant about it. Residents also often noted the moralization in others. Those interviewed frequently commented that “no one cares,” and expressed a certain degree of hopelessness about their situation. They were clearly frustrated by their seeming inability to do much about mounting disorder.

Far was also a frequent response, mostly discernible in regard to social disorder. Disorderly people are unpredictable by everyday standards, and some are potentially violent. Those seemingly crazed by drugs or drink might do anything (recall the man mistakenly shot in his neighborhood park, or the woman who was assaulted there). Abandoned buildings may harbor predators; corner gangs can be menacing, especially for women and the elderly. Another cause for fear was that some disorder came from inter-group conflict. Sometimes that conflict was racial; at other times it was between generations, or between home owners and renters, landlords and tenants, and others with conflicting economic interests. The potential for violence can smolder behind these divisions. It is also important to note that people report being afraid for their children as well as for themselves. They fear their children will be the victims of violence or the targets of drug pushers, and feel in particular that they should not be exposed to blatant commercial sex or public drinking.

Visible physical decay may spark fear of crime, because Americans have come to associate it with higher levels of risk. Like observable social disorders, physical decay is taken by many as a
Disorder and Decline

"Sign of crime." Arthur Stinchcombe and his colleagues (1980) argue that one of the things that differentiates fear of crime from concern about many other risks (such as being run over at a street crossing) is that Americans identify the incidence of crime with environmental cues. They dubbed these "the signs of crime," and their presence is taken by many as an early warning of impending danger—"we fear crime in situations that give off danger signs in advance." Graffiti marking a gang's turf, burned-out buildings, and abandoned cars provide just this sort of signal. Being wary in their presence may indeed be wise; we shall see that robbery rates and other indicators of the extent of neighborhood crime are strongly related to the level of perceived disorder.

The effects of disorder may be even more general, however. It is not just that people fear that disputable may actually harm them or their children. Disorder may also serve as an indicator that community self-controls no longer protect residents and passersby; witness the report of an informant in Wicker Park:

There was a mother less than ten feet away, and one of her kids walks up to an old woman. There was an old woman working in the front yard and the kid walks up to her, and—this is where the sidewalk is higher than the yard—the kid proceeds to pee on the old lady. [Wicker Park, Chicago]

Visible physical and social disruption is a signal that the mechanisms by which healthy neighborhoods maintain themselves have broken down. If an area loses its capacity to solve even seemingly minor problems, its character becomes suspect. Dan Lewis and Greta Salem of Northwestern University describe the importance of the "moral reliability" of a community in the eyes of residents:

When the moral reliability of a community dissolves, local residents are no longer sure that the behavior of their neighbors will conform to what in the past were uniformly acceptable standards, and fear of crime appears. . . . Because of the homogeneity of the population, city life puts a premium on moral reliability. City dwellers learn to distinguish between those they can trust and those they cannot. The trustworthy, those who share our values, serve as the building blocks for our lives, while the untrustworthy are to be avoided. Thus, people can be relied on to the extent that they share expectations about each other's behavior and can be disciplined when those expectations are violated. Those people whose behavior is not subject to the moral order are dangerous both because they cannot be relied upon and because they will not accept discipline (Lewis and Salem, 1986: 99-100).

Thus, even though disorders are not in themselves life-threatening, fear may be a rational reaction to them.

Another consequence of disorder is more disorder. The problem is contagious. Wilson and Kelling's article (aptly titled "Broken Windows") attributed a great deal of importance to the role of observable decay in stimulating neighborhood decline. They implied that deterioration lowers the inhibition level of (primarily young) residents and passers-through, because things are already "smashed up."

[If a window in a building is broken and left unrepaired, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken. . . . [the unrepaired broken window is a signal that no one cares, so breaking more windows costs nothing. (It has always been fun). . . . Untended property becomes fair game for people out for fun or plunder. . . . (Wilson and Kelling, 1982: 31)]

This view is consistent with research on vandalism, littering, and building decay and abandonment, all of which appear to be contagious. Researchers and neighborhood residents agree that certain disorders are self-propagating—once they appear, they generate more disorder unless they are quickly and energetically stamped out. The contagion proposition implies that levels of disorder across urban neighborhoods may be only partly explained by such factors as poverty. To the extent to which disorder becomes self-generative and feeds on itself, current levels of disorder produce future levels of disorder. It will not be possible to document the magnitude of this process using the data available here, since we are dealing with one point in time in the development of each neighborhood. However, this position has important policy implications, for it suggests that intervening directly to attack specific disorder problems is indeed striking at its "causes."

Finally, disorder also has implications for the future of a neighborhood through its impact on non-residents, for it stigmatizes both the area and the people who live there. No one driving through Chicago's Woodlawn could avoid the impression that the
community was deeply troubled. As one of our observers described it.

[Most of the stores along 63rd Street were just empty shells. The interiors had either been torn out or they were plagued with fire or vandalism. We passed several buildings that were falling down, and next door to these buildings I noticed a second-hand store. A man was busy outside of the building putting bars on his store. [Woodlawn, Chicago]

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