COMMUNITY ACTIVISM IN OAK PARK:
COMPETING AGENDAS FOR CHANGE IN A GENTRIFYING NEIGHBORHOOD

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A Thesis

by

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Abstract

of

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Statement of Problem: Through an ethnographic analysis of activism in Oak Park, a working-class neighborhood of Sacramento, California, this work explores conflict in the ways different community groups define social change and reveals how different perspectives on such change and competing strategies of neighborhood improvement help shape residents' claims to the city.

Sources of Data: Data were gathered by the author's participation in community groups and non-profit organizations in Oak Park and observation of their attempts to improve the quality of life for residents in the community. The author's fieldwork was further substantiated by the use of extensive anthropological and sociological research in print, as well as a small amount of research from other fields. In addition, the author made use of historical news articles from the *Sacramento Bee* as well as the *Sacramento News and Review*, a news and entertainment publication.

Conclusions Reached: Efforts to improve the quality of life for residents occur through revitalization projects, grass-roots projects, labor organizing, and programs of non-profit agencies. The ethnographic data highlight the ways that community groups are facilitating social change in the gentrifying neighborhood of Oak Park. Although the community groups' agendas for social change are aimed at improving the quality of life for residents, their efforts are heterogeneous and different strategies to facilitate such change are fueled by various notions of social change of the middle-class, women, and activist residents.

Analysis of the data suggests that groups' efforts to improve the quality of life for residents in Oak Park are counterproductive and do not improve the quality of life for all residents, especially the poor. Moreover, the author perceives the occurrence of what are often referred to as "dilemmas of activism." While these projects benefit the overall quality of life for the middle-class and promote a middle-class lifestyle, they in fact contradict their own objective, which is to improve the quality of life for the poor. Poor

residents are being displaced in the neighborhood, are depending more on social services to sustain their livelihood, and some are even resisting gentrification of the neighborhood as they struggle to maintain their lifeways. The strategies used by community groups to facilitate their notions of social change cause social conflict among residents as they struggle and compete to attain what they perceive as their rights to the city.

In hindsight, the efforts of community groups to improve the quality of life for poor residents in urban and ethnically diverse neighborhoods need further study. By analyzing dilemmas of activism, we can better understand questions about who benefits from community activism and how to address social issues in low-income communities.

_____, Committee Chair
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_____

Date

DEDICATION

For my parents
Joe and Isabelle Garcia

who have always encouraged me to seek new experiences

I would also like to thank Joyce Bishop for her careful and detailed critique of my work. I will miss spending time visiting and laughing with her during office hours. Terri Castaneda also spent time editing my work and Michelle Matisons, formerly of the CSUS Department of Women's Studies, spent much time conversing with me about the topic of "gentrification." I thank my committee members for their collegiality and commitment towards the academic growth of their students and feel that I am well prepared for any professional or academic research I will do in the future.

Likewise, I would like to especially thank my parents, Joe and Isabelle Garcia, for their constant support of the choices I have made in life and for their dedication towards helping me attain my education and well-rounded personal experiences. Without their interest this project would have never begun. Their sense of humor and optimistic outlook has made my research more of a pleasure to do.

Finally, I would like to thank the residents of Oak Park who welcomed me into their neighborhood, opened up their homes to me, and shared personal stories of their lives with me. They made me understand what it means to be part of a "community." In doing so, I will always be humbled by their generosity, kindness, and efforts to make me feel part of their community, Oak Park.

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INTRODUCTION: STUDYING THE URBAN

Located in Sacramento, California, the working-class neighborhood of Oak Park has undergone urban development and has been an object of "revitalization"[1] projects over the past several years. Gentrification[2] has brought increasing attention to the neighborhood as community groups have worked to facilitate social change through various forms of neighborhood activism. These community groups are trying to accomplish neighborhood change, but they vary in their agendas and strategies for change. Newly arrived middle-class residents participate in revitalization projects to rid the neighborhood of "blight" and improve what they consider the quality of the neighborhood; others create grassroots projects to provide resources for the poor; and yet others organize and educate the poor about issues of importance. Through an ethnographic analysis of neighborhood activism, this study explores conflict in the ways community groups and other community-based organizations define social change and reveals how different notions of "change" and competing strategies of neighborhood improvement help shape claims to the city.

In this chapter, I provide the background information that will help us appreciate the questions addressed in this thesis. I will describe the process of gentrification in Oak Park from an economic, political, and social perspective and explain its relation to neighborhood activism. Finally, I introduce readers to the research site where this study took place.

In academic literature, gentrification is described as the process through which "poor and working-class neighborhoods in the inner city are refurbished via an influx of private capital and middle-class homebuyers and renters" (Smith 1996:32). After more than fifty years of neglect and disinvestment, economically distressed urban neighborhoods in the U.S. are becoming targets for reinvestment (Newman 2004:34). Historically, during the 1970s, rapid increases in house values, upgrading of housing stock, and in-migration of white collar and professional households occurred and ultimately led to upper-income, in-migrant households coexisting with lower-income, longer term residents in gentrifying locales (Taylor and Covington 1993:379). In these changing urban areas, "the social consequences of the renewal of centers have been discussed in terms of gentrification and anesthetization of the city and urban life" (Nylund 2001:225). Since the close of the 1980s new urban conditions have transformed the politics of gentrification and have led to burgeoning reconfigured neighborhood alliances within and across lines of race and class (Schneider and Susser 2003:149). In consequence, "urban revitalization is seen as relying on the reconstitution of a sufficient stock of safety and, if possible, civility" (Smart and Smart 2003:273).

As urban development takes place, social and symbolic boundaries between residents become more concrete and the everyday spaces of the street become sites where micro-politics of contemporary urban life unfolds. Individuals exercise herein their spatial rights while negotiating the spatial claims of others (Tonkiss 2005:59). While integrating into urban life, residents and visitors are cautious about where they spend time and with whom they associate. While they objectify and even fear those who are

different from themselves, they distance themselves from others. Thus, "social polarization increases fear of violence, requiring 'pacification'" (Smart and Smart 2003:273). And although many neighborhood residents have become proactive and are attempting to control and shape their own destinies through collective organization and social action when they are faced with neighborhood change (Login and Rabrenovich 1990), the fact that neighborhood organizations engage in change-driven social action does not always mean they will have the ability to solve local problems" (Mesch and Schwirian 1996:467).

As poverty increases worldwide and the gap between rich and poor becomes more evident, the poor have become invisible, marginalized, or excluded from public view (Susser 1996:411). Poor residents are, in hindsight, often left underrepresented and unheard in neighborhood politics. A decline in basic urban services has occurred from fiscal crises experienced by city and federal governments facilitated by changes in the economy. The decline in related social services is threatening the ability of poor and working-class populations to sustain themselves (Jones et al.1992:99).

In the late 1980s, after years of neglect of the central cities, poverty and unemployment became too widespread to ignore, and neighborhood participation programs and revitalization projects began to emerge. In recent decades, numerous urban development and anti-poverty initiatives have attempted to address the problems of residents living in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Residents of these neighborhoods exhibit a diversity of interests in the neighborhood based on varying meanings of gentrification, which are in turn informed by those very interests. The diversity of

interests and perspectives on gentrification often present complex challenges (Boyd 2005:265).

Over the past three decades "the particularities of neighborhoods and cities have shaped activist strategies in various U.S. cities" (Paris 2001:33). In large cities, middle-class political activists rally to attain healthcare benefits and low-income laborers rally for increased wages. Middle-class residents living in low-income urban neighborhoods have implemented revitalization projects to improve their neighborhoods; women living in low-income and ethnically diverse neighborhoods have unified their efforts to help women and their children attain social mobility; teachers have conducted outreach to their student's parents to encourage them to be active participants; church members have created food closets for the homeless; and labor activists have organized the poor.

Each of these efforts is fueled by a belief that there is a social problem that needs to be addressed if conditions of poverty are to be improved. But each group has a different perspective of what a social problem is and how to address it. These diverse perspectives regarding how to facilitate community change can be seen in the types of community work performed by residents. Different ideas of social change are thus revealed in the work of community groups, non-profit organizations, and grassroots projects, which are largely formed of middle-class residents. Nachmias and Palen (1982:180) explain that researchers "are only beginning to clearly distinguish between areas undergoing upper-middle-class gentrification and those working-class areas experiencing incumbent upgrading." Nachmias and Palen further claim that very little is

known about the residents who are likely to participate in neighborhood organizations (1982:180).

Prior Research

Anthropologists traditionally have conducted fieldwork in small-scale societies and peasant communities in order to observe and document the lifeways of small groups of people and have concerned themselves with the fundamental issues of the maintenance of life and society (Ulin 1991:8-9). These analyses of small communities have generally focused on the social or political structure of a group within agricultural environments and have emphasized interaction between society and nature and the ways in which social groups have organized themselves in relation to their environment (Jones et al. 1992:100). Jones explains that although these analyses are "obscured by the complexity of modern city life, an understanding of these processes is central to social analyses" (Jones et al. 1992:100). While research on small communities attempts to explain a group's social and cultural construction as bounded by kinship, customs, and ritual practices, "research in urban society will usually focus on social constructs such as community, class, race, and gender" (Tonkiss 2005:1).

Urban ethnography has undergone many changes since it evolved out of the Chicago School of Sociology in the 1940s and 50s. The early Chicago School taught that "one cannot understand social life without understanding the arrangements of particular social actors in particular social times and places—Social facts are located" (Abbott 1997:1152). Traditional urban sociology was concerned with such activities as how social groups formed communities, created subcultures, and avoided anomie, which all

were intrinsically urban phenomena (Walton 1993:304-305). Tonkiss (2005:2) further

explains, "founding perspectives in urban sociology and social theory were concerned

with specific cities in specific context, even as they aimed to develop general accounts of

urban form and urban experience." Since then,

> Social scientists studied the way social relations are shaped by urban spaces and
> focused on the manner in which spatial borders reproduce economic, social and
> cultural divisions, look at the city as a site of political agency and contested
> power, ask how economic processes in urban spaces are reflected at the levels of
> meaning and representation, and focus on issues of gender and sexuality in the
> city. [Tonkiss 2005:2, 4-6]

Walton (1993:315) further states that "the new urban sociology has added a vital

ingredient to the study of ethnicity and community by locating those local processes

within the larger economy, labor force, and political environment" and "beyond

employing these broader forces simply as background, the new work attempts to follow

structural forces influences into the processes of ethnic identity formation and community

action." Anthropologists that have produced ethnographies documenting the formation

of ethnic identity and community action include Sacks (1996 in Low 1996b:389), who

explains race, class, and gender relations through the framework of capitalism, which she

defines as materially based and state-reinforced social and cultural construction. Abu-

Lughod's (1994) "collective ethnography" of New York City's Lower East Side is

another effort to reveal the economic and social complexities found in inner-city

neighborhoods. This analysis shows inner-city neighborhoods as sites of struggle with

development and government representatives and are also sites of conflict for the

residents that live in them (Low 1996b:392). And Gregory (1993) examines how

African-American women living in an apartment complex in Queens, New York,

contested racialized images of their housing complex and its residents held by Caucasian activists in the surrounding area, thus showing how racial ideologies are constructed, enacted, and rearticulated by those in power.

"Urban anthropology is the anthropological subspecialty which focuses on the development and context of social relations in industrial society" (Susser 1982b:8). Much research has been conducted in the United States or "at home" by American social scientists. Anthropologists had worked at home in the past, and by 1980 a growing amount of these studies have accumulated, and is quickly increasing (Moffat 1992:205). Smart and Smart (2003:263-285) emphasize that the "urbanization of peoples traditionally studied by anthropology, combined with growing legitimacy for 'anthropology at home,' resulted in rapid growth of urban anthropology from the 1970's." A key question within contemporary urban theory, culminating from urban research, has been what the relationship is between two aspects of the city in 1) the built environment and 2) the social life that characterizes urban life (Nylund 2001:221). Performing research in urban localities "at home" can help to better understand the relationship between the urban environment and social life.

Emerging from urban studies, the phenomenon of gentrification has received a great deal of scholarly attention over the last few decades. Revitalization of central-city neighborhoods has been one of the most publicized and debated urban developments in the last decade and has become the focus of bitter debate (Hodge 1981:188). And although "there are many benefits to revitalization, the process creates losers and winners" (Hodge 1981:188).[3] A number of anthropologists performing research in urban

environments, such as Ida Susser (1986), Jeff Maskovsky (2003), and Neil Smith (1986),

have documented the dynamics and complexity of gentrification and urban activism in

cities. Since the early 1970s, the news media and an increasing number of academics

have chronicled gentrification, or the movement of middle-income households into low-

income neighborhoods throughout cities in the U.S. (Knox 1987:654). "Gentrification

may have affected less than 1 percent of the central-city housing stock in the U.S.,"

which is "not great when measured against the broad sweep of urban change" (Knox

1987:654). But, as Knox suggests, "The reasons for the extensive literature and

disproportionate interest of academics, politicians, and the media in gentrification are to

be found in what gentrification may (or may not) represent. It encapsulates an ideology"

and

> Not only does a neighborhood populated by 'upscale' individuals represent a flow
> of money into the city; it also represents a highly esteemed
> lifestyle….Gentrification, moreover, confirms the possibilities of upward
> mobility. [Beauregard 1985:56]

For others,

> Gentrification is further evidence of the regressive consequences of the uneven
> outcomes of advanced capitalism, with the poor, the elderly, and minorities
> bearing the cost of urban change. Further, because it fosters capital accumulation
> and the reproduction of the middle classes, gentrification has become a symbol
> and portent of urban change for the 'new wave' of liberal/socialist urban politics.
> [Knox 1987.654-655]

Meanwhile, for academics

> Gentrification processes represent a microcosm of urban change in which to test
> and develop theory. It is a highly visible expression of changing social relations
> and of the interaction of social classes in space and, as such, it offers a convenient
> focus for debate over the relative importance of structural forces, historically
> contingent events, and human agency. [Knox 1987:655]

Although the anthropological literature on the city published since the 1980s has incorporated a number of models and paradigms from other disciplines, the dominant research trends in urban anthropology appear to be post-structuralist studies of race, class, and gender in the urban context; political economic studies of transnational culture; and symbolic and social production studies of urban space and planning (Low 1996b:401-402). And while "cities are seen as sites of polarization, segmentation and differentiation, and also of important struggles—what is missing from these conceptions of spatial scales as continuous and nested, however, is attention to spatial scales 'below' the level of the urban (such as the body, home, community, and neighborhood)" (Vaiou and Lykogianni 2006:731).

The most important transition in the anthropological study of the city occurred in the 1980s, with the introduction of the political economy model.[4] Walton (1993:304) suggests that the political economy model has been the dominant paradigm in urban sociology for the past 25 years. Further, Amin and Graham (1997:411) suggest that "urban studies has experienced a remarkable renaissance in the past fifteen years, fueled by the replacement of tight, positivistic approaches with structuralist and more recently, post-structuralist theories." This model allowed researchers to introduce a different framework or critique of urban anthropology to research in the United States, thus ushering in a decade of ethnographies that demonstrate how structural forces shape urban experience (Low 1996b:386). Examples of a few of these landmark ethnographies include *Norman Street* by Ida Susser (1982a), which focuses on a Brooklyn working-class neighborhood, a monograph by Ulf Hannerz (1980) titled, *Exploring the City*, and

Leith Mulling's (1987) critique of urban anthropology in the United States titled, *Cities of the United States: Studies in Urban Anthropology*. While acknowledging the contributions of that literature, I present a different approach to life in the city—an ethnography of neighborhood activism—in an attempt to explore the conflict in the ways three community groups define agendas for social change and how their agendas for change shape claims, or resident's rights to the city. In this thesis, I utilize Amin and Thrift's (2002) description of rights to the city as having a right of access to equal participation in public spaces in the city.

This study responds to Steven Gregory's call for a paradigmatic shift in urban ethnography in order to "consider local activism as a real social force" (1998:19). Gregory, in his ethnographic study of neighborhood activism in Corona, argues that it is important to understand how collective identities are formed because we can better understand the process of how and why people act collectively, and participate in activism. Moreover, we can identify the formation of collective identities as a critical axis of conflict in struggles between the people, the state, and capital. Such studies of neighborhood activism can contribute to our understanding of the relationship between 1) the formation of collective identities and 2) structural arrangements of power. My research is an attempt to explore Gregory's (1998) claim that local community activism, occurring in the form of community groups and grassroots projects, generates diverse forms of responses that are changing the social dynamics of Oak Park, Sacramento.

Research Focus

The research site of Oak Park, located in Sacramento, the capital of California, is home to an ethnically diverse population of approximately 21,125[5] inhabitants. In 2000, Oak Park's population was 42% Caucasian, 24% African-American, 23% Hispanic, 9% Asian and 2% American Indian.[6] The neighborhood can be described as a working-class neighborhood, with many low-income residents. In 2000, the estimated median household income was $26,331, compared to the California statewide average of $41,994, and 26.5% of families were living below the poverty level.[7] Recently, the neighborhood has seen an influx of middle-class home buyers who are flocking to the neighborhood to buy affordable homes. Between 2005 and 2006, there were approximately 800 home sales in Oak Park and the estimated sale price of these homes was between $250,000 and $300,000.[8] This influx of middle-class residents and home ownership has marked the beginning of gentrification.

Oak Park is conveniently situated between downtown Sacramento and other working-class neighborhoods, and intersected by commercial streets including Broadway and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. It is bordered by a state-of-the-art medical hospital at one end and a law school at another. Areas near the hospital and law school are popular spots for middle-class residents to buy homes. These areas house newly renovated Victorian and bungalow style homes, coffee shops, and other commercial businesses characteristic of a gentrifying community.

Oak Park is one of Sacramento's oldest neighborhoods and its first suburb. By the first part of the 20th century, the neighborhood had developed into a middle-class

area of single-family homes. But during the 1930s, the area began to decline, as homeowners who were affected by the Depression and the World War were unable to maintain their homes (SHRA 2005:1). Many of these individuals left Oak Park for inexpensive new suburbs outside the central city, and with the flight of middle-class homeowners to new suburbs, the economic and social condition of the neighborhood declined. The neighborhood became rampant with widespread deteriorating housing and commercial property, empty lots and abandoned buildings, refuse, and abandoned vehicles. In 1973, the City of Sacramento responded by establishing the Oak Park Redevelopment Project Area. Since then, the Oak Park Redevelopment Project Area has slowly pushed to revitalize the area with various redevelopment programs. Over the past five years, Oak Park redevelopment projects and programs have totaled more than $20 million (SHRA 2005). Other redevelopment and affordable housing projects and programs are being proposed over the next four years and are estimated to cost approximately $35 million (SHRA 2005).

Oak Park is also now home to a number of political powers emerging in the form of churches, business associations, political groups, civic groups, and a Neighborhood Association. When I moved there in 2005, many of the revitalization projects planned by the city for the neighborhood were already in progress. In fact, the anticipated development of some projects, such as the construction of the 4th Avenue Lofts, the acquisition of key properties by the city, and related historic preservation projects are what initially drew me to conduct research in Oak Park. The local Neighborhood

Association was also gaining attention for its grassroots style of activism aimed at ridding the neighborhood of "blight."

The composition and scale of Oak Park made it a prime location for observing community events and listening to resident's activist speech.[9] Participants in neighborhood activism included individuals from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, with the majority of participants being middle-class Caucasian residents. Residents in this gentrifying community have divided perspectives on how to improve their neighborhood and many joined community groups, while others did not. Some residents were indifferent to their neighbors, while others sought to build friendships. But most were aware of the changes occurring in their neighborhood.

Chapter 2

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

"Social scientists use theories and concepts to help them grasp, order, analyze, and understand the nature of the societies, cultures, and sociocultural formations with which they are confronted" (Bond 1981:228). In contemporary anthropology "ethnographers grapple with the issues of reflexivity and the incorporation of voices, the hierarchies of 'otherness,'" and suggest that with "the imposition and creation of identities of color, gender, nation, and foreignness, certain messages emerge clearly" (Susser 1996:428). Urban ethnographers typically embed themselves in a local setting or community with the purpose of learning about the people residing there. While participating in the daily routine of a group of people, they observe and detail daily activities. From these observations, "ethnographers attempt to tease from the tangled threads of social life, insights that will make a contribution to social theory" (Stoller 1994:354).

Contemporary anthropological studies of the inner-city employ participant observation as a method of uncovering and explaining the adaptations and accommodations of urban populations to microenvironments (Low 2002:2). Many of these studies focus predominantly on the center, producing ethnographies of culturally significant places such as markets (Bestor 2001), housing projects (MacLeod 1987), gardens (Rotenburg 1995), plazas (Low 1996a), convention centers (Lindquist 2006), waterfront developments (Williams 2001), and homeless shelters (Lyon-Callo 2000) that articulate macro- and micro- urban processes (Low 2001:45). The "otherness" of people

in city environments is exposed in the form of social constructs, such as community

(Krauss 1989), class (Freidenberg 1998), race (Williams 1992), and gender (Spain 1992).

Elijah Anderson (2002:1537) further elaborates on urban ethnography and states,

> Of particular interest is how residents meet the exigencies of life, how they group themselves socially, and how they arrive at their shared understandings of the local system of rules of everyday life—the codes they live by. Direct observation of key events and people's reactions to them can alert the ethnographer to the subtle expectations and norms of the subjects—and thus, to their culture.

Collecting large scale qualitative data in urban contexts once seemed almost impossible

to do, but anthropologists have successfully negotiated cultural and institutional barriers

and produced detailed ethnographic descriptions (Susser 1982b:7).

"The practice of intensive fieldwork has been central to the definition of modern

social anthropology as a discipline—to the extent of being the single distinctive feature of

the anthropological method" (Jenkins 1994:433). Anthropologists' knowledge is gained

by close and repeated interaction with specific individuals, who provide information

about different cultures and different ways of being. "The main technique for

constructing knowledge about a putative 'other' is participant observation, blending

oneself within the lives of others by sharing time with them in their own space"

(Freidenberg 1998:170). "In participant-observation studies, the observer occupies a role

in a social context, which is the subject of study" (Bositis 1988:334).

Much urban ethnographic research has been conducted in lower-income

neighborhoods (Marks 1991:461-462), where inequalities are exposed at the level of the

"community" and reveal how residents perceive their community environment. The term

community implies something "geographic and psychologic" and "geographically it

identifies a specific cluster of individuals, whereas psychologically it indicates shared interests, shared social characteristics, and social interaction; but, however, geographic proximity and similar interests do not make a community" (Hutchinson et al. 1996:201). The frequency and intensity of interaction and segregation among residents are the main ingredients that determine community identity (Ibid). Within these localities, the daily ways of life of community residents can be observed. "Community life can be understood as the life people live in dense, multiplex, relatively autonomous networks of social relationships" (Calhoun 1988:225). And although residents live in the same community, many may not define and use their community similarly. "Community is thus not a place, or simply a small-scale aggregate, but is a mode of relating" (Ibid.). Residents may live in the same community but may not associate with and may even fear their neighbors.

Public spaces such as streets, parks, and sidewalks are also of theoretical interest to researchers. From afar, they seem as though they belong to no one particularly, and therefore belong to everyone. But closer observation reveals that these public spaces are places where social avoidance occurs. "Physical and social disorder in public spaces are fundamental to a general understanding of urban neighborhoods" claims Sampson and Raudenbush (1999:604). "The urban 'ghetto,' the social isolated inner city, and the 'underclass' neighborhood have all become powerful phrases in the popular discourse on race and urbanism" and "they are grounded firmly in American consciousness, and carry a strong, value-laden understanding of citizenship, individual responsibility, and normative social behavior" (Venkatesh 1997:82).

Moffat (1992:217) states, "if many contemporary Americans don't really live in a 'community' with their immediate neighbors in space, on the other hand, many of them do 'build' it in other directions." Residents volunteer their time to community groups and non-profit organizations in their community and they perform this work for a variety of reasons. Stoll (2001:530) explains, "by participating in civic organizations, individuals build social relationships and access social resources that are likely to enhance their social and economic prospects." In addition, participation in community activity requires a common sense of community or a common desire to participate with other members performing work for poor residents. Middle-class residents are often capable of volunteering in their community because "participation in community activity relies on resources such as time and effort" (Lloyd 1984:13). Wilson (2000:223) states, "social resources play a crucial role when volunteering means activism to bring about social change or when collective goods, such as safer streets, are the goal." Social resources are resources the poor do not usually have and many poor people are not capable of participating in community groups, unlike those of the middle-class.

Grusky (1994:113-114) explains that social "classes" are not communities; they merely represent groups of people that have the same possible and frequent bases for communal action. Social classes have similar life chances and possibilities of securing goods, external living conditions, and personal life experiences (Grusky 1994:113). The middle-class is both a social and economic term and is defined by Weber (cited in Grusky 1994:123) as a group that owns property, is marketable in the workforce, and is in a position to draw support from these sources. Members of the middle-class have "white-

collar" occupations, such as professional and managerial jobs, and have the same taste

and class interests. They are entrepreneurs and have the capability of being creative in

their jobs. But social classes cannot just be specifically defined solely on one's life

chances and a technical division of labor; they are based directly on a system of relations

of domination and subordination. The working-class and the poor are subordinate to the

authority and decision making ability of the upper and middle classes. The middle-class

has the authority, privilege, prestige, and power to make decisions that affect other

people's lives and lifestyles, but in this social class position, they struggle over how to

use their power (Wright 1979:14).

Gentrification and the City

Gentrification does not have one meaning. "The phenomenon of gentrification

has been variously labeled as the 'back-to-the-city' movement, urban renaissance, and

neighborhood revitalization" (Galster and Peacock 1986:321). And gentrification has

generally been defined as "primarily structured around class oppositions" (Bridge

1995:237), and focused on class and ethnic/racial relations. Although social scientists

define gentrification differently and focus on property or on people, they seem to agree

that when neighborhoods become gentrified many social and physical changes take place.

They explain the process of gentrification as having economic and social impacts.

Phillips (2002:282) claims that "the study of gentrification has, since the 1970s, been a

subject of considerable interest and debate among geographers and has been described as

a major 'research frontier."

Choldin and Hanson (1981:562) define gentrification as a name for the process of neighborhood change "in which white upper-middle-class households purchase dwellings in old residential areas and renovate the housing, typically displacing lower-status households." Zukin (1982:423) states that, "in recent years the 'revitalization' of older cities, or the reconquest of their declining centers for middle-class users, has often appeared accompanied by an explosive growth in facilities for cultural consumption." Smith (1996:32) describes gentrification as "the process through which poor and working-class neighborhoods in the inner city are refurbished via an influx of private capital and middle-class homebuyers and renters." He also has argued that popular discussions of gentrification often enact a "frontiermanship ideology" in which the gentrifier is seen as a pioneer, settling in an taming urban wilderness (Smith 1996). But while gentrification is described as the influx of educated middle-class residents into lower-income neighborhoods and as economic development occurring in the form of new businesses, loft apartments, and parks, these middle-class residents are also promoting neighborhood activism to "clean up" and beautify their neighborhoods through revitalization projects.

The explanations provided for 'revitalization' and gentrification are "generally formulated out of the concepts, values, and beliefs espoused by those financial institutions, politicians, corporations, real estate developers, landlords, and upper and middle-class residents who benefit from the process" explains Deutsche (1986:69). Jager (1986 cited in Bridge 1995:240) concluded that "the aesthetic of gentrification is an example of claims for social distinction involving the emulation of grand bourgeoisie and

a distancing from the qualities of working-class neighborhoods." During gentrification, homes are renovated, vacant lots are cleaned up, trendy businesses and restaurants open up, and the cost of neighborhood homes increase, low-income residents struggle to afford higher rents, and newly formed Neighborhood Watch Associations encourage more surveillance of public spaces. Residents are discouraged from playing loud music, having late parties, and fixing cars on the sidewalk. Lower-income residents eventually become "priced out" of their neighborhoods and are forced to decide upon options of moving to more inexpensive neighborhoods or becoming more dependent on services provided by community organizations, non-profit organizations, and government sponsored programs.

In communities that are in the process of being gentrified, social scientists have documented the ways and reasons residents come together to address problems of crime and disorder in their neighborhoods. Donnelly and Majka (1998:189) state, "since the early 1970s, there has been an increased interest in the role that local communities can play in addressing the problems of crime and disorder and many communities have anticrime programs that are initiated either by the local city or police officials or by residents themselves." While the middle-class perceives the neighborhood poor as problematic to their community, they organize with other residents to rid the neighborhood of crime and disorder. "The adoption of a community policing model by many police departments further emphasizes the role of community organizations in crime prevention and control efforts" (Bennett 1995:76). Community residents will organize themselves and take matters "into their own hands" to address problems in the

neighborhood. The neighborhood thus becomes an area characterized by social conflict and contestation over public space.

Research Method

This study is focused on community groups in the gentrifying neighborhood of Oak Park, Sacramento. Oak Park is a working-class neighborhood and has about 21,125 inhabitants. It is known for its culturally diverse population and abundance of non-profit and faith-based organizations. In addition, the neighborhood is characterized by socioeconomic disparities, a history of neighborhood activism, a high crime rate, and a documented history of middle-class residents moving into the community. For nine months, from December 2005 to September 2006, my residency in Oak Park allowed me to observe the activities of community groups and learn something about their agendas for social change in the neighborhood.[10] I became a regular participant in Neighborhood Association[11] meetings, grass-roots projects, and volunteer organizations, thus gaining access that allowed me to acquire an emic perspective on various residents' perceptions of how to facilitate change for the poor. I analyze the observations and conversations collected during this fieldwork to provide an ethnographic perspective on how different groups attempt to facilitate social change in a gentrifying neighborhood.

In becoming a participant and befriending residents in the neighborhood, I became engaged with people who had different perceptions of poverty and opposing views of how to facilitate change in Oak Park. For instance, during my first Neighborhood Association meeting, I introduced myself as a new resident and a graduate student at California State University, Sacramento.[12] My "newcomer status" and

graduate student identification was welcomed by both middle-class and working-class residents in the neighborhood. My identification as a student, which was made known to people who asked about my background, and my status as a third-generation Mexican-American allowed me to maneuver myself comfortably through various groups of people from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. In most cases I gained trust from residents in the community.

Eventually, I visited people in their homes who greeted me with green tea and bread, homemade dip and chopped vegetables, lentil soup and crackers, or fruit pie. Next, I gathered community data by visiting neighborhood laundromats, hanging out in coffee shops, visiting the neighborhood bookstore and art gallery, shopping at local liquor stores and grocery markets, volunteering at the multi-service center, and speaking to many residents. Before moving in December 2005 into a small one-bedroom apartment in a reconstructed Victorian house where I lived for nine months, I spent two years learning about and exploring the neighborhood at all times of day or night. I stopped at neighborhood liquor stores to grab beer, soda, or chips (a frequent purchase in liquor stores), attended Neighborhood Association meetings, volunteered my spare time with different community groups, and eventually gained enough of an understanding of the social make-up of the neighborhood to more confidently position myself and settle into the neighborhood. Performing volunteer work in the neighborhood seemed like a reasonable way to participate and gain trust from people in the neighborhood and it allowed me to observe how residents participating in community groups and non-profit organizations improve the quality of life for people in Oak Park. In addition, I learned

the various definitions of "community" held by residents. Eventually, I co-founded a community group named the Oak Park Neighborhood Latinos, worked locally for the CSUS Math Engineering and Student Achievement Program (MESA), became a participant in a Women's Needs-Assessment Study, became a regular attendant of Neighborhood Association meetings, and became a labor organizer for three months at the neighborhood Labor Association.

While living in Oak Park, I noticed there were a multitude of community groups and non-profit organizations that focused their work on helping the poor in the community in different ways. I performed volunteer work with the intention of learning more about how social change was being accomplished for poor residents and I began to attend local Neighborhood Association meetings once a month to learn of the revitalization projects and community initiatives taking place. While attending the Neighborhood Association meetings, I met a handful of residents who were very enthusiastic about participating in community projects. Some residents who partook in community groups in Oak Park cheerfully welcomed my presence, while other residents—particularly lower-income residents—observed my presence with curiosity. From the perspective of community activists, I was a resident of Oak Park and therefore could easily "belong" to such community groups. But many lower-income residents remained both curious and suspicious of me as I interacted with middle-class residents. Over time I learned the perspectives that some residents had about poverty in Oak Park and learned that middle-class perspectives about poverty fueled the creation of various community groups.

After attending a few Neighborhood Association meetings I befriended a young Asian woman who was conducting a Women's Needs Assessment study in Oak Park. A board member of the Neighborhood Association introduced me to the woman because I told him I was a graduate student observing community work for my thesis and he thought I should meet Linda because she was also working in the neighborhood to collect data for a Needs Assessment study. After chatting with her a couple of times, she insisted I participate in her project and invited me to attend the women's group she held at her home in Oak Park. The Women's Group was composed of a dozen women who met regularly to discuss issues affecting women and children in the community. Although Linda at many times asked me about my thesis project, I learned to distance myself and inquire about the Women's Group and its purpose. At the Women's Group meetings I learned of their plans to improve the quality of life for women and children. The social welfare of women and children, they believed, were key to sustaining low-income communities. Simultaneously, I began to volunteer once a week with a local labor association in Oak Park and began organizing low-income service workers in the neighborhood. The labor association's views about poverty and their plans about how to improve the quality of life for the poor followed a Marxist ideology of "radical" activism. And while working at non-profit organizations, I learned how non-profit organizations provide relief to the poor and produce programs to help a continuing clientele of poor, who are often dependent on the programs they administer.

The analysis that follows is based on the observations and conversations collected during my nine month stay in Oak Park.

Chapter 3

SETTING

The City

The city is composed of more than just physical space, buildings, and a dense

population; it is 'social space' where people are involved in complex and contradictory

relationships. The city is furthermore an illustration or collection of messages, a world of

meanings, a grid of communications, and is a stage or a theater where the struggle among

counterposed material interests takes place (Ferrarotti 1992:25). At the community level,

cities are places where people come into contact with people who have different values,

opinions, and beliefs they find unfamiliar or strange. Cities are filled with these types of

"strangers," or people unlike themselves. People keep a social distance from each other

while trying to find commonalities. In central cities, residents lack a sense of "common

identity," but these big cities are a primary location to experience "otherness." (Frug

1996:1050).

City neighborhoods are constantly influx, with ever-changing economic fortunes,

patterns of immigration and emigration, and development activity. Residents come and

go, and the city's power over space is exposed. The city's power over land use has the

ability to radically change the character of the neighborhood without the residents'

consent (Frug 1996:1050). City power is largely invisible, but is made visible through

struggles that take place among residents and city representatives. City power over land

use can further segregate neighborhood residents in a city and "city control has been

exercised principally through cities' zoning power and through a combination of other

city powers, such as condemnation, financial incentives, and municipal borrowing, mobilized to promote urban redevelopment," claims Frug (1996:1081). Urban redevelopment initiatives in cities have been lauded as beneficial economic development in inner-cities by the general public and media.

Many neighborhood residents encourage urban redevelopment initiatives, hoping that dilapidated buildings will be rehabilitated and new businesses will open up, drawing a new influx of consumers and capital into the city. Deutsche (1986:71) explains that "the use of the city neighborhood as a commodity to be exploited for profit represents only one of its purposes in the capitalist economy—traditionally it has also provided the conditions necessary for reproducing necessary labor power." But Amin and Graham (1997:421) explains that just concentrating on the cultural experience of new consumer spaces can often ignore the larger social contexts in which they are produced and the socio-spatial segregation, social control, and surveillance with which they are often associated. More specifically, city control over land use in cities lays the foundation for new consumer spaces to develop in neighborhoods.

"For the moment, the modern city remains structured by the historical forces that have created it, the most recent of which has been twentieth century modern planning and urban development" (Cooke 1990:339). Increased surveillance has accompanied modern planning and urban development. Forms of state surveillance, in the modern city, and control of populations, as well as of capitalist organization and work discipline have depended on the homogenizing, rationalizing, and partitioning of space (Alonso 1994:382). The modern city is thus a center point for commercial industry and is a

stratified, selective, and distanced structure. Economic forces are further restructuring

the city, as cities are being "sold" as places to visit for tourism or business. This

attraction is further drawing people to move to the city. But, the desire for space, in

cities, is coming more into conflict with the proposals of many urban planners, who are

beginning to plan for an increase in urban density (Newman and Hogan 1981:270).

For decades, urban enclaves and ethnic places have been perceived as undesirable

areas of congestion, crime, disease, and other social pathologies, and have been targets

for urban renewal. Lin (1995:629) explains that "ethnic places have reemerged as

districts of significance in a 'postmodern' developmental environment in which local

urban culture has a stronger potential for preservation and persistence." Although ethnic

places have not become neighborhoods of great economic or social vitality, they have

become symbolic in other ways, as urban enclaves having sentimental and historical

significance (Lin 1995:629). Ethnic places in cities, such as Oak Park, are spaces where

struggles take place and social conflict occurs and where behavior is highlighted by the

public and the media. Ethnic places have become both 'representations' and 'social

realities' of the city.

Oak Park Today

> *While leaving Starbuck's coffee shop I walked down the sidewalk and noticed a*
>
> *large crowd shuffling into the 40 Acres Art Gallery. Everyone had smiles on their*
>
> *faces and was dressed formally in dresses and suits. I stepped closer to the*
>
> *gallery and saw people walking around. The gallery had a "Closed" sign on the*

door, so I figured I must be observing a private party event. While walking away

from the gallery I heard a pianist outside in the courtyard playing John Lennon's

"Imagine." I stepped into my car and headed back to my apartment.

"The neighborhood is a type of social space" (Sills 2003:73) and the everyday

lives of people in a neighborhood are shaped, in part, by its distinct social context.

Neighborhoods are sites that give individuals a sense of membership and community;

they are places where acts of reciprocity are important to building relationships (Boyd

2005:277-278). "It is reasonable to assume that a 'neighborhood' is an important unit of

conceptual cognitive space; what is less clear is how person/neighborhood relations are

formed and maintained" (Aitken 1990:249). Aitken further explains:

> "The social and physical environment is not an unchanging backdrop to which
> urban residents simply learn to adapt. People are active participants, seeking out
> and processing information on an environment that surrounds and envelops. In
> addition, urban environments comprise constant disturbances, and people have
> varying degrees of success coping with its variability."

Studies have shown that people are committed and attached to their

neighborhoods for a variety of reasons but those residents also maintain linkages outside

of their community. "Within the neighborhood, people socialize with neighbors; use

neighborhood based institutions for a variety of purposes, including shopping, recreation,

socializing, and worship; and participate to some degree in neighborhood-based

organizations" (Ahlbrandt 1986:122). Some very poor residents in neighborhoods are not

regularly exposed to cultural and social space outside of their neighborhood. Ahlbrandt

(1986:122) further explains, "except for those individuals who are the most place-

bound—the oldest and the poorest—people maintain active social relationships with

people living outside the neighborhood; place of work is normally outside of the neighborhood and are used by most people with varying frequencies." Routine participation in community organizations by the middle-class and the varying survival strategies of low-income residents are formed in relation to the environment of their neighborhood. Lawrence and Low (1990:454) explain that relationships between society and culture and the built environment are interactive in that people both create and find their behavior influenced by, the built environment. In a neighborhood such as Oak Park, urban renewal and the pressures of gentrification are major factors that shape the beliefs and daily strategies of residents.

The neighborhood of Oak Park in Sacramento is inhabited by a culturally diverse population with deep historical roots. The ethnic make-up of the neighborhood consists primarily of immigrants of various ethnicities such as Latinos and African-American residents. There are also many Caucasian residents who live in Oak Park. In one day of venturing out into the neighborhood, a person can come across a homeless man walking his dog and pushing a grocery basket down the street, see Hmong children playing hopscotch on a driveway, pass by African-American children riding bikes in front of Starbuck's coffee shop, drive past a Rastafarian mowing a lawn and older African-American males barbequing in their front yard, and walk past a Caucasian resident throwing out the trash. During the day, the neighborhood is a colorful collage of bicycles, newer and older dilapidated cars, people walking down the street, and people sitting on couches in their front porch. At any time a person can sit and drink coffee in Starbuck's while hearing Stevie Wonder playing in the background. Pedestrian traffic is

visible in the neighborhood at all times of the day and night. Liquor stores have many visitors, bus stops are always occupied, and the front yards of homes are often filled with people hanging out on couches. Because some people do not own cars or cannot afford gas, the streets are busy with those who walk to their next destination or ride bikes and the bus to destinations outside the neighborhood.

Although many individuals in the neighborhood are poor, barbecues are plentiful. People have outdoor parties, and the parks are always filled with men playing basketball. The low-income in the neighborhood often share rides, visit each other in their homes, and invite neighbors to block parties. Residents are creative, using whatever means necessary to sustain themselves. Poor residents share babysitters, food, and cars and utilize available social services in the neighborhood, such as clothing provided by churches and canned food provided by non-profit organizations. Families rely on each other for shelter and many people have strong ties to their churches, which always seem to be full on Sundays. The relationships formed by lower-income residents can be presumed to be caused by "a lack of opportunity within disadvantaged areas" and therefore "have resulted in a sort of adaptive strategy on the part of its inhabitants" (Kubrin et al. 2006:1563).

Baptist, Catholic, and Presbyterian Churches, and a Muslim Mosque punctuate the Oak Park landscape. These places of worship are consistent gathering places for residents and their very presence provides a community backbone for the neighborhood poor. Neighborhood churches often engage in their own forms of community action and provide resources and services which the poor rely on for basic needs. Further, recent

studies have demonstrated that religious congregations are already an essential part of the social welfare net, providing services such as food and clothing pantries, limited financial aid, job referrals, tutoring, child care, English language classes and self-help programs (Pipes and Ebaugh 2002:50). Community clinics, soul food restaurants, and thrift stores also add special character to neighborhood streets. The environment of Oak Park can be described as having a Bohemian essence that is conducive to a type of American culture characterized by racial politics. Historically, "consciousness-raising" groups, such as the Black Panthers, have had roots in the neighborhood and have provided community services for low-income residents. Oak Park is home to a heterogeneous group of people.

Historical Overview

Sacramento represents a type of city with recent rapid growth and employment heavily concentrated in the services sector. It does not have tenements, massive public-housing projects, or row houses, or other attributes of ethnic ghettoization (Ford 1995:562). "Focused policies such as open-housing laws, anti-redlining regulations, and affirmative action have saved Sacramento from some of the worst excesses of ethnic ghettoization" (Ford 1995:563). Although Sacramento does not suffer from extreme ghettoization, [13] there are a number of people living below the poverty level. But the city of Sacramento also has many social service programs to aid the poor and help them attain a healthy standard of living. The presence of these programs provides relief to many people living in poverty and many residents in Oak Park utilize social service programs that are available in the neighborhood and throughout the city.

Oak Park, an Agricultural Beginning

During 1850 – 1851, the first years of the Gold Rush settlers came to the Oak Park area, but were unable to establish titles to land they occupied until 1865 when a United States government survey was completed (Historic Environment Consultants 2003). Settlers set up fences and markers to distinguish their farmland. The soil in the area was not of high quality and people with modest means were able to afford farmland in Oak Park. In the 1850s, hay and small grains were largely produced but as the mining industry dwindled, farmers in the area began to produce more fruits, vegetables, dairy products, hogs and horses for the growing population of the city of Sacramento. As a result, one of the areas' first grape vineyards was started.

The initial development of Oak Park began when an Irish blacksmith, named William Doyle, bought a 230 acre tract of land and built a house and a bridge from his house across a canal on 31st and Y Street (Historic Environment Consultants 2003). William later sold the ranch land to a real estate promoter, named Edwin Alsip, who had a vision of developing the land into a small town. Edwin created the Oak Park Association, which included a select group of ten investors, who divided the land into parcel blocks and incorporated street names. The Oak Park Association later auctioned off the lots to real estate speculators and middle-class families. The community later developed slowly over time and Oak Park became not only Sacramento's first suburb, it became the model which Alsip and many other Sacramento area real estate developers would use in creating subdivisions in the dynamic growth years to come (Historic Environment Consultants 2003).

In 1889, the Oak Park Association street car formed a company named the Central Street Railway which built a railway with electric powered trolleys and developed an 8 acre picnic and park area. Oak Park became Sacramento's first trolley car suburb. During 1891-1894, when the Central Street Railway became a more popular form of transportation, Oak Park finally began slowly to grow and other developers began to buy up property in the area. During the 1890s, a nationwide depression forced the Oak Park Association to dissolve, but in 1903, the street car company was reorganized as the Sacramento Gas, Electric and Railway Company, an enterprise which brought more entertainment into the area.

Between 1900 and 1910, a working-class population was established, community churches were founded, a weekly newspaper was established, elementary schools and firehouses were built, and stores and a bank opened for business. In 1911, Oak Park (with 7,000 residents), was annexed to the City of Sacramento and became a mature neighborhood in the 1920s (Historic Environment Consultants 2003).

Oak Park, a Suburban Destination

Figure 1. Oak Park Gate Photo
http://www.cityofsacramento.org

The neighborhood of Oak Park has undergone significant developmental changes since the 1930s, when it was described as Sacramento's first suburban neighborhood. Originally a farming community, the neighborhood was a destination for European immigrants. Shortly thereafter, the neighborhood soon saw an influx of working-class residents and economic development. Oak Park acquired the services that were typical of suburbs of the era, such as a newspaper, grocery stores, schools, law enforcement, and an amusement park, Joyland. Connected to Sacramento by the streetcar system, Oak Park was established as a commuter suburb, with many outside residents being shuttled to the neighborhood of Oak Park.

But with the closure of Joyland in 1927, the use of the neighborhood streetcar system began to decrease in popularity. Businesses began to close after the closure of Joyland, which began a downward economic condition of Oak Park's business district. And the increased use of buses and cars in the 1950s began to give people the freedom to commute in a different way to different places. The construction of a freeway in the neighborhood in the 1960s followed the burgeoning car culture, which would leave the opportunity for urban blight to develop.

The city of Sacramento did not have a large African-American population during the formative years of Oak Park. African-Americans, and many others, discovered California and Sacramento during the Second World War, either as military personnel, or as workers in the wartime industries. After the war, many stayed in Sacramento, or came back later. "By the middle of the 20th century, the predominantly white neighborhood of Oak Park had shifted to being a mostly African-American neighborhood, in part due to

redevelopment projects elsewhere in the city, forced relocation, and white flight"
(Simpson 2004:8). Between 1960 and 1980, flight to the new suburbs and the loss of
working-class jobs in Oak Park devastated the business district in Oak Park and in turn
depressed property values (Historic Environment Consultants 2003). Crime increased as
vacant land and dilapidated buildings increased.

Oak Park has "evolved from an independent farming village, to a modern inner-
city 'ghetto,' and now to revitalized neighborhood" (Simpson 2004:7). Economic
development in the form of commercial business and the reinvestment and selling of
homes continues to transform the neighborhood. But despite the changes, the perception
of the neighborhood as an underclass ghetto[14] remains present, and this perception
continues to be reinforced through the media, which tends to highlight crime in the
neighborhood.
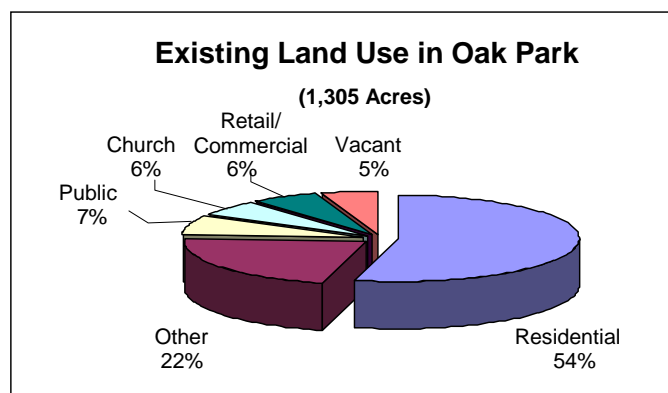
Figure 2. Existing Land Use in Oak Park
http://www.shra.org/Content/CommunityDevelopment/ImplPlanTOC.htm

Over time, the demographics of Oak Park changed dramatically, as immigrants
moved into the area and the neighborhood began to gentrify. Developers, urban planners,
and residents, with differing interests at the micro and macro-level, hope public space in

Oak Park will be used in different ways. Homeowners, subsidized housing occupants, and resident activists have had competing claims on limited space. Currently, existing land in Oak Park consists of 1,305 acres, comprised of 54% residential land, 7% public land, 6% retail/commercial land, 6% church owned land, 5% vacant land, and 22% land used in other ways (see Figure 2) (SHRA 2005:2). As of the 2000, 38.1% of Oak Park's housing units (in the 95817 zip code area) were owner occupied, compared to a rate of 66.2% statewide, and 61.9% of Oak Park's housing units (in the 95817 zip code area) were renter occupied, compared to a rate of 33.8% statewide (U.S. Census Bureau 2000).

Oak Park residents have varying jobs, lifestyles, and social habits that overlap and come into conflict with each other. Although these groups occupy the same geographic area and have their own culturally-distinct history, lifestyle, and perspectives, which diverge drastically from one another, their presence has helped form the neighborhood and has affected how each party perceives its neighbors and "home," Oak Park.

The St. HOPE Corporation,[15] an outgrowth of St. HOPE Academy, was founded in 1989, by NBA basketball player Kevin Johnson, a native of Sacramento. The St. HOPE Corporation is an organization that focuses on redevelopment of the Oak Park community and on the restoration of historic Oak Park structures. In 2003, the "40 Acres" complex, which contains a bookstore, art gallery, theater, barbershop, and Starbuck's coffee shop, opened in renovated historic buildings. The close proximity of the neighborhood to downtown and the abundance of affordable housing have attracted many people. In addition, people are drawn to the earthy bohemian environment of Oak Park, which has become more urban in appearance and attitude. The middle-class has

been lured to Arts and Crafts style homes and trendy lofts and bungalows. But many of

the lower-income are drawn to the neighborhood of Oak Park because there are low-

income home buyer programs available in the community that provide homeownership

assistance in "target areas" (see Figure 3). Similarly, historical neighborhoods, such as

Oak Park, have long drawn newcomers as the historical neighborhoods are interpreted as

markers of good taste, set against the mass-produced sameness of the suburbs and the

older homes, retail, and leisure spaces (Bridge 2006:722).
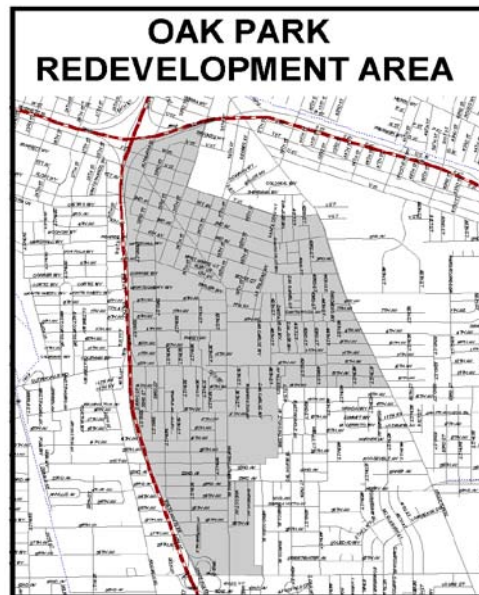
**Figure 3. Map of Oak Park Redevelopment where a
"target area" for homeownership assistance is shaded.
http://www.communitycouncil.org/level-3/direct_connect_earnings.html/**

At the same time, the neighborhood began to be projected as a cultural hub, as

cultural events showcasing music and art were increasingly spotlighted. While the

development of Oak Park has lured first time homebuyers, immigrants, working-class

and middle-class families to the neighborhood, many artists began to view Oak Park as

an artistically and politically stimulating neighborhood where they could live and

produce artwork and write music and books. The neighborhood's distinctive character

makes the community alluring to the artistic population. Commentaries in the

Sacramento News and Review (Harvey 2006) described Club Jazz, a newly opened jazz

club, as "the new hot spot for jazz in Oak Park." The club owner, Hewitt Robinson, was

quoted as previously experiencing the Bohemian movement to San Francisco and was

"hoping to bring that flavor to Sacramento" (Harvey 2006).   Jazz clubs, art shows, and

the renovation of the 40 Acres Gallery and the Guild Theater began to draw small crowds

from different parts of the city. Excitement over the "revitalization" of Oak Park meant

that the neighborhood was on its way to becoming more hip and urban in nature with

sidewalk sales, crowded restaurants, coffee shops, and the development of the trendy 4th

Avenue Lofts (See figure 4).

Figure 4. 4th Avenue Lofts in Oak Park
http:// www.fourthavenuelofts.com

Revitalization of the Neighborhood

> *Entering Starbuck's to get coffee, the coffee shop was lively and bright and the*
>
> *couches were filled with a couple of faces I recognized. A Latino male, in his*
>
> *early fifties wearing sunglasses, and an African-American man in his sixties, with*

big black sunglasses, khakis, and a black coat on, sat comfortably across from each other on two couches. The Latino male was humming lightly to the Rolling Stones soundtrack playing in the coffee shop. An elderly black man walked by him and said "Hi, what's up?" The Latino male replied, "just hanging out and listening to good music." The African-American man with big black sunglasses got off the couch and quickly walked outside. He yelled "Hi" to another African-American man riding a bike who stopped quickly to talk to his friend. Afterwards, the African-American man with the big black sunglasses walked back into the coffee shop.

Currently, while newcomers flow into Oak Park to secure inexpensive housing and enjoy the multi-cultural and trendy environment, some are simultaneously working to improve the quality of the neighborhood through participation in neighborhood activism, as a way to address social problems. Social problems are defined differently for different community groups, and these groups envision different solutions to address social problems. The variety of community groups and community-based organizations in the neighborhood reveals the array of perspectives people bring to social problems. While some groups want to "beautify" the neighborhood through revitalization projects, others want to provide resources for women and children, some want to organize the poor, and others want to provide the poor with basic necessities, such as food and shelter.

While these community groups help unify people in the neighborhood, they also signify that people have different and sometimes conflicting perspectives of their community. The neighborhood is characterized by contradictions and conflicts that arise

over commercial life, the use of the street, and the meaning of local history. While the middle-class defines liquor stores and decaying parks as dilapidated "eyesores," the unemployed perceive these spaces as places where they can "hang-out," meet up with friends, and share information. The unemployed and lower-income residents, who usually do not participate in neighborhood activism, therefore, do not speak on behalf of themselves to tell their story from their perspective. The increased policing of public spaces, such as liquor stores and parks, disrupts the daily routine and security in the lives of the lower-income residents. In sum, public space[16] in the neighborhood can be described as places that are characterized by conflict and social control, where individuals are policed. This public discourse thus reveals people's sense of their rights to the city.[17]

In Oak Park, community groups with diverging perspectives on social change are involved in neighborhood activism. Their agendas for change overlap, creating social conflict in the urban landscape. A local Neighborhood Association, composed of newly arriving middle-class residents, is working to revitalize the neighborhood through projects focused on economic development because its members believe that development will rid the neighborhood of crime and 'blight' and will ultimately improve the community. A women's group takes a more moderate stance, and works to facilitate change from the 'ground up,' and has an agenda to help empower women in the neighborhood. Alongside these efforts, a local neighborhood labor association follows a Marxist ideology and practices 'radical' politics. They feel the poor can be helped only if resources are distributed evenly by the government and believe capitalism is the stem of

poverty. They and their comrades work to organize lower-income residents and educate them about laws they perceive to not be in the interest of the poor.

In addition to community groups, non-profit organizations are also prevalent in the neighborhood. Many of the non-profit organizations in the neighborhood have been present for many years and the services they provide have been utilized in different capacities over time, in tune with a changing economy. They regularly provide services and resources to the poor, and unlike many community groups, they are largely invisible to the residents who do not use them. While driving near these organizations, a person sees long lines of people waiting to receive food or clothing. And unlike the community group workers, participating in public forms of activism, non-profit workers participate in an institutional form of activism. Large cities often have many non-profits and social service organizations that provide a quality of life to the unequal social and economic stratification that's present in largely populated cities. In Oak Park, many non-profits are present to provide services to the large amount of poor people in the area. As the community becomes further gentrified, non-profit organizations are becoming more of a social "crutch" to the poor, allowing them to keep their residency in the neighborhood. Non-profits serve a similar role as community groups in Oak Park, in that they help relieve the effects of inequality.

Community Groups and Non-profit Organizations

Community groups and non-profit organizations can be found in many communities, especially lower-income and downtown regions of cities. Marwell (2004:286) states, "Non-profit community-based organizations are key players in an

expanding arena of public social provision: privately delivered, direct services to the poor." Both community groups and non-profit organizations play an integral role in communities, providing necessary services for people and building neighborhood ties. "Community based organizations provide material resources, build local social ties, and offer other kinds of assistance to residents of poor urban neighborhoods" (Marwell 2004:286). These organizations become important stakeholders in the community and they become the beneficiaries of charity, gain status for their work, and receive awards for their commitment to social service. The poor, in effect, come to rely on their services and these services become necessary to support their livelihood and uphold a standard of living.

Community organizations are perceived by many people as having a positive presence in the community and are therefore welcomed in many lower-income communities. While non-profits often provide social and human services for the lower-income residents, "community organizations tend to engage in crime prevention, such as block clubs, community associations, umbrella organizations of community groups, and community development corporations" (Bennett 1995:73). The programs implemented in communities by community organizations vary from neighborhood watch programs to property identification efforts to tenant patrol.

While many non-profit organizations conduct work to serve the needy, many of the programs and activities implemented by non-profits are often constructed to benefit not only the disenfranchised, but the organization and their agendas. Savas (2002:90) claims, "government funding of non-profits, through contracts, may have some

undesirable consequences; it can preclude innovative strategies and instead demand
adherence to rigid guidelines and traditional approaches." The social service programs
that facilitate social change often have a clinical and programmatic approach. The social
service programs give little or no consideration to how residents perceive problems or the
solutions they prefer (Bennett 1995:78). "By becoming agents—even appendages of the
state, many non-profits are now heavily dependent on the state and increasingly are
subject to many of the same problems that bedevil public agencies—they scramble for
government dollars and serve as mediator between impersonal institutions and the
individual" (Savas 2002:90).

In sum, social service programs conducted by non-profit organizations and city
and county programs are assumed to have an analytical approach, incorporating
collection and analysis of data, which result in a program with goals, objectives, and
tasks (Bennett 1995:77-78). It is largely believed that these programs will be successful
in helping to reach a goal, which will in turn, benefit the overall condition of the
community.

Chapter 4

COMMITTED TO CHANGE

I waved "hello" to Damien, an African-American project manager for the St. HOPE Corporation, and he stopped sweeping the sidewalk and walked into Starbuck's and sat next to me. Damian was professionally dressed and began to speak about his new job as project manager. He explained he cleaned the property once in a while to make it look presentable and keep it clean, in light of the fact that homeless people leave trash on the ground. Next, Damien mentioned the development that would be taking place across the street...the 4th Avenue Lofts had been approved for construction and the Jersey Market[18] was seized through eminent domain. An old bungalow across from Broadway will be moved in its place. Damien told me that St. HOPE employees have begun to gain trust in him and mentioned advice that was given to him in the past by his mentor..."Trust is gained slowly. Learn the foundation of a business entity, how it works, then make small changes." While saying goodbye to me, he lightly tapped me on the shoulder, smiled, and was off.

This conversation illuminates the ideological trappings of revitalization politics and reveals the dominant perspective of middle-class residents in Oak Park who want to facilitate social change through revitalization projects in the neighborhood. Although Damien is living in a community that has many homeless and poor residents, his acknowledgement of them is almost nonchalant as he explains how he sweeps the trash off the floor that is left after them. The homeless and their daily habits are perceived as

aiding in the dilapidation of the community, so Damien, as project manager of the St.

HOPE Corporation works towards making the sidewalks look clean and presentable. As

an employee at a local community corporation involved in creating community

revitalization projects, Damien feels that his job and the efforts of St. HOPE will help

create social change in the community. There is a juxtaposition or dichotomous

relationship between Damien's two roles as project manager of a community business

and a community activist. The roles are in opposition as Damien learns how a business

entity facilitates social change without addressing the cause of homelessness. As a

middle-class community activist, Damien wants to make positive changes, but must

follow the strategies for change employed by the St. HOPE Corporation. The strategies

implied by the St. HOPE Corporation focus on economic development of the

neighborhood. The social context that creates homeless individuals is thus masked

through agendas of revitalization of the neighborhood.

"Different classes construct their sense of territory and community in radically

different ways" (Harvey 1990:260). And the term "social change" is often used

ambiguously by individuals. Varying definitions of social change reveal important

differences in people's perceptions of "community" and beliefs about how to increase the

quality of life for residents. Individuals, such as Damien, often perceive social change as

a process of regenerating an area through increased development, smart growth projects,

and other projects focused on aesthetically improving an area. These types of projects

embody a dominant belief that social change is made through "progress" or economic

growth and "beautification" of the environment. Social change is thus perceived as an aesthetic improvement of the environment.

Varying definitions of social change include an example published by the *San Gabriel Valley Tribune* in an article titled "Celebrating 40 years of Social Change." This article documents forty years of the Center for Social Action's non-profit work to empower the low-income Latino community through after-school programs (Ertll 2008). Another article published in the *Sacramento News and Review* states, "Improving the image of Oak Park requires not only the revitalization of the community, but also the physical improvement to increase development" (Shirey 2005). In other words, there are different perspectives as to how community improvement should be accomplished. Observations in Oak Park reveal the community groups studied in this thesis differ in their definition of what a social problem is and in their strategies needed to alleviate and improve the perceptions of the social problem. Their agendas for change overlap in the community and produce social conflict between middle-class residents and the poor in Oak Park.

Many community groups and non-profit organizations are dedicated to social change initiatives because they believe they can help the poor attain social mobility and higher standards of living through their programs. Helping the poor attain social mobility is a key component for those helping to create social change, and community groups believe their work will help create social change for lower-income residents. But perceptions of social change and how to facilitate social mobility influence the creation of these initiatives, which take many different forms in low-income communities.

Different types of social change initiatives can include empowerment programs, which

educate the poor about issues that affect them or about laws that are not in their interest.

Through these empowerment programs, the most marginalized step into the political

arena. Furthermore, non-profit organizations also act as bridges or facilitators in social

change (Corville and Piper 2004).

There are conflicting agendas among the groups active in Oak Park and these

conflicts animate the concerns and approaches of Oak Park residents: Do revitalization

projects improve the community? How do agendas of change manifest themselves in the

community? Who do social change strategies benefit? How do the poor perceive

revitalization projects and the work of neighborhood community groups and non-profit

organizations? These types of questions reveal what Kling and Posner (1990), in their

collection of essays, identify as "dilemmas of activism" which serve to inherently shape

the issues and strategies around which people mobilize community action. Such

dilemmas of activism need inquiry and can be further illuminated through public

discourse in Oak Park. Many leaders of Oak Park community groups and organizations

understand these issues to some extent and struggle in a political climate wherein the

multiple perspectives regarding poverty are voiced and the choices regarding how to

combat poverty are debated and contested by residents, community groups, property

owners, and the government. Neighborhood activists involved in the community are at

times aware of these dilemmas, and they argue that simply ridding the area of blight

(occurring in the form of closing liquor stores, increasing police patrol, and welcoming

the development of businesses) ignores the broader social context in which problems in the community occur.

These "dilemmas" of activism reveals the tension implicit between improving geographic communities, helping individuals within that community, and focusing on issues of social class inequality (Rubin 1994:403). The overarching question posed is— who do revitalization projects benefit and how do the poor cope with neighborhood changes? Courville and Piper (2004:41) argue that "power is a factor in all social-change processes and hence will be a factor in discussions on the role of collective hope in social change." Katznelson (1981) questions whether social change activities can simultaneously focus both upon 'class' and 'community,' as activities that target geographic or social communities distract attention from the class-based causes for economic equality. Social problems are perceived differently by residents, who will decide to join community groups based on how they define a social problem and how they believe social problems can be fixed. Each group believes the work they are doing is a collective effort that will benefit the poor. But agendas for change implicitly benefit some groups, while excluding others, and these agendas for change inherently work to further stratify and marginalize the poor.

Community Groups in Oak Park

In Oak Park, the role of community groups and their agendas for change come into conflict as their strategies for change overlap in public space. The agendas and strategies for change ultimately conflict in the community as initiatives to improve the community are undertaken. There are contradictions of the agendas of community

groups that are political and produce tension between the middle-class and lower-income population. The strategies employed by these groups to facilitate social change reaches beyond the meeting rooms and into the public spaces of the neighborhood of Oak Park and is manifested through increased police surveillance, imposition of eminent domain, candlelight-vigils, grass-roots projects, and door-to-door canvassing activities. These are sources of tension among residents, they alter residents' sense of their rights to the city.

Below, I provide descriptions of the community groups working to facilitate social change in Oak Park. These descriptions provide insight into the types of social conflict that is occurring in Oak Park. Each group is engaged in a power struggle to conduct change, which interfaces in the neighborhood in various ways. Each group's ability to conduct change is dependent on gaining supporters throughout the neighborhood and city. Their agendas encompass different ideological discourses that draw and guide supporters. These community groups have social structures which are indicative of the people who compose them. Social structures are composed of the social traits of the people who compose them, such as social status, modes of social distance (relational and cultural distance), degrees of interdependence between parties, the capacity for collective action, and types of social control (Black 1995:853-854).

Thus, through the work of community organizations, a larger "colonization" of the neighborhood is occurring—a hegemonic discourse, revitalization, is displacing and further marginalizing the poor. Colonialism is a system of domination. Additionally, colonial discourse is a process of exploitation and subordination, a creation of institutional modes of control, and persuasion through linguistic description (Errington

2001:19). The identity of the neighborhood of Oak Park is being constructed, as a certain type of community, a "beautified" community. This community, though, is nonetheless being constructed through hierarchically organized public spaces and is further being stratified through this organization (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:8). Hegemonic discourses of revitalization in Oak Park are problematic, contested political processes of domination, struggle, and conflict.

From the point of view of Neighborhood Association members, social change can occur through economic development that would bring more consumers to the neighborhood, attract more first-time homebuyers, and attract economic growth. From the point of view of Women's Group members, social change in the neighborhood can be done by empowering women and helping families gain social mobility, attracting more funding for grass-roots projects, and helping further the image of Oak Park as a "healthy" community composed of smiling women and children. From the point of view of the Labor Association, social change can only occur through efforts to organize the poor, recruiting comrades, and educating the poor about initiatives and laws that are not in their interest. The Labor Association has an agenda to improve the community through empowerment of the poor and dissent of revitalization projects. In Oak Park, each of these organizations work to renew, recreate, defend, modify, and resist dominant discourses of revitalization.

Neighborhood Association

Some newly arrived middle-class members in Oak Park formed a Neighborhood Association in 2005, which met once a month, in an effort to discuss community

problems, events, and initiatives. The Neighborhood Association had a variety of members, ranging in ethnic, social, and economic background. But the majority of members could be defined as middle-class, Caucasian, having a college degree and white-collar job. Some attendees of Neighborhood Association meetings were actually long-time residents, but regardless of length of residence, all felt the desire to help improve the quality of the neighborhood through economic development and beautification projects.

The Neighborhood Association was officially formed in 2003 and consists of several board members who are residents in the neighborhood of Oak Park. Board members[19] are voted into position and help create the topics of discussion for monthly meetings. They also network to gain prospective members and political and financial supporters. Most importantly, these members are committed to renewing the community through various revitalization programs, activities, and initiatives. Meetings are places where board members can discuss news that will affect the community, such as urban development, business closures, new community programs, community events, and crime in the neighborhood. Meetings have quickly become places where middle-class residents can voice their opinion about the condition of their community and how to improve it.

In general, members of the local Neighborhood Association perceived poor residents as irresponsible and wanting an "easy way out," and who at times partook in the informal economy of petty theft and crime as their livelihood. This group offered non-systemic reasons for why the poor could not break out of poverty and explained the social problems of the poor as an effect of their lack of motivation to take responsibility for

their lives, get educated, and get a job. They, therefore, held the poor accountable for their situation and asked, *Why is that person poor?* and *Why can't that person read?* This group held favorable views of revitalization projects aimed at "beautifying" the neighborhood and ridding the area of blight.

While many middle-class residents enjoy the availability of affordable homes and the quaint multi-cultural atmosphere of their community, they increasingly want to rid their community of crime. Many middle-class residents who live in the neighborhood do not want to live near petty criminals who sell drugs and engage in prostitution. Thus, they support and become involved in revitalization projects to beautify the neighborhood, rid the area of blight, and promote police patrol of the neighborhood. The Neighborhood Association has helped gain support of a number of revitalization projects consisting of urban development projects, the closure of liquor stores through eminent domain, and increased police patrol.

Such activities are presumed to equal progress for the neighborhood, while "blight" equals regression of the neighborhood. They support landlords who raise rents in the neighborhood because they want to attract "nice" people to the neighborhood and believe the quality of life for all community residents will occur through revitalization projects. What these activists are interested in is to sanitize the landscape of its "bad" qualities, which include the poor and the homeless. From their perspective, the removal of groups, such as men who roam the streets at night and juvenile delinquents, is the equivalent of removal of dilapidated housing and other "blight," because they are an expression of an unproductive environment that must be cleared away.

Pertinent to the Neighborhood Association's success is support of ideological discourses of "revitalization." They promote an "image of redevelopment" with plans for redevelopment and smart growth. At the center of these agendas are newly arrived middle-class residents, new urban dwellers who celebrate leisure, affluence, and 'quality of life' (Gilfoyle 1998:190) and want to improve their community while sustaining a quality of life for themselves in their neighborhoods. But, Deutsche (1986:68) states of revitalization projects, that "no matter how objective their language, they are by virtue of their selective focuses, boundaries, and exclusions, also ideological statements about the problems of and solutions for their sites."

Women's Group

In contrast, women involved in a Women's Group focused on improving the social condition of the poor by creating projects oriented towards assisting women and children in the neighborhood because they believed change could be facilitated from the "ground up," by helping residents achieve social mobility through grassroots programs. These members took a more moderate stance toward poverty and believed programs for the poor were needed to offer them support while they tried to overcome poverty. Most believed the poor could not break out of poverty because they lacked cultural capital, family support, and the other resources that provided them access to education, jobs, and resources necessary for social mobility. Thus, members created projects such as bookmobiles and after-school programs to attract youth. The Women's Group also helped further the image of Oak Park as being a "real" and healthy community composed of smiling women and children.

Members of the Women's Group consisted of a dozen women who lived in the Oak Park neighborhood. Some members were newly arrived at the neighborhood, were mothers, and wanted to help the poor after observing how they struggled to survive without adequate resources. Other members had been involved in various community projects for a long time and wanted to join a Women's Group to help the poor through direct service involvement. The members who participated in the Women's Group felt they could more effectively help improve the community through grass-roots projects, instead of directly supporting revitalization projects. In sum, these women observed the struggles of children in the neighborhood and wanted to carry out positive change for children through the formation of a women's group. These women met regularly to discuss the challenges that women and children faced in the community.

The Women's Group was formed in 2006 by a twenty-something year-old Asian woman named Linda, who had resided in the neighborhood for a few years. She was an active member of a church group and wanted to eventually secure a job that involved helping the poor. I met Linda at a Neighborhood Association meeting and we quickly became acquaintances. Linda invited me to participate in a Women's Needs Assessment Study she was conducting and invited me to attend a meeting of her Women's Group. She also informed me that women in her Women's Group wanted to create projects to help women and children in the neighborhood. As the creator of the Women's Group, Linda provided the meeting spot, facilitated the meetings, encouraged dialogue about potential neighborhood projects that benefited women and children, and created focus groups to undertake her Women's Needs Assessment Study. The women in this group

were to be the main participants in the Women's Needs Assessment Study. Each woman would be surveyed about what resources they believed women in Oak Park needed and a documentary film would be created. In addition, the women worked on other projects, such as participating in a workshop to learn how to apply for First 5 grants, which were specifically available for projects for women and children under five years of age. In sum, the Women's Group believed that women and children in Oak Park needed resources in the community and focused their efforts on working to provide services for them.

Traditionally, women's community-based activities have historically involved unpaid work in churches, schools, child-care programs, hospitals, and recreation centers (Naples 1992:442). This work was focused on helping the poor "inside" the system. But now, rather than focusing on the distribution of resources or the ownership of production, people are demanding that the state take action to ameliorate conditions (Susser 1986:114). Women are thus organizing and mobilizing communities and are demanding action, equality, and funding from state agencies. They are taking leadership roles and becoming presidents of local block associations, making speeches, coordinating demonstrations, organizing food distributions, and confronting politicians—both locally and nationally (Susser 1986:114).

Labor Association

Lastly, members of a local Oak Park neighborhood Labor Association took a much less conservative and more "radical activist" stance towards the socio-economic condition of the neighborhood and attributed social problems in the neighborhood as

stemming from a historically marginalizing society, or capitalism,—and believed poverty was a result of structural conditions in society. They followed a Marxist ideology of social change and argued that throughout history the poor have been marginalized from access to education, jobs, and property, and therefore did not have the socio-economic foundation for social mobility. These individuals asked, *What causes poverty?* and *What causes illiteracy?* instead of, *Why are people poor?* and *Why can't that person read?* From their perspective, critical systemic analyses of poverty were needed to improve the lives of the poor.

The Oak Park Labor Association is part of a larger umbrella organization that has offices nationwide. They follow labor organizing ideology and have an agenda to organize unrecognized[20] workers who exist outside of the jurisdiction of the national labor laws. They state that "the number of workers falling into the unrecognized workers strata is growing astronomically as a result of current so-called decentralization solutions carried out by both the private and governmental sectors in order to maintain their position of dominance within the present economic system." They further believe that the government aids dependency of low-income workers through social service programs and claim that "the social services sector is a new source of capital for those large corporations who are based both in the service and production sector."

In 1973, an umbrella office of a nationwide labor association in Sacramento opened with a provisional aim to organize the domestic worker. This aim later grew into organizing all low-income service workers. They formed deep roots within the community and formalized an organizing process, called System Organizing, in which

members, students, and sympathetic individuals are trained to create a cadre of skilled

organizers dedicated to the development of permanent solutions to the problems of the

strata being organized. The Association believes that as conditions grow worse for

people and for the work force in general, new opportunities open up to end the situation

and "when fate casts you a dagger, grasp it by the handle" (The National Labor

Association 1975).

     In general, the history of labor movements has encompassed the movement to

address social inequality. Labor movement groups believed that in capitalist

democracies, economic resources, which form the basis of power, are distributed

unequally among social classes and interest groups. Therefore, to reduce inequality, the

working-class can create solidarity and mobilize a majority to form political parties, gain

institutional power, and pressure the state to alter distributional inequalities (Quadagno

1992:616-617). But, the labor movement believed that winning elections is not sufficient

enough to address inequality. To defend citizenship entitlements the working-class must

form a stable and cohesive labor movement that is capable of providing resources and

serving as a continuing basis of political mobilization (Ibid.). Embracing these beliefs,

the Labor Association employed systemic organizing of the low-income to address their

agenda of creating social change in the community.

     Members of the labor association in Oak Park varied in gender, age, and

education. Full-time members volunteered their time in exchange for food, shelter, and

health benefits and part-time volunteers received breakfast, lunch, or dinner for their

services. Labor Association volunteers were recruited at colleges, door-to-door

canvassing, and by calling prospective volunteers on the phone. Persons who empathized with the agenda of the Labor Association were the most easily recruited volunteers. Labor Association members were very intelligent, critical thinkers, spoke more than one language, were well organized, and persuasive public speakers. They, in turn, sought other volunteers with the same skills. As a national Labor Association, with offices nation-wide, full-time volunteers traveled from various cities to work at nationwide offices in exchange for food, shelter, and health benefits. The organization received no federal funding, and all money was raised from the community and other sympathetic organizations.

After attending my first meeting with members of the Labor Association, I decided to volunteer my time once a week. The Labor Association was highly organized and had specific labor organizing activities they performed each day of the week. Senior members worked almost seven days a week supervising volunteers. Full-time volunteers were responsible for performing a variety of duties, such as canvassing poor neighborhoods to recruit prospective volunteers and members, setting up booths at grocery stores and college campuses to conduct outreach, distributing food and clothing, and coordinating utility advocacy appointments to make calls to utility companies, on behalf of the low-income, and ask for extensions on their utility bills. Full-time volunteers performed their work diligently on a daily basis and they arrived at 8 a.m. in the morning to open their office and closed at 9 p.m. Members of the Labor Association were very educated about labor issues and taught classes to new volunteers in efforts to educate them about the people they were helping in the community. They did not support

revitalization projects in the community or attend Neighborhood Association meetings. They were committed to organizing the poor and picketing and lobbying against legislation they felt from their perspective would negatively impact the poor.

Non-profit Organizations in Oak Park

In addition to community groups in Oak Park, there are a also variety of professional organizations working to improve the quality of life for residents, such as local non-profit organizations composed of employees and volunteers. Non-profits provide resources for residents and provide residents with a "sense of community." They are gathering spots for residents to come together as well as places where the low-income can find consistent forms of support. Non-profit organizations, such as the Sacramento Food Bank, the Sacramento Area Emergency Housing Center, and the Imani Clinic provide food, emergency shelter, and free health clinic services to the poor. Residents know these organizations will offer a consistent form of support in their neighborhood. The locations of many of these organizations are not easy to spot in the neighborhood because they often resemble homes and vacant buildings. Faith-based organizations, such as neighborhood churches also fill a role by providing resources for residents and many churches have their own food and clothing closets. Non-profit organizations are plentiful in lower-income neighborhoods because these services are in close proximity to the poor.

Many middle-class residents do not know these social services exist in the community because the poor use public space in their neighborhood differently. The poor are invisible to middle-class residents. And the poor gain knowledge of the local

community differently than many middle-class residents. Many poor residents walk, ride their bike to visit family, neighbors, grocery stores, and community clinics, or get rides from friends when traveling through and outside Oak Park. Often times the very poor do not leave the neighborhood regularly, as do the middle-class. In contrast, the middle-class own cars and do not usually use public transit to travel within or outside the neighborhood. If the middle-class does use public transit, it is usually to travel to and from work. Likewise, the middle-class is usually employed and can afford to travel outside the neighborhood to go shopping, eat out at restaurants, and take vacations. They rarely explore their lower-income neighborhood.

The poor often do not have steady jobs, and if they do, they are usually "service sector" jobs, involving restaurants, retail outlets, and construction companies. The poor thus often make a very low income and do not receive health benefits. They, therefore, utilize the free clinics, food closets, and other social services in the community to supplement their income. Without the provision of social services the poor would rarely be able to visit a doctor and they would not be able to sustain their household. Many of the poor in Oak Park have come to depend on social service agencies in their neighborhood to provide them a quality of life.

A neighborhood's social life and the quality of the neighborhood's living environment are improved by the availability of public, private, and non-profit services within a neighborhood (Ahlbrandt 1986:122). Government Code defines non-profit organizations as charitable based-organizations that serve religious, charitable, scientific, testing for public safety, literary or educational purposes (DiMaggio and Anheier

1990:138). Likewise, "The mission of community-based non-profit organizations is to increase attention to the needs of disadvantaged residents of their geographic place (i.e. "community members"), who are thought to be receiving insufficient resources and consideration from government and market entities (Marwell 2004:270). This increased interest takes the form of service provision to, and/or advocacy work on behalf of "the community." Non-profit organizations[21] strive to help the poor by providing social and human services programs and are often operated by people with academic degrees, who conceive of their social service programs as logical and pragmatic efforts to help the poor. In this way, non-profit organizations can also be labeled as "human service facilities." Human service facilities provide public or 'merit goods' to the poor (Wolch 1980:332). The social service programs that are implemented by non-profits, are perceived by many people as being beneficial to the poor because they provide resources and services over long periods of time and help individuals acquire social mobility.

Non-profit organizations and employees ask, *What services do the poor need? What social service programs are in place to help the poor? What new programs can be implemented to help benefit the poor?* And *What government funds are available to help finance new programs?* Many non-profit workers focus on how to implement on-going programs to help the poor, instead of asking how the poor have historically come to depend on social services.

Chapter 5

CLAIMS TO THE CITY

In this chapter, I attempt to explain how social conflicts are manifested in the gentrifying neighborhood of Oak Park. I further discuss the role of government bureaucracy and the media in reinforcing political conflicts and stratification. This social conflict produces diverse claims to the city and further stratifies the neighborhood through the redirection of property under the uses of eminent domain, increased police patrol, neighborhood associations, and other revitalization projects.

"Spatial practices in urban society have many subtleties and complexities and are places vital to the accumulation of capital and the reproduction of class relations under capitalism—which make them a permanent arena for social conflict and struggle" (Harvey 1990:256). Further, those individuals who have the power to command and produce space posses the ability to enhance their own power. Therefore, any prospective projects to transform society must, therefore, grasp the complex nettle of the transformation of spatial practices (Harvey 1990:256). Cities are places where social movements and political struggles take place, and these efforts include defending the ability of particular cultural groups to receive public services and amenities.

The different revitalization projects, initiatives, grassroots projects, and other forms of activism have significantly changed the social dynamics of the neighborhood of Oak Park. The media have simultaneously highlighted the crime and revitalization projects occurring in the neighborhood, a fact which has contributed to negative perceptions of Oak Park. Bennett (1995:73) states, " It is commonplace to see news

reports of residents marching down their community streets with signs protesting the presence of drug dealers, picketing in front of buildings used by drug dealers, or holding prayer vigils on street corners frequented by drug dealers." In response to illegal drug dealing, residents and community organizations plan activities to 'take back' their communities from drug dealers and criminals, even if such reclamations of the communities' public areas are only temporary (Bennett 1995:73). This attention leaves outsiders susceptible to believing that revitalization projects will benefit the neighborhood because they will help decrease crime and improve the quality of life for residents.

In most cases, the press and civic leaders applaud the communities' assumption of responsibility for what happens in the neighborhoods and their efforts to create safer communities through their own actions (Bennett 1995:73). But while the media highlight projects and initiatives to clean-up the neighborhood, they are only hearing one perspective on how community groups believe social change should be accomplished. The conflicting perspectives of social change from community groups and the poor are not emphasized or debated by the media. The dominant view of revitalization in Oak Park, as a form of "beautification" and economic rejuvenation, ignores the larger ideological agenda for change in the neighborhood that is furthered by government representatives and middle-class residents. These agendas inevitably mask the social conflicts that are taking place amidst the struggle to facilitate change in the community.

Role of State and Media

"The political nature of capitalism and its fit within the world system of states, in sum, expands the economic context to include the problem of governance" states Blim (2000:32). Marx emphasizes that within state relationships, we find contradiction, power struggles within the elites and between state and communities, and coercion. State ideologies are the most effective in providing coherence to those power struggles (Gailey 2003:45). Areas of conflict, where social movements exist, often occur in urban renewal areas, or suburbs (Jenson and Simonsen 1981:282). In order for the state to reproduce itself socially, it must be able to accommodate the conflicting interests of different classes, fractions, and geographical groups. A state system which can accommodate these various class and group interests must be pluralist in structure (Jenson and Simonsen 1981:282).

Local political systems are therefore faced with the problem of developing methods to solve urban problems and the conflicts associated with them. The power of the media is such that it has a role as a "vehicle of culture" and is often understood as a force that provides audiences with ways of seeing and interpreting the world (Spitulnik 1993:294). The power of the media has progressively colonized the cultural and ideological sphere. Public concern about 'street crime' and drug use is strongly associated with government initiatives on those issues, which highlight the importance of the role of government in their construction of social 'problems,' explains Beckett (1994:426). Increasingly, street crime and drug use have become "politicized," which is also a result of their social construction by the mass media and state.

Altheide and Michalowski (1999:476) proclaim that "the prevalence of fear in public discourse can contribute to stances and reactive social policies that promote state control and surveillance." Thus, the mass media and public perceptions of issues and problems are related. An example of this is the extraordinary attention the media and state institutions have of street gang activity. Street gang activity has become depicted as a signature attribute of ghetto life, along with other resonant behaviors such as teenage childbearing and welfare dependency (Venkatesh 1997:82).

Social Conflict

There are a few people inside the liquor store. Men walk quickly to the beer isle, grab single cans of beer, pay for them, and head out the door. Feeling a little out of place, I try not to linger too long and quickly grab a container of turkey lunch meat. I walk up to the cashier who smiles and says "hi." I notice there is no price on the lunch meat and ask the cashier what the total is. "A dollar fifty-two" he says. He smiles and jokingly continues, "But that's chump change for you huh." Surprised by his comment I say, "No, I'm just a student living off loans." He replied, "But you'll be out of here later." I ignore his comment and while walking out of the store I tell him to have a nice day. Feeling self-conscious, I begin to wonder if I look and act like a "middle-class" resident.

Lloyd (1984:15) explains that it is important for social anthropologists who are studying community action not only study community action in the locality where it is taking place, but to also study community action and its interaction with the state. "To understand how and why a community can or cannot mobilize itself is half of the

question; to appreciate its interaction with the state and its agents (also engaged in a mobilization exercise) is the other" because "community action is likely to develop around specific interests and it is fragmented and competitive" (Lloyd 1984:15). Community action takes many forms and community groups form partnerships with various agencies and organizations (including government agencies). Groups with similar interests and goals create powerful ties in efforts to facilitate urban development and initiatives. Community groups in Oak Park have specific interests and strategies as they compete for political support and "ownership of land." Competition between community groups and residents creates a struggle over each groups' sense of its rights to the city.

Participation in voluntary associations, such as neighborhood organizations, is informed by specific goals or motivations of residents (Wandersman et al. 1987:535). The community groups perceive their community differently and perceive certain residents as more "deserving" of living in the community than others. These efforts and strategies for social change come into conflict with the daily life-ways of the lower-income residents. Revitalization projects introduce new rules for how public space should be used. Revitalization efforts also come into conflict with the agendas of other community groups and non-profit organizations in the neighborhood. As projects and programs proposed by community groups and the Neighborhood Association compete for support, some projects come to fruition, while others do not.

Each community-based organization has different agendas that appeal to a wide variety of organizations. Therefore, the work performed by some neighborhood

organizations is part of a broader spectrum of efforts to help improve the quality of life for residents. For example, the Neighborhood Association is the most powerful entity that pushes to gain support of the revitalization of Oak Park. The Association has board members that have local, academic, or government ties, and thus is able to make a variety of powerful partnerships and networks. This makes it easier for them to gain the support of local governments to fund projects. The Association's ability to sustain their group depends on their access to resources and the ability to find common interests among residents and neighboring organizations. These efforts can be understood as are part of a broader agenda of internal "colonialism" exhibited by city and state governments.

There is conflict over the definitions and uses of public space in the neighborhood and there is dispute over how public space should be used. Residents are divided on urban renewal projects. While many residents want to improve the quality of the neighborhood, they are in disagreement about how it should be accomplished. Even neighborhood leaders are at odds at how to accomplish social change. While many government representatives and neighborhood leaders work to accomplish social change in the neighborhood, they also acknowledge that there are dilemmas of activism occurring in the neighborhood. That is to say, they recognize that gentrification and the dislocation of the poor are furthered by revitalization projects and that this creates tension among residents. But they feel the benefits of revitalization contradiction outweigh the negative impact on poor residents.

For instance, some politicians and community activists state that they struggle with one looming issue—gentrification. These neighborhood activists state that as people

are rediscovering urban areas, striking a balance between revitalizing a community and keeping it affordable has proved difficult. Some residents working to clean up Oak Park worry that the influx of professionals will drive up housing prices to the point where they are unaffordable for the working-class. In November of 2005, a representative of the Housing and Development Agency in Sacramento stated that "neighborhood activism has increased in Oak Park, which has yielded improvements, such as a growing number of new homeowners in the neighborhood." In response, the neighborhood City Councilwoman who helped start the Neighborhood Association in 2003 stated that "at the rate we are going, we are going to price poor people out of this city." She is again quoted in a March 2006 publication of the *Sacramento Bee* (Vellinga) as reaffirming those doubts and saying, "I still want the neighborhood to be diverse, but parts of Oak Park are no doubt losing their diversity."

Liquor Stores and Eminent Domain

> Eminent domain is defined as the power of a nation or sovereign state to take or authorize the taking of private property for public use without the owner's consent. The power of eminent domain is based upon a political right founded on the common necessity of appropriating the property of individual members of the community for the benefit of the whole community. [Weedon and Reece 1983:127]

Liquor stores in Oak Park have become sites of contestation for middle-class and lower-income residents, community activists, and politicians. They have often been sites of crime and violence, which has led many residents to urge the city government to close down the liquor stores. Many of these stores are situated along residential streets in the neighborhood and have been part of the Oak Park habitat for many years. Areas around the liquor stores are often crowded with people hanging out. Foot traffic occurs at all

hours of the day and night and residents living near liquor stores are intimidated by the noisy crowds. From the perspective of the middle-class, liquor stores are "problem areas" because they attract solicitors and illegal activities such as drug dealing and prostitution. Furthermore, residents who own homes near the liquor stores claim these spots make them feel endangered. From their perspective, liquor stores are viewed as "eyesores" and dangerous places in the neighborhood and should be closed down to have the property used in other ways.

A group of residents who attend Neighborhood Association meetings in Oak Park have supported proposals for the purchase of two neighborhood liquor stores through eminent domain by a housing authority that operates under the umbrella organization of the Housing and Redevelopment Agency. The Housing Authority defines itself as the "public developer for the City and the County regarding affordable housing, public housing and redevelopment projects and issues."[22] The City Council voted to grant the Housing Authority the budget authority to buy both properties. These residents argue the liquor stores attract loitering, drug dealing, and trash on and around the premises, even though they are mandated as Drug Free Zones. These initiatives have gained much support from residents, and the controversy surrounding these prospective closures has been highlighted by the media and newspaper articles have described the closure of the Jersey Market. An article published in the *Sacramento News and Review* (Beckner 2005), about the closing of the market, quotes a resident who has lived near the liquor store for twelve years: "The store was blight then, and is blight on the neighborhood now." Perspectives on public space in Oak Park as "blight" are prevalent and reveal that

campaigns for urban renewal in the neighborhood are gaining momentum and political power.

Neighborhood Association efforts to revitalize the neighborhood involve of open dialogue about closing down local liquor stores, through government initiated eminent domain, in order to restore the use of the space in other ways. While residents attend Neighborhood Association meetings to voice their opinion about closing down liquor stores, the initiative gains support from other residents, groups, and government representatives. From the perspective of many residents, closing down liquor stores will benefit the overall community and welfare of residents, as individuals will no longer have to be exposed to petty crime. The lack of petty crime will help make the residents in the community feel safer and the lack of deviant behavior and solicitors hanging out around the liquor stores will therefore help "beautify" the neighborhood.

Although many residents feel that closing down liquor stores is a positive change for the neighborhood, there are a handful of residents who want the stores to remain open. These residents claim that local liquor stores have been open in the community for many years and provide necessary products for not only the poor, but working residents. The liquor stores, although used as spots for the poor to hang-out, also serve as markets for other residents in the neighborhood. They attract residents who want to make a quick-stop to get groceries and other amenities. Many of the liquor stores not only sell cigarettes and alcohol, but also other popular products, such as coffee, fruit, and ethnic foods. These products often sell out quickly. Likewise, the liquor stores contribute to the neighborhood by hiring residents in the community and accepting food stamps.

At a particular Neighborhood Association meeting I attended, conversation about the possibility of closing down a community liquor store encouraged heated discussions between proponents and opponents of the closure. At the meeting, a crowd consisting of about seventy-five residents was present to voice their opinion about the issue. Government representatives and the liquor store owner, Daniel, who was of Middle-Eastern ethnicity, were also present. This meeting drew a large crowd and many of the residents who had heard of the closure felt passionately about its consequences. Some residents felt the closure would improve the neighborhood, while others felt it would have a negative impact on the economy and character of the neighborhood. Many regular customers saw a need for the market, which makes the neighborhood a "real" community. Daniel stood up and explained that he was just a simple business owner who was trying to afford to send his kids to college in the future and he did not want to cause conflict in the neighborhood. He was desperate because the city wanted to purchase the market for "not more than fair market value" and Daniel was desperate to protect his investment. He argued that his business attracted many customers in the neighborhood and that the site around the store was very peaceful. And while some activists saw the issue from the owner's point of view, they also viewed the acquisition of the market as a solution to problems that have been plaguing the community for decades. In sum, the city's plan to buy the markets represented the end of a long struggle for neighborhood activists.

Although Neighborhood Associations are places for public discussion of the use of eminent domain in Oak Park, I observed that residents who do not attend these

meetings have knowledge of the use of eminent domain in the neighborhood and talked about this issue outside of the Neighborhood Association meetings. In February 2006, I walked into a neighborhood thrift store to donate clothing. Two elderly African-American women were working behind the counter and smiled and greeted me as I dropped off the clothing. I next roamed around the store to do some shopping. While looking through mounds of clothes piled on the floor I overheard the two women speaking about the use of eminent domain in Oak Park. I listened carefully as one of the women said she was angry that property in the neighborhood was being seized by the city. She spoke about a woman she knew whose property was seized and received much less than her property was worth. She again explained that she was angry at how easy it was for eminent domain to occur in Oak Park. While listening to this woman, I learned that residents in the neighborhood had knowledge of the use of eminent domain in Oak Park and had conflicting opinions about its use. While many Neighborhood Association attendees supported the use of eminent domain, other residents did not agree with this method and attributed this method as being furthered by the gentrification of Oak Park.

Another market in Oak Park had also been targeted by government officials for closure. The Sunday Market, located on Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. had long been associated with local problems. Neighborhood residents complained of cases of drug use, burglaries, physical assault, and prostitution and city officials decided they were going to add the Sunday Market to the list of Oak Park closures and filed a lawsuit against the market owner, asking that he clean up the area or it would be shut down. The attorney for the Sunday Market's owner claimed that the lawsuit was unfair and stated that,

> I think the city is trying to make the Sunday Market a victim of the gentrification of Oak Park. We are vigorously going to try to defend its right to be in the neighborhood. The City is trying to eliminate neighborhood problems by destroying independent businesses. This store offers a service to the neighborhood. They sell food and people are in and out buying all kinds of amenities. It's not just alcohol. [Montano 2006]

There were several cases in which the city had filed lawsuits against liquor stores. These cases were all part of a new project undertaken called Justice for Neighbors, created with the purpose of advocating for safer neighborhoods and of improving coordination among resident groups, businesses and city departments working toward that goal. "Justice for Neighbors" hoped to take on high-profile problems and respond quickly to complaints of nuisances or issues that threatened the public health and safety of the public. City officials stated that the Sunday Market met the Justice for Neighbors criteria because it had a long history of criminal activity and loitering of homeless people around the business. In addition to Justice for Neighbors, members of Sacramento Area Congregations Together (ACT) supported the city in shutting down neighborhood liquor stores. ACT was formed different church members that lived in Oak Park.

In early March, 2006, the Sacramento City Council voted unanimously to force the two neighborhood liquor stores to vacate their properties so that the buildings could be replaced with housing. A City Council woman who supported the decision explained,

> These kinds of liquor stores—they are blight. Eminent domain is a tool that the government can use to take away a property for better use. I can't think of a better use for these two properties than as a place to live for new homeowners. [Reese 2006]

In response, owners of the stores told the Sacramento Bee that "the city can do what they can, but they can't control everything that happens outside of their property."

Alongside the struggle to close down liquor stores in Oak Park, opponents of the closures argued that the government was not thorough in handling the property that it seizes. Some residents argued that the Housing and Redevelopment Agency, which helped facilitate the liquor store closures, was one of the slumlords of Oak Park, and was charged with owning almost half of the city-owned single family houses which were vacant and boarded up. Many residents argued that the vacant homes have become a problem, with increasing dilapidation, trash on the yard, and squatters residing in the buildings. Residents claimed that the city was irresponsible with how they managed the ownership of their homes and lots. They believed that city-owned lots were just as much of an "eyesore" and an attraction for crime as some of the liquor stores and demanded that the Housing and Redevelopment Agency take better care of their lots or not buy any at all. An Oak Park activist fighting for better housing stated that "this agency is supposed to set an example in the community, but they are a poor neighbor and we go after slum landlords and the Housing and Redevelopment Agency is first on the list" (Hardy 2006).

The use of the right of eminent domain to replace liquor stores in Oak Park caused tension between middle-class and lower-income residents, the latter of whom were not always seen in the neighborhood, became magnified through middle-class perspectives of poverty. The middle-class population, who strongly supported the seizure of the liquor store and other liquor stores in the neighborhood, gained much support from government representatives. Their arrival in Oak Park brought forth new ideas of how public space in the neighborhood should be used. Hoping to decrease crime in their

community they began an onslaught of redevelopment initiatives that impacted the low-income. Other residents defended the liquor stores and argued they were businesses that enhanced the community of Oak Park. Tension between the middle-class and lower-income residents increased as redevelopment initiatives and increased police patrol moved forward in Oak Park.

Police Patrol in the Neighborhood

Alongside efforts to revitalize the neighborhood, other characteristics typical of a gentrifying community, are also occurring. Police have increased their presence, as middle-class residents attend neighborhood meetings and insist that there be more police to patrol the neighborhood. At Neighborhood Association meetings middle-class residents expressed they feel unsafe in their neighborhood because the crime rate is high, there are many drug houses, and a large quantity of prostitutes. These residents argue drug users burglarize homes and cars to sustain their drug use and they dispose of used needles in vacant lots, alleys, and neighborhood garbage bins. Likewise, they hang out and walk around the neighborhood inebriated. Because drugs are prevalent in the neighborhood, many residents feel that police should increase their presence and arrest drug users. From their perspective, people who engage in petty crime in the neighborhood are irresponsible and untrustworthy because they are unemployed and choose petty crime to sustain themselves. Thus, they should be punished and arrested for their behavior. Residents explain that cleaning the streets of drug users will allow them to feel safe in their neighborhood because they won't have to worry about their property

and safety. They argue that increased surveillance of drug houses will ensure public safety in Oak Park.

At Neighborhood Association meetings, residents and the police have created a strategy to decrease crime in the neighborhood. The police, who are present at every Neighborhood Association meeting, have created a "Cops Session," wherein police seek input from residents about which streets and houses need surveillance and police patrol. Residents gather in break-out sessions and list the addresses and possible crime occurring at these certain addresses in the neighborhood. The police will then publicly review the list with residents. This list is used as a guide for police patrol in the neighborhood. In addition, police listen to the complaints of residents and inform them of how they can address issues of crime anonymously. Many residents will attend Neighborhood Association meetings to become informed about the progress of crime-fighting in Oak Park.

At a particular Neighborhood Association meeting I attended in January 2006, I had a rare chance to listen to a woman speak out against agendas to patrol homes and arrest drug users. Before break-out sessions to pinpoint problem houses took place, a forty-something year-old African-American woman, who did not say her name but stated she was a recovering drug addict, stood up and addressed the audience. She anxiously explained that she did not want drug users to be incarcerated because it would only ensure the abuser's cycle of drug use. She further explained that there was a lack of conversation about rehabilitating drug users and wanted to see more programs created for drug offenders in the neighborhood. She explained,

Rehabilitation programs would do a better job of decreasing drug activity in the neighborhood. I hope that more people at these neighborhood association meetings talk about rehabilitation of drug users versus incarceration of drug users.

Police rhetoric about criminals they have arrested in the neighborhood is often negative and reveals perspectives that police have of the poor in Oak Park. In March 2006, I walked into a Neighborhood Association meeting which had about fifty attendees. The police were present, as usual, were busy listing the homes in the neighborhood they were patrolling and the people they've arrested, and were proudly telling residents about the progress they had been making in the neighborhood. They emphasized that parks and in the community would be busy hang-out spots during the summer and warned residents that there would be an increase in crime in the parks. They explained that during the past few summers there was violence, drug use, drinking, and drive-by shootings in local parks. A few meeting attendees asked the police what they would do to ensure resident's safety in the neighborhood. The police stated that although they would increase their presence, they could not arrest people for just hanging out. A police officer started to talk enthusiastically about an arrest he had made a couple of days ago in one of the parks. While laughing, he began to imitate the inebriated man he arrested. The neighborhood City Councilwoman stood up and corrected the police officer by saying, "All right now, you can stop acting the funny man." Next, a few board members talked about their latest victory for the neighborhood, the seizing of two liquor stores, which the meeting attendees applauded with clapping.

Increased police patrol of Oak Park meant that more police cars roamed the neighborhood at all hours of the day and helicopters flew over the area shining bright

lights on the ground. Arrests of youth were common sights in the neighborhood and it was not unusual to see youth being questioned, searched on the streets, or sitting in the back seat of a police car. During a four month investigation, that took place from November 2005 through February 2006, police officials arrested fifty-eight suspects and seized a large quantity of drugs, as part of efforts to crack down on drug sales in the area. A U.S. Attorney commented on the event and said that "their focus was on trying to restore peace and quality life to the neighborhood" (Fletcher 2006).

Oak Park activists further hailed this event as an achievement for activists, who have been trying to clean up the neighborhood. In contrast, one neighbor claimed that he did not know anything about a crack house on his street and stated the neighborhood wasn't as bad as some people say. But officials painted a different picture claiming that drug sales operated from rented houses during the night. A neighbor who lived across the street from one of the drug houses stated that Oak Park would be a better place after the arrests.

In Oak Park, there are deep contrasts in ideas about what constitutes "neighborhood" and "community." Many middle-class residents in the neighborhood perceive a good neighborhood to be one that is void of crime carried out by drug dealers and youth roaming the street. Police presence is necessary if they want to live in an area that has safe parks and public spaces. These residents want to live in a community where neighbors talk to each other, attend barbeques, and walk down their streets without being fearful. Their ideal neighbors include those who are also college educated, employed, are family oriented, and are "upstanding citizens." Many lower-income residents define a

"neighborhood" as one where they live close to family members and friends and there are within walking distance to markets. A "community," from their perspective, entails having family and friends nearby that they can trust and ask favors from. They want to live in a community where they can roam freely.

The "disorder" defined by the middle-class in Oak Park is associated with "blight," vacant lots, youth walking in the street, people walking in the street at night, drug use in the parks, and loitering in front of liquor stores. This disorder is a problem for middle-class residents. Further, in people's minds certain public places are tied to race and class, which sharply reinforces their beliefs about disorder in the neighborhood. That a large number of minority men frequent liquor stores in Oak Park, ride their bikes around the neighborhood, and hang out in parks serves to reinforce beliefs that disorder in the neighborhood is produced by minority men. This belief guides many of the police in Oak Park to target minority men in the community. Sampson and Raudenbush (2004:323) state, "disorder is part of a larger cultural narrative or generalized stereotype that is tightly bound up in American cities with racially and spatially understood meanings."

Forming Oak Park Neighborhood Latinos

While living in Oak Park, I attended Neighborhood Association meetings to learn about the revitalization of Oak Park. But I also participated in creating a community group which allowed me to gain further insight into why people create such organizations.

While attending Neighborhood Association meetings, I befriended an older Mexican-American woman who lived in the neighborhood. Sylvia, was about seventy years old, and lived in Oak Park for many years. She had a son who was a dancer and a daughter who was a lawyer, both of whom lived in New York City. Sylvia was a retired teacher who had worked for the CSUS Math, Engineering, and Science, Achievement (MESA) program in Sacramento for many years. She had an active lifestyle and enjoyed participating in community events, taking Latin dance lessons, and traveling around the world. We became friends quickly and Sylvia helped me secure a part-time student assistant position with the MESA program. At Neighborhood Association meetings we sometimes sat next to each other and talked about a variety of topics, from work to travel to neighborhood events.

A few months after we met, Sylvia invited me over to her house to talk about a project she was working on. I was intrigued and excitedly agreed to meet with her. Sylvia had long felt that the Neighborhood Association meetings had an underrepresentation of Latino residents attending meetings. She wondered why such a large number of Latinos lived in Oak Park but did not attend the meetings. Sylvia felt there were many reasons why Latinos did not attend Association meetings, the language barrier being a main reason. Many Latino residents in Oak Park were recent immigrants or first-generation Latinos who did not speak English, and Neighborhood Association meetings were conducted in English. Sylvia told me that for a long time she had always wanted to hold meetings in the neighborhood that were bilingual and benefited the Latino residents. At Neighborhood Association meetings, she felt decisions in the neighborhood

were being made by middle-class residents who were not Latino and Sylvia felt that if a large number of Latino residents lived in Oak Park, they should also know what projects were being conducted in the neighborhood. She informed me she wanted to conduct meetings where Latinos could be given a "voice" in the community. These meetings would be bi-lingual, given in both Spanish and English, and would inform residents of the projects being undertaken in the neighborhood. In addition to this information being shared at meetings, other information about community resources and social services in the community would also be shared. For those who wanted to attend Neighborhood Association meetings, Sylvia would act as an interpreter on their behalf.

After explaining her idea, Sylvia asked me if I wanted to be part of the group, a board member who would help her accomplish this work. I excitedly said "yes," knowing that this would give me a great opportunity to learn more about the community as well as an opportunity to gain community organizing skills. I almost by accident became the chair of the group. The following week we met again at her house to discuss who else we wanted to ask to be a part of the group and what the group's objectives would be. Sylvia had two other people in mind that she wanted ask to become board members. Monica was a forty-something year old Caucasian real estate agent who spoke Spanish and sold many homes to Latino first time buyers. Monica was an avid participant in Neighborhood Association meetings and had a charismatic personality. Luis was a retired Oak Park resident who had lived in Oak Park all of his life and attended all Association meetings. He knew many Oak Park residents and had many ties to the neighborhood. When we approached these two individuals and asked them to

become board members, they eagerly agreed and we began to schedule meetings to discuss plans to create our own community group in Oak Park.

The four of us decided to name our organization the Oak Park Neighborhood Latinos. We decided the mission of our organization would be to provide a platform to give a "voice" to Latinos in Oak Park, although all residents in the neighborhood would be welcome to attend. The four of us would hold bilingual meetings once a month in the Oak Park Multi-Service Center and we would inform attendees of issues of importance to them. We would inform attendees of community projects and revitalization projects that were occurring in the neighborhood and share information about available community services and resources. Our group would provide information about issues such as health, education, and home ownership to attendees and we planned to provide information about discounted and free services in the neighborhood also.

The four of us had many board member meetings before we held our first official Oak Park Neighborhood Latino meeting. At these board member meetings we discussed our mission statement, issues of importance to Latino and other community residents, meeting objectives, created a meeting agenda, a list of goals and objectives, and a meeting sign-in sheet. We also spent a lengthy amount of time designing bilingual Spanish and English flyers to advertise our first community meeting. We publicized our meetings by posting flyers throughout the neighborhood. Flyers were posted in coffee shops, the multi-service center, neighborhood churches, and small community businesses. The rest of the meeting preparations included reserving the meeting room, buying

refreshments and appetizers and making copies of the meeting agenda, list of objectives, and sign-in sheet.

We held our first meeting in November of 2005 at the neighborhood multi-service center in Oak Park. To our surprise, only two people attended our first meeting, one of which was the owner of the Jersey Market that was threatened with closure by the city, through eminent domain. He also brought a friend. Daniel stated he attended our Oak Park Neighborhood Latino meeting because he wanted us to hear his views about why he wanted to keep his liquor store open and was hoping that we could help him accomplish this in some way. We were interested in hearing his story and were sympathetic to his reasons for wanting to keep it open. We understood that the neighborhood benefited from the liquor store being open, but did not know how to further persuade community members to think differently about the liquor store. Many community members felt strongly about their decision to close the liquor store and city representative were already in the process of closing down the store. We brainstormed what changes Daniel could make at his liquor store to make it more "neighborhood friendly." After our meeting we wished Daniel the best of luck and told him we hoped to see him speaking with community residents, at more Neighborhood Association meetings, to propose his changes to the store. Although we were a little disappointed about the low attendee turn-out of the meeting, my fellow Oak Park Neighborhood Latino board members and I were happy we got to meet the owner of the liquor store.

After our first meeting we did not attempt to have any more meetings because we felt we did not have the time and resources to coordinate meetings and gather attendees

for future meetings. We knew the Latino population would be hard to reach because

many Latinos in the community did not participate in the "progressive" community

culture of Oak Park. Many Latinos stayed away from political activism in the

community because of fears of deportation or because they simply did not understand the

issues that were taking place in their community. They did not have the same perspective

of the community as did middle-class residents. Many Latino residents sought support

from their family members, instead of through community organizations. Further, we

realized organizing meetings on a monthly basis took plenty of time, resources, and

political support. We decided to instead keep attending Neighborhood Association

meetings and participating in projects we thought would truly help the neediest residents.

In hindsight, the outcome of our meeting gave us insight into the dynamics of

conducting community meetings at the grass-roots level. Beyond our own expectations

of time, money, and resources, getting community residents to attend meetings was

challenging. Those who do attend community meetings do so for many reasons. Our

inability to get community members to attend, especially Spanish-speaking Latinos, led

us to rethink our perspectives and strategies about how to facilitate community change.

Labor Organizing in the Neighborhood

In Oak Park, a Labor Association participated in efforts to improve the quality of

life for the poor in a different way than the Neighborhood Association and the Women's

Group. The Labor Association office in Oak Park, was part of a nationwide Labor

Association and the mission of the labor association was to "Organize Sacramento's

service workers and other low-income workers, as one step toward eradicating poverty."

For three months I performed a variety of activities, such as canvassing the neighborhood of Oak Park to recruit prospective volunteer members, setting up booths at grocery stores, meeting with low-income residents to make calls to utility companies and asking for extensions on their utility bills, and visiting the California State Capitol to lobby legislators to oppose Assembly Bill 654, also known as the assisted suicide bill. Members of this association worked diligently to help the poor by educating them about issues that affected them. They also disbursed food and clothes to the poor and held holiday parties for their low-income members at community venues and churches.

From their perspective, Labor Association members felt that revitalization and increased urban development in the community threatened the livelihood of the low-income sector of the population. They believed the low-income residents would eventually be priced out of the neighborhood and would have to relocate. They also opposed revitalization projects that were proposed in other areas of Sacramento, such as the prospective development of a Century Theater at the Downtown Plaza. They also opposed corporate "gouging" of low-income residents, in the form of increased late fees, and lobbied to increase minimum wage for service workers. Labor Association members also conducted certain activities to help the poor, such as distributing food and clothing, but they emphasized that in order for social change to occur, people had to participate in legislative advocacy. Members followed the development of legislation and tracked bills that were being proposed by state legislators. If there was a particular bill that was being passed that was not in the interest of the poor, they visited the State Capital in hopes of meeting with legislators and voice their opinion about a bill that would negatively affect

the poor. For example, Labor Association volunteers rallied outside the Capitol and succeeded in gaining a statewide $1 per hour pay raise for attendant care workers employed by the state's In Home Supportive Services (IHSS) program.

Labor Association members, embracing a Marxist ideology, perceived the political economy of capitalism and the unequal distribution of resources as having negative effects on the poor. From their perspective, poverty resulted from a historically marginalizing society, or capitalism. Thus, poverty was a result of structural conditions in society and social problems were attributed to the poor historically being marginalized from access to education, jobs, and property. The poor therefore did not have the socio-economic foundation for social mobility and the poor would remain poor for generations. By educating the poor about legislation that would benefit or negatively affect them, they believed the poor would be empowered and better able to represent themselves by making informative political decisions. From their perspective, systemic analyses of poverty were needed to help the poor. Members of the Labor Association strongly believed that lobbying for a government that provided universal health care, equal access to quality education, and equal access to other resources was one way that social change could occur.

In hindsight, members of the Labor Association did not participate in projects to revitalize the neighborhood because they felt the only way to bring about social change was to become involved in legislative and political issues. They believed the poor would not benefit from revitalization projects because those projects were not in their interest; they were not beneficial to them. Members stayed away from neighborhood activities

and spent their time trying to recruit more members whom were sympathetic to their political "cause." The labor association felt that certain projects and initiatives to help the poor could only be used as a "stepping stone" for some poor residents. They felt the very poor, many of whom lacked citizenship, reading and writing skills, and established family networks, would not be able to benefit from many of the revitalization projects that were taking place to improve the quality of life for residents in Oak Park.

The Labor Association opposed campaigns for "urban renewal" and in an article written for their October 2004 Sacramento Valley Edition newspaper, titled *The Low-Income Worker*[23] they are quoted as stating that, "urban renewal campaigns always means urban removal for local businesses and residents, who find their shops and homes bought out from under them or priced out of reach." From their perspective, they felt redevelopment projects would negatively affect the poor residents and local community businesses. Revitalization projects were often talked about with doubt and criticism by members and they felt that those projects would only benefit the middle-class and corporate interests. The manager of the Labor Association stated she had become a victim of the revitalization movements in the community.

One Saturday afternoon, while volunteering, I was eating lunch with Margaret, the office manager. I fixed myself a chicken spread sandwich and sat down at the office kitchen table to eat. Margaret handed me the *Sacramento Bee* and I started to read it quietly. Feeling that this was a good time to talk to Margaret about the community of Oak Park, in general, I asked her if she thought that Oak Park was becoming gentrified.

Margaret looked at me and said that she was a victim of gentrification of the

neighborhood.

> The poor in this neighborhood are being pushed out. This
> organization was a victim of gentrification a few years ago. Our
> office use to be located on Stockton Boulevard but now it's located
> here because the City forced us out of our old space. We were
> informed by the city that businesses development was going to
> take place on the commercial space where our office was located
> and that we had a few months to move out and find a new location.
> Well, I didn't go anywhere until the last day when the police came
> and they handcuffed me and led me out of the building. So we had
> to relocate to this place and Stockton Boulevard has new
> businesses.

Margaret also informed me that they were seeing an influx of clients due to

gentrification of the neighborhood.

> We are providing assistance to a lot more people who cannot pay
> their utility bills and are in need of food. Spanish speaking
> residents particularly need help and they can't receive too much
> government assistance because they are undocumented. So, they
> come here knowing we speak Spanish and won't turn them down.

She also stated that they were able to recruit more volunteers to picket in front of the

State Capitol to support legislation for minimum wage increases. The Labor Association

did not participate in any community events and if they did, it was to set up a booth and

help gain volunteers for their efforts in the community. For instance, the labor

association would try to keep updated on current community events happening in the

community to keep track of initiatives that were forthcoming and to find a way to make

their organization known in the community.

One day Bob, the operations manager of the labor association asked me if I

wanted to help them set up a booth at a Community Job Fair that was taking place at the

Convention Center in downtown Sacramento. I told him that I would try to attend, knowing that I had another engagement, but I thought it would be a great opportunity to show solidarity with the Labor Association. The Saturday morning of the job fair I arrived late to meet them. When I walked into the Convention Center I was not able to find them. So I walked around the building and noticed that members were canvassing the streets, talking to and handing out their monthly publication to people on the sidewalk. I found Bob, apologized for being late, and asked him if they were still going to participate in the job fair. Bob said that they were kicked out of the fair because they were not signed up and did not reserve space for the event. He laughed and said that they never sign up for events. They just show up and booth events until they're kicked out. "We don't want to be part of the bureaucracy," he said. "We just want to booth and canvass without any strings attached."

The Labor Association did not have a favorable view of revitalization in general. They perceived revitalization as an elitist strategy to keep the elite in power and have control over resources. The October 2004 edition of *The Low-Income Worker* included an article titled, "Sacramento residents and businesses battle against corporate welfare: Hostile takeovers aimed at Downtown and Oak Park." They criticized the City Council approval for $15 million of city tax money that was to be allocated to Westfield and the Century Theaters. They felt that providing these corporations with this tax money would "give them economic hegemony in the central city." This money would allow Century and Westfield to build new movie theaters in Downtown Sacramento, which would ultimately threaten to take business away from small independent local theaters.

Members of the Labor Association labeled this takeover the "K Street Massacre" and attributed this as part of a pattern in which local government takes tax money from workers and small businesses and gives it to large corporations. This type of urban renewal, they emphasized, "always means urban renewal for local businesses and residents, who find their shops and homes bought out from under them or priced out of reach."

The Labor Association further wrote about a situation in which in 1999, the Housing and Redevelopment Agency demolished a minority owned store located on Stockton Boulevard, despite a series of protests held to save the local business. The agency ultimately handed over the property to the Raley Corporation. They warned that in Oak Park a few other businesses were on the list for seizure through eminent domain and the attempted takeover was underway for the owners of eleven lots, who are being forced to sell their property to the Housing and Redevelopment Agency. The association argued that the Oak Park neighborhood will get stuck with the bill for the redevelopment scheme because the Housing and Redevelopment Agency won a local property tax increase to pay for the development.

Further, they argued that housing prices in Oak Park have doubled in the last five years, and are pricing low-income residents out of the neighborhood. Oak Park residents, they claim, are not the only victims of this displacement. Many Californians can no longer afford a medium-priced home. They wrote,

> Government programs that pour in money at the top—a.k.a.
> 'trickle-down' schemes, which don't trickle are increasing urban
> blight. The responsibility of the situation, they claim, does not lie
> with individuals, but with the system that enables corruption. For

more than two decades we have opposed many redevelopment
programs. We, at the same time, organized benefit programs such
as an annual Back-to-School-Campaign to supply school clothes to
low-income children in the Oak Park neighborhood, which provide
a means of survival so workers can continue to fight for living
wages. [The Low-Income Worker, October 2004]

In hindsight, from the perspective of the labor association, they did not want to

become a part of any project they believed facilitated unfavorable revitalization of the

city or gentrification of their community. They felt those projects were only being

conducted to benefit the elite and would produce more inequality and further marginalize

the poor. Revitalization projects not only threatened the quality of life for the poor, but

also themselves, as they did not participate in any coalitions, neighborhood associations,

or government sponsored programs. By only relying on donations and not receiving any

types of government grants to operate their association, they would have the freedom and

anonymity to work towards fulfilling their own agendas to improve the quality of life for

the poor. They enthusiastically argued they take part in challenging the root cause of the

economic downgrading of the community.

Conducting a Women's Needs Assessment Study

I became a member of the Women's Group in efforts to learn about how women

organized to create social change in Oak Park. Participating in the women's group

enabled me to observe gender-based perspectives of community work. I met Linda, the

founder of the women's group, at a Neighborhood Association meeting early in my

residency in the neighborhood.

Linda, the founder of a Women's Group in Oak Park, was conducting a Women's

Needs Assessment Study in Oak Park to learn of issues that affected women and children

in the community. With the guidance of a CSUS Women's Study professor, Linda surveyed/interviewed about fifty women in the community about what resources they thought were being provided and were lacking for women in the community. The surveys/interviews and results of the study would then be video recorded to create a documentary titled, *Where I Live: Talking to Women in Oak Park*. The documentary and findings of the study would thereafter be presented at a CSUS Women's Studies Forum, titled, *Women in Oak Park: Past, Present, and Future* at a Baptist church in Oak Park.

The women's group consisted of about twelve women who lived in Oak Park who wanted to help improve the quality of life for women and children in their community by creating projects that helped women and youth in the neighborhood. The group often talked about how Oak Park was becoming gentrified and about the effects it had on women and children. They agreed that gentrification presented good and bad outcomes for them and tried to create projects that would help temper its negative effects.

The members of the women's group believed social change could be facilitated from the "ground up," through grassroots efforts, by creating small projects, such as reading bookmobiles for children and mentoring sessions for women. The women believed that projects for poor women and children such as those were needed to assist the poor while they tried to overcome poverty. Many of these women felt the poor could not break out of poverty because they lacked cultural capital, family support, and the other resources that provided them access to education, jobs, and resources necessary for social mobility. They wanted to help provide resources to help them break out of poverty.

The surveys for the Women's Needs Assessment study were taken over a period of time at various members' homes. In addition to surveying women in the women's group, Linda surveyed about thirty-five other women who were not part of the women's group and lived in the neighborhood of Oak Park, also asking what resources were needed in the community for women and children. At these meetings the hostess provided water and fruit drinks and healthy snacks consisting of vegetables, dips, fruit, and nuts. The women would mingle for a bit and then sit on the floor when Linda began facilitating the meeting. Linda would then organize women to participate in the survey. Further, she wanted some of the women to be filmed while answering questions in the survey, and she hired a filmmaker from PBS to record the documentary titled, *Where I Live: Talking to Women in Oak Park.* This film would show women in Oak Park describing their neighborhood and describing what resources and services they thought their community needed for women and children.

The survey revealed that women thought the issues that were important to focus on in the community included drugs and alcohol, youth after-school programs, and career training. In addition, women felt that mentoring and tutoring services, women's health education, and religious/spiritual study groups were also needed in the community. Lastly, women emphasized that more women needed to be proactive and participate in neighborhood associations/organizations located in the community. Crime was viewed as the most threatening issue to women in Oak Park and youth development was perceived to be the most valuable contribution that women could focus on in the neighborhood. The documentary also showed parks, schools, and businesses, located

throughout the neighborhood of Oak Park. Comments from local community activists who participated in Neighborhood Association meetings, about what revitalization projects were occurring to improve the quality of life for all residents in the neighborhood, were also included in the documentary.

After data for the Women's Needs Assessment Study was gathered and the women were filmed for the documentary, Linda and the CSUS Women's Studies professor, Dr. Denise Aniston, held a CSUS Women's Studies Forum at a Baptist Church in Oak Park to present *Women in Oak Park: Past, Present, and Future*. The forum consisted of an introduction given by Dr. Aniston, a welcoming speech given by a representative of the church, a historical overview of Oak Park given by a graduate student of the CSUS Ethnic Studies Department, a summary of the Oak Park Needs Assessment Study given by Linda, a presentation on the concept of gentrification given by myself, a speech given by a mother in Oak Park, a video screening of *Where I Live: Talking to Women in Oak Park*, and a questions and comments session for the general audience.

There were about thirty people who attended the forum and many of the attendees were very interested to hear what revitalization projects were taking place in Oak Park. Much of the audience felt that it was necessary to have revitalization projects to improve the quality of life for residents in the neighborhood. They thought that, "If the projects added business development and programs for residents, then how could they not be beneficial to all residents?" Some residents expressed the need for more community participation at Neighborhood Association meetings by poorer residents. They stated that

these residents were also affected by revitalization efforts and should be a part of the decision making process for community projects. Others expressed they wanted to see more women's groups in the neighborhood because they felt that Neighborhood Association meetings only addressed development issues and crime in the area. But, they all agreed that by having more women's groups, the community could get the support they really needed to improve the quality of lives for residents.

Some women in the group were not supportive of revitalization efforts in the area, such as increased police patrol of the neighborhood. These women felt that the police overwhelmingly targeted minority youth in the neighborhood and they believed that frequent arrests of these youth would not solve problems in the neighborhood. They argued that more after-school programs and role models were needed in the neighborhood and that community centers, and libraries should be put on the agenda of revitalization efforts. They did not agree that increased development in the form of trendy shops and coffee shops would help the individuals in the neighborhood that really needed it. "The neighborhood already has many locally owned restaurants and coffee shops and residents should be giving them their business" they argued.

In retrospect, the women's group in Oak Park was sympathetic to the needs of women and children and felt that more community grass-roots projects such as a bookmobile, after-school activities for children, and support groups for women would be a step in the right direction for women and children to build social capital in a rapidly changing environment. From their perspective, lower-income women needed many resources and support groups to help them overcome poverty and children were

especially vulnerable to the negative effects of poverty. They argued that children, in their formative years, needed special attention to gain a solid foundation to allow for social growth.

Abrahams (1996:769) explains that women's community activism provides resources and promotes values regarding the meaning of 'community' and is a form of solidarity to develop a social arena of discourse in which the community's 'private' needs are exposed and debated as a responsibility of the state. The women in the women's group often spoke of their work as a way to "give back to the community," gain personal rewards, and produce social change. Their efforts for social change are very different from that of the Neighborhood Association and the labor association. And they believed revitalization has both positive and negative impacts on the poor and strived to create projects to temper its negative effects. While depending on grants from the government to fulfill their agenda of working with women and children, they take a different approach than the Neighborhood Association and the labor association. Social change, from their perspective, can be conducted by helping women and children build social capital, the key to sustainability and social mobility. The women's focus on local community politics and their style of working behind the scenes rendered them at times invisible, but important voices in community resource allocation.

Conflict among Middle-class and Lower-income Residents

The gentrification which had been occurring in Oak Park and overwhelmingly sparking conflict between middle-class and lower-income residents was exacerbated by middle-class efforts to clean up the neighborhood. In January 2006, the home of a CSUS

professor, who was also a Neighborhood Association board member, was firebombed with Molotov cocktails after she tried to discourage drug activity in front of her house. Also, during that year, a pipebomb was thrown into the home of a twenty-five year-old Sheriff's deputy who worked as a Sacramento Court bailiff. Right after the attack, some community leaders speculated that the attack was the result of tensions between drug dealers who work the area and newer more affluent residents who want their streets safe. The deputy's house was located just a few blocks away from the home of the CSUS professor.

Many of the deputy's neighbors, who were long-time residents, stated they did not feel nervous about the attack and would go on with their daily business in their usual way. A neighbor stated in response to the attack that he "felt zero nervousness about the attack and that their neighborhood was tight-knit" (Ranganathan 2006). But across the street, another neighbor, who had lived on the same street her whole life, stated that lately young professionals were buying up Oak Park's low-priced houses as real estate prices soared in the region, but also confirmed that the street had never been unsafe. "When its Oak Park, people make a big production about crime" she said, "but this is the best kept secret anyone could want and I'm not afraid to go anywhere."

Activists in the Oak Park neighborhood were divided over the significance of the attacks. The city Mayor stated that "the event was not a reflection of the neighborhood and Oak Park was really improving as a neighborhood." A board member of the Neighborhood Association, however, saw the attack as an event "unique" to Oak Park and explained that,

> First-time homebuyers and young families have been moving in and increasingly reporting the exploits of pimps and drug dealer who work the area. I think they're becoming desperate and their reaction I think is—we're squeezing on their territory. [Jewett 2006]

Neighborhood leaders speculated the crime may be an out-cropping of ongoing tensions between drug dealers in the area and young families and professionals who are driving out criminal activity.

Following the firebombing incident at the CSUS professor's home, a candlelight vigil was conducted by more than fifty people. At this vigil, the professor stated that she thought the firebombing act was directly linked to her activities in the neighborhood. She said that on many occasions she had told people to stop loitering, had called the city to have junked cars towed away, and had confrontations with people who had objected to her protests. But the professor also explained that Oak Park needed more mental health and other counseling services for people who roam the streets. She stated her reasons for moving to Oak Park stemmed from "wanting to live in a diverse neighborhood, not far from work and in a great house—at an affordable price" (Ferriss and Sanchez 2006). "After the attack," she stated, "more people are beginning to attend Neighborhood Association meetings and the incident is bringing them together." Another neighbor nearby, who participates in Neighborhood Association meetings, explained that "their ultimate goal was to make their neighborhood a livable and walkable place."

In response to the firebombing attacks and other crime taking place in Oak Park, residents organized an anti-violence picket. Leila Lawson, a newly arrived African-American mother, children's advocate, and member of the Women's Group, joined

twenty other residents in May to march in solidarity among the neighborhood. Marchers walked along the neighborhood holding signs that said "Stop the Violence in Oak Park." They marched around areas where youth violence occurred in the past months. Residents were joined by a City Councilwoman who was enthusiastic about the continued community activism in the neighborhood. The City Councilwoman proclaimed, "we have a group of new neighbors, with some of the neighbors who have grown up here; there is a new energy and together they are making a difference" (Carreon 2006).

In addition, Leila is quoted as stating that "residents were taking back their community, street by street" and a sixteen year-old resident stated that "residents have hope—even though it's crazy here, everybody just lives life as it is—like it could be your last day" (Carreon 2006). Neighbors in this march hoped to capitalize on the city's revitalization efforts and gain further momentum to push Sacramento's first suburb beyond what appears on the daily crime log. In Oak Park, anti-violence efforts led by residents were becoming a more normal activity and residents were more readily participating in those kinds of efforts. Politicians were also joining the efforts and hoping that revitalization of the neighborhood would help solve community problems.

Residents, such as Leila, were active in multiple efforts to help improve the quality of the neighborhood. Leila participated in the Women's Group, anti-violence efforts, and other community events. As a participant in many community activities, she often had to juggle conflicting agendas for social change. Leila was a mother and activist and although she advocated for increased social services for women and children in the neighborhood, she also protested against youth violence. "Participation in projects

coordinated by the women's group," she argued "is voluntary by residents who choose to improve their situation. Some people in the neighborhood do not want to improve their situation by making right choices and this is where we say 'enough is enough.'" Her reasons for participating in a variety of events are not unusual. Many Oak Park residents attend many events and are a part of many community groups. They often reason and decide who is a "deserving" member of the community and who is not.

In conclusion, many middle-class residents want to help improve the community through social change initiatives aimed at helping the community's most vulnerable residents. Deciding who has rights to the community is a form of power that is exhibited in the community by middle-class residents. There are criteria by which to judge residents in the neighborhood that are used by community groups, which can serve to further stratify residents and produce tensions among middle-class and lower-income residents.

St. HOPE Corporation

In addition to debating the use of eminent domain, police patrol, and increased urban housing in Oak Park, residents were divided over the redevelopment projects sponsored by the St. HOPE Corporation. Some residents felt that St. HOPE businesses and redevelopment projects would help improve the neighborhood, while others felt the corporation contradicted its mission and was actually negatively affecting the poor. But for the most part, many residents welcomed the closing of Sacramento Public High School and its re-opening as St. HOPE Public Charter School.

Most community members felt the school would be a smart addition to the neighborhood and that its state-of-the-art curriculum would help willing neighborhood kids fulfill their dreams of attending a competitive college. They argued that the high school had seen improvement in its Academic Performance Index in the first two years after opening, but noted that, on the downside, enrollment had dropped. Some opponents of the new school argued that the school ran more like a business rather than an academic institution. School administrators who had resigned from St. HOPE Academy also stated that the school became too bureaucratic, "Principals are CEO's, not principals, and students are clients and customers, and not students" (Rosenhall 2005).

When I walked into my first Neighborhood Association meeting, I sat next to a Caucasian woman named Jamie Roberts, who was a long-time resident of Oak Park and member of the Peace and Freedom political party. At this meeting, board members asked attendees to introduce themselves and state how long they'd lived in Oak Park. During my turn, I stood up and introduced myself as a CSUS graduate student who had just moved into the neighborhood. The group clapped and welcomed me. Jamie turned to me and smiled and said she had lived in the neighborhood for many years.

Switching our conversation, I asked Jamie if she was in favor of the business proposals in Oak Park. Jamie responded,

> I'm really not in favor of any corporations or big businesses
> opening up in Oak Park. Oak Park should have more small 'mom
> and pop' shops. I boycott all of Kevin Johnson's businesses that he
> opens up in Oak Park because they are driving small businesses
> and the poor out. When St. HOPE Charter School opened up and
> Sacramento Public High School shut down, many of those lower-
> income students stopped going to school altogether. Many poor
> kids didn't get on waiting lists to attend St. HOPE and they had to

attend outlying high schools. Well, many of their parents didn't
have cars to take them to school and there weren't any buses in
Oak Park that transported them to those schools. So, those kids
just dropped out of high school altogether. You can see them
walking around the neighborhood during the day. I actually took
in two young African-American teenagers and am raising them
until they finish high school.

In addition, Jamie argued that many properties the St. HOPE Corporation bought

in the neighborhood were left undeveloped for long periods of time and had become

"eyesores" in the community. She also stated that Oak Park lost a locally and minority

owned coffee shop which couldn't compete with Starbuck's coffee shop. The St. HOPE

Corporation had bought a handful of properties which many residents argued were

rundown and havens for criminals. Further, these residents argued that "it's a waste of

tax dollars for city employees to have to continually ask property owners to remove or

repair eyesores and take care of the upkeep and many residents are not willing to wait

longer to have these properties improved" (Roberts 2005). They thought that if these

properties couldn't be kept up, then the development should not be bought.

Also, while some residents believed the St. HOPE Corporation was furthering the

gentrification of Oak Park, corporation representatives believed that their organization

was helping to successfully revitalize a dilapidated community. In a January 2006

edition of the *Sacramento Bee*, Kevin Johnson authored an article which highlighted the

achievements of St. HOPE. He stated that,

In Oak Park, St. HOPE has not only helped revitalize the
community through real estate and business development, it has
also helped reform the public education system by creating an
independent charter school district. St. HOPE, a non-profit
organization I founded in 1989, believes community revitalization
starts with public education. However, if education is not closely

> coordinated with community revitalization efforts, the maximum
> result cannot be achieved. You cannot have one without the other,
> and the young people from inner cities must realize the importance
> of these two complimentary goals. [Johnson 2006]

In sum, inner city growth, in the form of new business, homes, and schools is spread across the neighborhood of Oak Park. St. HOPE development projects have been furthered by an elite group of African-Americans who had the desire and capacity to revitalize their community. In doing so, they gained momentum and enthusiasts in the neighborhood who wanted to support the efforts facilitated by African-Americans who were "giving back to the neighborhood." Gentrification, as furthered by ethnic groups, is becoming more common and is viewed as having more positive effects on communities, than negative ones. Boyd (2005) in her analysis of "African-American gentrification" explains that, "the reliance on individual investment as the answer to African-Americans' problems is part of a broader ideological current that suggests that individual class mobility is the answer to racial inequality" and

> Where they once identified gentrification as one of the primary
> causes of black urban poverty and struggled against its harmful
> effects, black neighborhood activists now regard it as one solution
> to disinvestment—when, that is, the middle-class residents
> involved are African-American. But black gentrification, like any
> other kind, threatens to displace the neighborhood's long-time
> residents. [Boyd 2005:66]

Non-Participants

In contrast to the middle-class residents who participate in Neighborhood Association meetings, there are many middle-class residents that do not participate in community-based organizations in Oak Park. These residents choose to live in the neighborhood because they enjoy the affordable housing and convenient location of the

neighborhood. But although they are not active participants in community politics, they choose to live in an ethnically-diverse neighborhood and are aware of the social issues that affect their neighborhood.

For instance, my downstairs neighbor Chris shared a two bedroom apartment with his wife and ten-month year-old daughter. Chris had a Master's degree in biology and taught college preparatory math and science classes at the local Catholic high school. His wife, Sara, had a Master's degree in psychology and was a practicing psychologist at a hospital outside of the neighborhood. Chris and Sara were in their early 40s and had lived in their residence in Oak Park for about three years. They enjoyed the location of their home. Chris worked in the neighborhood and enjoyed the low rent and interesting environment of Oak Park. The couple listened to trip-hop music, enjoyed traveling, and were great cooks and decorators. They fit the definition of a progressive couple, but they did not attend Neighborhood Association meetings or participate in any other community events. In fact, Chris mentioned they had few friends in the neighborhood. And although they had friends who visited often, they lived in other areas of the city. Most of the couple's recreational and leisure time was spent doing activities outside of the neighborhood because they felt the neighborhood was unsafe and lacked entertainment options.

I met Chris when I was moving my furniture into my new apartment, located just above his own residence. He came out and introduced himself. He then matter-of-factly gave me a brief summary about the neighborhood and my new neighbors in Oak Park.

Hi I'm Chris. I'm like the manager of this complex and take care of the place for our landlady. Welcome to your new apartment. Are

you sure you want to live here? Just kidding. My wife and I actually haven't had any problems with our neighbors in the past three years we've been living here. Let me introduce you to the neighborhood…Next door there are African-American men that drink forties and smoke the chronic on their front porches early in the morning. They don't make a lot of noise other than that. Across the street, those guys like loud cars and loud music. Next door to you is a suspiciously clean law student who gets his clothes pressed by a service that picks them up from his doorstep. I think he's a rich kid whose parents pay for everything.

Chris continued,

Anyhow, around the corner is a park that you should never walk around. There are a lot of drive-by shootings that happen there at night. While living here you'll hear a lot of gun shots. Don't be afraid to call the cops. We don't usually call the cops unless they happen really close to our house.

Chris was very observant of his neighborhood and was aware of the issues that took place in the community, but he was not bothered by them and did not want to spend time being involved in community groups. He enjoyed living in a neighborhood that was unpredictable and close to his job. He and his wife used their "street smarts" and took necessary precautions in their neighborhood. But they also did not frequent many shops in the neighborhood and stated that once his daughter reached school age, he and his family were going to move into a better school district.

Maria was a thirty year-old Mexican-American woman who lived with her mother and step-father in Oak Park. She was a high-school math teacher and often attended community gatherings and events in the community. Although she wasn't a participant in community activism, she attended social events in the community. I met Maria at a Neighborhood Association meeting and I liked her right away. She was smart and we quickly became acquaintances. One day while I was visiting her and her mom at their

brightly painted bungalow in Oak Park, I asked Maria if she visited the 40 Acres Art

Gallery often. I also asked her if many people in the neighborhood attended art events at

the gallery. Maria laughed and said,

> I sometimes go to the art gallery if I'm looking for something to
> do. But there aren't a lot of people from the neighborhood that go
> to the art gallery. Most of the people that go to the art gallery are
> middle-class Caucasian people who live outside of the
> neighborhood. Most people from the neighborhood also don't go
> Starbuck's to get coffee. Law students from the nearby
> surrounding area are the ones that mostly buy coffee there or
> people who are driving on their way to work. The poor people in
> this neighborhood don't visit the bookstore, art gallery, or coffee
> shop. The business that they get comes from middle-class people
> who live outside the neighborhood.

I asked Maria if she thought the efforts to revitalize the neighborhood were improving the

community and she replied,

> I think the neighborhood is looking better and more attractive with
> the new businesses coming in, but I really don't think the
> neighborhood's drug problems are getting any better. After arrests
> are made the drug dealers and users just come back out on the
> street. People think that the poor in this neighborhood are the only
> drug users here. But I've seen a lot of rich Caucasian people drive
> into this neighborhood in fancy cars and convertibles to buy drugs.
> They have money to buy drugs and the cops aren't going to bust
> them because they don't fit the stereotype of a typical drug user.

In sum, there are many middle-class residents who live in Oak Park who do not

choose to participate in community politics. But although they choose not to participate

in revitalization projects, they are aware of the issues that plague their community. They

enjoy the community for its quaint and unpredictable appeal and choose to reside in the

community because of its affordability and proximity to the freeway and Downtown.

Further, these middle-class residents acknowledge the problems that are taking place in

the community but are able to view them in a different light, from the point of view that "things are what they are and that's why I'm here." This perspective gives them the ability to live in the neighborhood while not being compelled to participate in community activism.

Chapter 6

ANALYSIS

In Oak Park, a number of community groups are working to improve the quality

of life for residents and improve the quality of the neighborhood through various means.

They are implementing revitalization projects, creating grassroots projects for women

and children, and organizing the poor. Similarly, non-profit organizations are

undertaking their own efforts to serve the poor, by providing long-term and emergency

services for needy residents. The agendas of these groups vary, but revitalization

projects, which focus on ridding the neighborhood of "blight" and community

"problems," are gaining the most momentum and attracting participation of residents in

the community. But, while many residents believe these projects will have positive

outcomes for the neighborhood, certain dilemmas have been exposed through community

activism. These "dilemmas of activism" center on: 1) who will actually benefit from

these improvement projects and 2) how to alleviate the negative effects on lower-income

residents in the neighborhood.

Rights to the City

Harrington and Merry (1988:713) claim that, "symbols of community

participation, represented by concepts such as neighborhood justice and community

justice, are not merely masks for state power but are expressions of it." Thus,

neighborhood justice and efforts of community activism work to merely mask the social

inequality that exists between residents in gentrifying neighborhoods such as Oak Park.

These dilemmas of activism expose the inequality of residents and reveal that some

residents have "rights to the city," while others do not. Rights to the city are manifested in neighborhood activism and are revealed in the public discourse of neighborhood revitalization projects that are implemented to improve the quality of life for some residents. While some residents participate in revitalization projects and have the power to approve projects, other residents do not. Diverging perspectives about how to improve the quality of life for residents also creates social conflict among the middle-class and lower-income residents in the neighborhood.

Social conflict occurs as a result of the residents' different perspectives on how community "problems" are defined and of how to address these social problems in the neighborhood. Middle-class residents, participating in Neighborhood Association meetings, support increased police surveillance, revitalization projects to "beautify" the neighborhood, the closure of liquor stores through eminent domain, increased development, historic preservation projects, and increased business growth in the neighborhood. Their powerful "revitalization politics" have gained momentum and increased resident participation in revitalization projects. In addition, women working to create grassroots projects focus their efforts to help improve the lives of women and children, labor activists argue that the poor will only be able to acquire social mobility through policy changes, and non-profit organizations coordinate programs to provide basic needs to the poor.

But middle-class community activists inevitably exercise "rights to the city" and get to decide who else has rights to public space in their community. They illustrate those rights through "upscaling" Oak Park through development projects, which causes

rents to increase and attracts more affluent residents into the neighborhood. When more

affluent residents move into the neighborhood, they usually create neighborhood

association groups and neighborhood "watch" groups. These many groups hold meetings

where community issues are discussed and initiatives to help decrease crime and increase

development are debated. In this way, middle-class residents express their power and

rights to the city.

Further, when middle-class residents demand that more surveillance of the

neighborhood in the form of police patrol occur, the poor become further oppressed under

this surveillance. And when affluent residents create neighborhood association groups,

they become "spokespersons" for the community and are persuasive in gaining support

for their own initiatives to revitalize their neighborhood. Hanson (1986:110) confirms

the political power of community-based organizations and states,

> An increasing catalyst for urban change is the locally based
> philanthropy or community foundation. And in all community
> based-organizations there is an inherent tension between
> developing staying power and accommodating change. Such
> organizations—unions, business associations, churches,
> community organizations, political caucuses—must
> simultaneously operate as agents of stability and agents of change.

While the middle-class implements revitalization projects, the poor become

further marginalized in their community and objectified under the scrutiny of middle-

class residents and the increased surveillance of police patrol. The poor, as targets of

these community groups, do not always benefit from such reforms and they have at times

resisted projects for community improvement. In some instances, the poor feel as if they

must commit crimes that showcase their animosity about revitalization projects. There

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are activists and non-activists in the community and their diverging perspectives on change produce an environment of conflict that makes political unity problematic (Stoeker 1995:126).

Many community groups believe they are genuine in their efforts to improve the quality of life for residents. When these groups publicize their efforts and try to gain supporters, they often become dependent on government funds and on the representation of government representatives and neighborhood volunteers to further their initiatives. They must continuously seek out this type of support to continue their activist efforts. The contradiction is that community groups must sustain themselves through creating successful projects and programs and through building collaborations to improve the neighborhood. But in doing so, they tend to overlook the local resident's needs and focus on their own agendas of community improvement. Their agendas for change work to further mask the inequality that exists among residents.

Behind agendas for change, middle-class residents argue that a healthy urban community is one that is being "beautified," is low in crime, and has cultural attractions. "Beautifying" the neighborhood also means that residents in Oak Park want more cultural attractions and unique businesses. Entrepreneurs open up small art galleries, vegetarian restaurants, trendy furniture stores, and artsy coffee shops. But while wanting "cultural" attractions to be available, they also want these events without the flurry and grit of true city life. When urban space becomes a social space that is filled with gentile activity, it inevitably increases in value, and people are drawn to the upscale atmosphere. Such

space becomes symbolic in that it attracts people of a certain lifestyle to have a cultural, intellectual, or ethnic experience.

The middle-class, or the producers of this space, have opportunities for determining which social classes will be able to participate in emerging strategies of urban rebirth (Zukin 1982:423). The producers of this space, such as urban planners, government representatives, business owners, and middle-class residents are able to make decisions in the neighborhood that are in their interest and in the interest of other "like-minded" residents. The middle-class often moves into working-class neighborhoods to enjoy the ethnic diversity and business owners, in return, also welcome and cater to them. Although these ideas associated with new urbanism, or smart growth, represent innovative approaches to urban planning in cities—smart growth and new urbanism produce social hierarchies at the local level.

Ongoing debates over gentrification and the 'reconquest' of blighted neighborhoods are widely inflected by race and ethnicity, as well as class (Regis 2001:754). It is largely argued that gentrification is promoted by educated, Caucasian, middle-class residents and usually has negative effects on already marginalized ethnic minority groups. The connection and relationship between ethnicity and tourism is not a new observation. Currently, postmodern analyses of ethnic places argue that ethnic places are 'manufactured,' or produced, as much as they are 'preserved,' and conserved (Lin 1995:643). Ethnic "places" are areas where the production and consumption of the "ethnic experience" occurs and are conserved for their value as a commodity.

Ethnic entrepreneurs in American society often carve out an economic niche by showcasing ethnic culture (Lu and Fine 1995:535). The middle-class in low-income neighborhoods are often catered to because local businesses see them as "good business." Middle-class residents living in urban areas will attend cultural events to seek an African-American, Latino, indigenous, or ethnic "experience." In Oak Park, many middle-class residents will attend book signings at the African-American bookstore, attend African-American history flicks at the local theater, and eat at soul food restaurants in the neighborhood.[24] They seek a unique cultural experience that perhaps cannot be experienced elsewhere in the city.

Public space in Oak Park is occupied and used not only by community groups, middle-class residents, and business owners. The perspectives of how lower-income and unemployed residents define their community are also revealed in the way they utilize public space. Although middle-class and lower-income residents live in the same community, these residents do not use or define their community similarly. They have different definitions of their community and experience their community differently. Lower-income residents use public space differently than the middle-class. Unlike the middle-class, the poor spend most of their leisure time hanging out in their neighborhood and attending community-based organizations and non-profit agencies to receive social services. Their daily activities consist of visiting friends and family in the neighborhood, hanging out at parks, meeting friends in front of liquor stores, waiting in line at non-profit organizations to receive resources, and visiting other social service agencies, such as health clinics and food stamp offices. In their daily routine, they form relationships in the

community that can easily be affected by revitalization projects. On the contrary, the

poor do not attend most public meetings, where development activities are discussed,

because they do not have the time to attend or the knowledge of the meetings taking

place. So the poor, therefore, do not have a "voice" or representation at Neighborhood

Association meetings.

While the middle-class often have family members living outside their

neighborhood, city, and state, the low-income often have family members living in close

proximity to them. So, while the middle-class plan to visit family during vacation or

during the holidays, the lower-income residents will visit family in their neighborhood or

in other nearby areas. These visits will often occur frequently or at the "spur of the

moment." Likewise, the lower-income residents often shop at neighborhood grocery

stores, eat at neighborhood restaurants, and visit neighbors for barbeques and parties. In

doing so, they become familiar with the neighborhood they live in and get to know the

employees and families at grocery stores and restaurants. Over time, the lower-income

residents will usually develop long-term relationships with their neighbors that are

strengthened through reciprocity. In contrast, the middle-class often does not develop as

many long-term relationships with residents in their working-class neighborhoods.

Revitalization projects tend to have grave effects on lower-income residents.

Although many middle-class residents perceive liquor stores as "blight" in the

community, liquor stores function for the lower-income residents in other ways. They

are utilized by residents who do not have cars and the elderly who cannot drive. Even

though liquor stores are not grocery stores, they provide basic amenities for the poor,

such as milk, eggs, and toiletries, and are furthermore places for the poor to meet with

friends and share information. The absence of liquor stores will make it difficult for the

poor to get groceries and other basic amenities. Middle-class residents want to close

liquor stores as a way to deter loitering. But even though the poor will not be able to

hang out in front of closed down liquor stores, they will be forced to hang-out at other

spots in the neighborhood. Thus, the closing of liquor stores will only make the

"problem" move to another area. The poor are almost powerless to make land

development decisions in their neighborhood and therefore they must give up their

"rights to the city." This creates tension and conflict among middle and lower-income

individuals.

Consequently, women who create grassroots projects in the community perceive

women and children to be the most vulnerable group in Oak Park. While the Women's

Group acknowledged that gentrification was occurring, they felt it had more positive

outcomes than negative ones. So the women's group created projects that would help

temper the negative effects of gentrification on poor women and children. From the

perspective of the women's group, women juggle domestic duties, work, and raise kids

and thus need a lot of support. Projects created by the women's group were perceived of

as helping to improve the quality of life for women and children, which would therefore

benefit the whole community.

On the other hand, the Labor Association in Oak Park did not support community

revitalization projects. They felt these projects would have negative effects on the lives

of the poor and would only in fact benefit entrepreneurs, corporations, and other wealthy

individuals. The poor would ultimately be displaced when new development or taxes were implemented. They believed the only way to improve the quality of life for the poor was through educating them about policies and laws that were not in their interest. In general, they believed the only way to improve the quality of life for the poor and make it possible for them to improve their economic situation was if the government distributed resources evenly among individuals. They argued the poor are poor because of inequities in the political economic system. Therefore, they organized the poor in hopes of empowering this group to take leadership positions and make policy changes that will affect their situation.

The Labor Association often had "differences of opinion" with city representatives and these differences of opinion could sometimes lead to confrontational disputes. They picketed for service worker's rights at the State Capitol, lobbied to oppose legislation they felt would negatively affect the low-income, wrote a monthly publication that included articles on issues that affected low-income services workers, canvassed low-income communities to recruit new members, and searched for organizations that would sponsor or provide free donations/services to their organization. They did not support the revitalization of Oak Park and organized their work towards confronting revitalization agendas.

Non-profit organizations in the community had their own agendas to improve the quality of life for lower-income residents. They created programs to serve the needs of the poor on an on-going basis and provided basic needs to individuals in the community. The individuals operating these programs perceived their programs as having a long-term

presence that would produce long-term positive effects in the community. But, in effect, many of the poor were also dependent on these services to sustain their livelihood. The services might not really be helping the poor exit poverty; they just provide basic needs, while masking social dependence on these services. These services, in the form of food banks, emergency shelters, and food closets also mask larger social reasons why the poor are poor.

It is argued by some residents that St. HOPE, a non-profit organization created by elite African-Americans, helped to facilitate the beginning of gentrification in Oak Park. Although its campaign for economic development was heralded as a positive beginning for the neighborhood, many residents later viewed the Corporation's agenda as having negative effects. They claim its agenda for change only benefited business and the middle-class, while masking class-based disparities in the community.

This thesis shows that community groups in Oak Park are in conflict with each other. The Neighborhood Association and neighborhood revitalization projects affect both the labor association's agenda to overcome inequality and the women's group's agenda to alleviate poverty. While neighborhood residents and businesses are displaced, the labor association rallies against revitalization agendas in the city. The women's group struggles with trying to create programs that will help the poor in their gentrifying community. The women's group does not have the same political representation as does the Neighborhood Association and they focus their work towards helping women and children gain social mobility.

In retrospect, a neighborhood is "home" to many people, each with their own aspirations and expectations. In a community where there are many middle-class and lower-income persons, many forms of social conflict can occur. During resident's efforts to solve community issues, differing perspectives on how to build a healthy community emerge. Some residents support certain reforms, while others do not; and when a community is undergoing gentrification, certain reforms gain more political representation than others. Despite the mixed feelings of the effectiveness of social service programs in communities, overall, it is largely believed by the middle-class that inner-city decline is being reversed and that urban renewal will improve the city (Grigsby and Corl 1983:87). Neighborhood groups have a mission and a commitment to improvement of "quality-of-life;" landlords have a commitment to the improvement of residential properties; social service agencies have a commitment to the welfare of individuals; and the courts to do justice and protect individual rights (Thacher 2001:766).

But social reforms must contend with an important feature of modern society, and any complex society has groups with different roles and values—so every constructed institution thus pursues priorities that are separate from and in conflict with each other (Thacher 2001:766). Because people have different roles, values, and beliefs, they create institutions that communicate those roles, values, and beliefs. In doing so, they reveal their agendas and perspectives for reform and change. The ways that people frame and imagine social problems fuels their use of the resources and creation of the institutions they create to solve social problems (Williams 2001:426). These perspectives can, at times, come into conflict. The types of reform and strategies for change that are

beneficial to one group may not be beneficial and in the interest of another group.

Further, more neighborhood and community development issues are politically charged

in Oak Park. Community development issues are closely tied to the struggle for the

empowerment of the poor, the minorities, and the disenfranchised that live in the city

(Grigsby and Corl 1983:92). In these locales, groups compete with each other for the

control of resources. When this occurs, it creates a potential for social unrest. Thus,

reforms regarding urban space are the product of, rather than the producer of, social

conflict (Rotenburg 2001:8) in Oak Park.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

While driving down 32nd Street I noticed two young boys cross the street to pick

up a basketball that bounced on the other side of the road. I stopped in the

middle of the street to let them pass and one of the boys quickly ran across the

street, picked up the ball, and waved for me to continue along. I slowly passed by

and the boy smiled, leaned forward, and held up a peace sign.

Through an ethnographic encounter with neighborhood activism, I have attempted

to explore the conflicting ways that community groups define agendas for social change

and have attempted to explain how their agendas for change shape claims, or resident's

rights, to the city. This work explores the conflicts in the ways community groups define

agendas for social change and attempts to reveal how different perspectives on "change"

and strategies for neighborhood improvement help shape residents' claims to the city.

This thesis attempts to demonstrate that, sometimes, efforts to facilitate social change are

counterproductive in that they work to reproduce systemic causes of poverty. In other

words, the work of community groups can sometimes be counterproductive in their

efforts to help the poor.

In this study, I focused on community groups and non-profit organizations and

their agendas for change in the neighborhood of Oak Park. In particular, I examined 1)

the manner in which each group hopes to achieve change and 2) the social, political, and

economic transitions those proposed changes entail for the neighborhood. I attempted to

explain the manner in which the agendas of community groups and non-profit

organizations conflict and tried to identify the reasons for the conflict in their agendas, while also documenting how the conflicts are manifested in public discourse. Moreover, I have tried to explain how some poor residents manage their routine in their daily lives and to what extent community groups and non-profit organizations inform their daily routine.

"Revitalization politics," as portrayed in the public discourse of Oak Park, revealed that a community is composed not only of physical characteristics such as houses, shops, schools, and parks; it is also defined by the perspectives that residents have of their neighborhood. Revitalization politics in Oak Park revealed there are diverging perspectives on how to improve the quality of life for residents and also demonstrated that competing agendas for change can cause conflict among middle-class and lower-income residents. Residents defined their community in different ways, based on their perspective of public space in the community and how they use it.

Residents in Oak Park have different aspirations and expectations, and also have differential access to houses, shops, and schools. These economic and social disparities affect perception of community. Semyonov (1981:360) argues that, "inequality among place and communities should be understood not only as a result but also as a cause of social stratification." So, it is to be expected that their communities differ by their social organization and availability of resources and opportunities because of their different social, occupational, economic, and industrial make-up of each community (Semyonov 1981:360). Such is the case in Oak Park, where residents experience such stratification.

The neighborhood of Oak Park is unique in its social, occupational, economic and industrial composition. The composition of the community groups created in Oak Park further reveal that there are occupational as well as social and economic disparities between middle-class and lower-income residents. Aspirations and expectations of the middle and lower class differ—some middle-class residents focus on creating social change in the community and form or join community groups to revitalize the neighborhood, create projects for women and children, organize the poor, or provide basic needs for the low-income. But, these projects and programs further mask the social inequities in the community, and may further enable the poor to become dependent on social services. Observations of community groups and non-profit organizations, detailed in this thesis, reveal that there are contradictions or "dilemmas of activism" in the work they carry out.

These dilemmas of activism further reveal the complexities of social inequality among the residents of Oak Park. Agendas for change do not always benefit the poor and some residents and government representatives acknowledge that some initiatives for improvement do not improve the lives of the poor. These residents and government representatives confirm that the neighborhood is losing its diversity and that lower-income residents are being pushed out of the neighborhood by increased housing prices. Likewise, increased surveillance of public space in the community is causing social conflict among middle-class and lower-income residents. Dilemmas of activism illustrate that there the contradictions of revitalization projects and are unable to improve the quality of life for all residents in Oak Park. Revitalization projects seem to reinforce

social stratification in the community. In modern societies, the state and economy require unequal relationships to sustain themselves and therefore reinforce these relationships through political systems (Calhoun 1988:224). The most powerful agendas for change improve the quality of life for one group of people, the middle-class. They do not necessarily benefit the poor or provide them social justice in their neighborhood. Social justice cannot be realized under conditions of persistent inequities of resources (Qadeer 1981:167).

In the neighborhood of Oak Park, space is characterized by conflict and struggle. Space is political (Keil 1998:624). In Oak Park, differential rights to the city can be seen through patterns of police patrol and surveillance, in cases of eminent domain, in agendas of revitalization projects, in grassroots projects aimed at helping women and children, and in efforts to organize and empower the poor. Tonkiss (2005:63) explains that people have competing claims in regard to whom a city is for and what is a city for, which fuel conflicts over space and power. In Oak Park, "claims to the city" are made by residents who want to improve the neighborhood with revitalization projects. At the same time, claims to the city are also made by lower-income residents who resist efforts of gentrification.

The media also play a role in reinforcing middle-class claims to the city through highlighting and emphasizing that "urban renewal" projects function to beautify the neighborhood of Oak Park. The media generalize that urban renewal projects will change the blighted neighborhood of Oak Park into a lively and bright cultural center, where diverse residents can live harmoniously together. But this generalization describes Oak

Park from one point of view—from the point of view of the middle-class—which believes there are too many social problems that can only be improved through "cleaning up" the neighborhood. This perspective has become the dominant perspective of both residents and non-residents, and there is little debate about other ways to improve the quality of life for residents.

Kasinitz and Rosenburg (1996:180) claim the high concentration of urban poverty in cities and the social issues that are presumed to accompany them are widely considered to be among the gravest problems now facing the U.S. In many low-income communities residents attempt to confront urban poverty and are trying to solve social problems by creating community groups to help improve the quality of the neighborhood. But, the formation of community-based groups that attempt to improve neighborhood conditions, and mold the urban landscape, is problematic. Not only have inner-city neighborhoods become arenas that showcase a struggle with outsiders, such as developers and city government officials, they are also sites of conflict for the subgroups that live within its boundaries (Low 2002:11).

The creation of community groups and other forms of community-based action can be problematic for other reasons. The residents forming community groups often have good intentions in trying to eliminate crime and revitalize communities. But often times, these residents do not understand that some projects they are trying to implement are created from one point of view. When the middle-class flees the "sameness" of the suburbs, they simply choose to live in socially diverse neighborhoods, where the lower-income residents often have drastically different lifestyles than themselves. The middle-

class does not view the lifeways of the lower-income residents in a positive light and yearns to live in a diverse neighborhood that is more like a cultural hub. In these neighborhoods, community groups often serve the interests of the middle-class and leave the poor out of neighborhood planning activities. Oropesa (1989:435) further stresses another important aspect of citizen groups—when residents are not successful in their initiatives or do not approve of certain initiatives, some of these residents move to other neighborhoods. Low-income neighborhoods can then end up losing increased attention that was fueled by the arrival of middle-class residents. Thus, there is no easy solution.

Amidst the dilemmas and controversy of revitalization projects, it is largely argued that community organizations aid the development of a collectively defined good. They provide a valuable function, especially for communities with diverse populations facing many problems, with potentially conflicting solutions. But this potential advantage remains speculative, as there is little evidence about the ability of democratic organizations to go beyond the aggregation of individual preferences in defining goals (Bennett 1995:75). And although community-based organizations may materially contribute to a sense of community, and are often politically effective, their contributions should not be confused with their capacity for management and distribution. More often than not, community groups have only enough power and resources to fail (Grigsby and Corl 1983:93). Community-based organizations often suffer from having a lack of resources and a lack of members that are able to effectively manage the organization. Community-based organizations and the programs created by them require planning, time, and financial stability.

Often times, when these programs fail in helping the poor, the lower-income are blamed for their inability to change their own social circumstances. In the aftermath of both finished and unfinished gentrification and urban renewal projects, the poor are often left to fend for themselves in a changing environment. The poor are then perceived as the creators and facilitators of their own social problems. Steadily, the poor are being presented as a mere aggregation of personal cases and are increasingly severed from the society, economy, and polity that in fact determine their social circumstances (Wacquant and Wilson 1989:9).

Initiatives created to solve community problems can be characterized as epiphenomena, in that they are usually created after middle-class residents move into neighborhoods and notice social problems. Reform follows crisis, and whether the reform is political or economic or physical revitalization, reform efforts seem to only occur after neighborhood deterioration has become pronounced (Hanson 1986:101). Community problems, for the most part, have long been occurring in low-income neighborhoods before initiatives to improve the quality of life for residents are introduced. Hanson (1986:101) further explains that

> The hardest thing to achieve in the urban polity is prophylactic action and transformative leadership in time to facilitate a smooth transition from one state of affairs to another. Projects to revitalize communities occur after a neighborhood has deteriorated, and not usually while they are in the process of deteriorating. This is because institutions are, by definition, ways of thinking and acting that are embedded deeply in the collective experience of those who make them up.

The middle-class, who are the creators of community groups and the drivers of urban renewal projects, don't usually perceive there to be community problems until they affect

them. And the middle-class don't usually participate in agendas for change unless the

changes are in their interest and benefit them. It is in the interest of the middle-class to

solve problems and they thus will reach out to solve community issues after the social

issues are well noticed.

The middle-class has much political power in working to revitalize low-income

communities, and there is a widespread belief that low-income neighborhoods will be

improved through beautification projects and increased economic development. But,

> The rubric of 'revitalization' is overtly falsifying. It's a word
> whose positive connotations reflect nothing other than 'the sort of
> middle-class ethnocentrism that views the replacement of low-
> status groups by middle-class groups as beneficial. The word
> 'revitalization' conceals the very existence of the inhabitants
> already living in the dilapidated neighborhoods that are targeted
> for renovation. [Deutsche 1986:69]

Revitalization projects have considerable political appeal in local communities and get a

steady flow of grants for such projects. This clearly indicates that the local government is

receptive to pressures from community-based organizations for home improvement loans,

code enforcement activities, beautification projects, and street improvements.

Additionally, through the involvement that middle-class neighborhood residents have in

planning and implementing neighborhood revitalization projects, the local government

comes to be viewed as a partner, not as an adversary by them.

Wacquant and Wilson (1989:15) explain that, for now, not only are ghetto

residents, as before, dependent on the will and decisions of outside forces that rule the

field of power—the mostly white dominant class, corporations, realtors, politicians, and

welfare agencies—they have no control over and are forced to rely on services and

institutions that are massively inferior to those of the wider society. Lower-income residents must survive on a lack of quality resources in their community. The majority of the poor are social service dependents who rely on physical and mental health programs, vocational rehabilitation, day care, and other forms of social guidance. They need to be in close proximity to receive those services. The dependence of the poor on social services such as healthcare, nutritional supplements, and emergency services reveals that the decisions made by the poor to reside in certain communities may be linked to the location of facilities which supply such services (Wolch 1980:340). And, as receivers of non-profit services and community groups, it is likely that the poor will develop their own perspectives regarding their neighborhood and define it differently from the middle-class. Their daily life is shaped by their underprivileged circumstances and they depend on daily survival strategies, such as borrowing amenities and asking favors from neighbors and keeping track of modest finances, to survive.

But in many instances, the poor have shown that they are resilient in the face of gentrification. In response to revitalization projects—when the poor are negatively affected by renewal strategies—they will create survival strategies to ensure their way of life. Lower-income residents adapt to their changing neighborhood where they are able to identify issues and challenges, make sense out of them, and formulate strategies to address them (Swidler 1986:280). The lower-income residents have a shared "culture" and via this culture, they are able to develop the tools necessary for survival. Put simply, culture provides the materials from which individuals and groups construct strategies of action (Swidler 1986:280). The poor will develop strategies to maintain their livelihood

in low-income neighborhoods. Among the resources that the lower-income residents draw upon to implement survival strategies are those provided by their kin and friends and by the contacts they develop within the formal associations they belong to.

Lower-income residents utilize resources from the groups they have access to or are socially integrated into, such as networks or organizations, or more specifically, what is sometimes called 'social capital' (Wacquant and Wilson 1989:22). The lower-income residents develop social ties among each other in a variety of ways, such as through strengthening relationships through reciprocity and sharing information. Forms of gift-giving and acts of reciprocity are common between residents in low-income communities. Trust is built between residents when reciprocity occurs. The acts of giving are group affairs, premised on reciprocity and the gift-giving helps unify groups, generations, and kin in the neighborhood. In Oak Park, the poor depend on their kin, friends, churches and on social services to survive.

Likewise, the poor tend to have less education, more illness, higher unemployment, and lower paying jobs, so it is reasonable that they utilize community services and resources that are in close proximity to their residences. But it is also uncommon for them to participate in community groups, meetings, and initiatives. When the poor do participate in community groups and attend community meetings they do not usually participate over long periods of time. Many of these individuals simply do not have the resources necessary for long-term participation. Although the poor do build social networks, extremely poor residents have fewer social ties. In short, the lower-income have lower volumes of social capital (Wacquant and Wilson 1989:23) and,

therefore, cannot sustain long-term participation. It is a rare occurrence when poor

residents are part of a formal organization, such as a block club or a community

organization, a political party, a school-related association, or a sports, fraternal, or other

social group. Because the poor often lack social capital and leisure time away from wage

labor, they cannot participate in community groups or community events.

The media have likewise revealed their power to further revitalization projects in

Oak Park. The media have helped to reinforce the viewpoint of Oak Park as a "ghetto"

that is in need of "revitalization." Newspaper articles and publications highlight crime in

the neighborhood and quote neighborhood activists and government leaders as stating

that revitalization of Oak Park will benefit the neighborhood. These viewpoints further

help reinforce this perspective of the neighborhood. The discourse of revitalization that

is fueled by middle-class residents in Oak Park remains a dominant force. Middle-class

initiatives have received much support from government representatives and community

activists. These media-fueled perspectives are likely to help reinforce existing biases and

stereotypes of the community. More public attention needs to be refocused on the living

conditions of the poor, in order for existing stereotypes to be broken.

In this thesis I have discussed the conflicts that arise over the use of public space

in Oak Park. The ethnographic illustrations I have used highlight the sociopolitical

forces, spatial practices, and social control evident in the neighborhood. They provide

insight into the conflicts that arise as different groups attempt to claim and define urban

space in Oak Park. Community groups and community-based organizations are

simultaneously engaging in efforts to define and claim urban space, in their attempts to

improve the quality of life for residents. These processes elucidate the ways in which the forces and limits of the social production of space and social construction of space are engaged and contested in public arenas (Low 2002:134).

On a broader note, ethnographies of the city expose the conflicts and contradictions of city life. They reveal that the "city" is more than just a conglomeration of businesses, parks, neighborhoods, freeways, and people. The city is composed of dynamic social and economic relationships. Gentrified neighborhoods are characterized by unequal social relationships and are places where one can learn about power and social conflict. Boyd (2005:268) explains that

> Recognizing and analyzing the discourses that promote gentrification is increasingly important. The discursive frameworks that individuals and organizations use to understand gentrification are more than rhetorical texts to be deconstructed; they are also reflection of political economic arrangements that have consequences for the quality of urban life. By providing evaluative criteria with which to consider and judge gentrification, they not only influence public debate on the subject; they also buttress the concrete distribution of material resources that supports uneven development.

In conclusion, this analysis of social change in the gentrifying neighborhood of Oak Park should not narrow one's perspective of the abilities of community groups to create a better environment for people in the community. Studies have shown that when given opportunities for collective action and decision making, residents can broaden definitions of social problems to be more inclusive and reflect the collective good of the community (Bennett 1995:76). Community development initiatives should continually be based on increasing the representation of all community members. Increased efforts to explore the connections and contradictions between community-based organizations and

their initiatives to improve low-income neighborhoods may further illuminate the

problems of poverty and segregation in many cities. By analyzing "dilemmas of

activism," we can better understand questions about who benefits from community

activism and/or how to address social issues in low-income communities.

NOTES

[1] Neighborhood "revitalization" is also known as "gentrification" (Lee, Spain, and Umberson 1985:581). Revitalization projects are projects that attempt to rebuild or renew a city or neighborhood.

[2] In this thesis, although I bring to light the various definitions of "gentrification," I utilize Neil Smith's definition as the process through which "poor and working-class neighborhoods in the inner city are refurbished via an influx of private capital and middle-class homebuyers and renters" (1996:32).

[3] "Critics of revitalization argue that the process unfairly rejects former residents and displaces them from their homes at great financial, social, and psychological costs" (Hodge 1981:189).

[4] The political economy model is both the, "attempt to understand the emergence of particular peoples at the conjunction of local and global histories, to place local populations in the larger currents of world history," and "the attempt to constantly place culture in time, to see a constant interplay between experience and meaning in a context in which both experience and meaning are shaped by inequality and domination" (Roseberry 1989:49).

[5] Population demographics for Oak Park were gathered from a report written by Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency titled, *Sacramento Revitalization, Oak Park: The Resurgence of Sacramento's First Suburb.* This is the Oak Park Redevelopment Area 2005 Implementation Plan.

[6] Source of demographic information is the U.S. Census Bureau 2000, Fact Finder, 95817 zip code tabulation area.

[7] Source of demographic information is the U.S. Census Bureau 2000, Fact Finder, 95817 zip code tabulation area.

[8] Data taken from http://www.city-data.com, 95817 Zip Code Detailed Profile.

[9] Pseudonyms are used to keep the anonymity of all informants in this thesis.

[10] Before moving to Oak Park to conduct full-time fieldwork, I conducted part-time fieldwork in the neighborhood for two years.

[11] Neighborhood Association refers to the association I participated in while residing in Oak Park and neighborhood association refers to the general usage of the term.

[12] It was important for me to be truthful in my representation of myself and associate myself as a student. In doing so, I gained important insight into how individuals in the neighborhood perceived my "newcomer status."

[13] "Ghettoization" is the process when groups of people are locked into cities, sometimes into the same cities, and locked into the poverty areas of cities, areas that have poor institutional services and poor housing (Moore 1981:280).

[14] Anderson (1990:167) explains the ghetto symbolizes persistent poverty and imminent danger, personified in the men who walk the streets.

[15] The St. HOPE Corporation is an outgrowth of St. HOPE Academy and was founded in 1989 by basketball star Kevin Johnson, who was raised in Oak Park. The St. HOPE Corporation has since grown into a multi-faceted organization focused on economic, social, and intellectual redevelopment (Simpson 2004:119). In 2008, Kevin Johnson was elected mayor of Sacramento.

[16] Amin and Graham (1997:422) states, "the difference between public spaces as a source of threat and fear, and public spaces as an arena of active civic life rests to a considerable degree on whether they, and the general urban and social and political milieu enveloping them, are spaces of social interaction."

[17] "Being in the city is not about claiming abstract rights or about an essentialized ideal that transcends race, gender, and sex and it is not about an imagined or perfect ideal state shared by all. It is about the right to citizenship for all, the right to shape and influence" (Amin and Thrift 2002:142). Deutsche (1999:195) also argues, "It is about the 'equal right to politics for all people'" (Deutsche 1999:195).

[18] Pseudonyms have been used to keep the anonymity of liquors stores in Oak Park.

[19] A couple of the same Board members who were coordinating the Neighborhood Association meetings from 2005-2006 are currently Board members.

[20] The National Labor Federation (1975) states, "The term unrecognized worker was developed to categorize a third status of workers in the United States who have not yet been recognized as necessitating the same rights and privileges as other workers who have been so recognized. These workers include farm workers, domestic workers, independent contractors, workers in small shops and in business and service arenas, and the unemployed and welfare recipients who are increasingly being forced into point of production arenas."

[21] Not all non-profit organizations are CBOs (community based organizations). For instance, while the Red Cross and National Urban League are non-profits, they are not CBOs. "The non-profits classified as CBOs, are, first of all, 'community-based' in that they are organized around a particular geographic place (i.e., a 'community,' such as an urban neighborhood. CBOs generally *only* operate in their geographic space, which distinguishes geographic CBOs from larger non-profits operating at multiple sites" (Marwell 2004:270).

[22] See http://www.shra.org/Content/AboutSHRA/About.htm.

[23] A pseudonym has been used to keep the anonymity of the news publication. The author of the news articles have also been kept anonymous.

[24] Lu and Fine (1995:535) explain that many of the social places where ethnicity is made 'real' are economically grounded. At festivals, restaurants, art galleries, clothing outlets, and musical venues, 'ethnicity' becomes used as a marketing tool, a part of an entrepreneurial market.

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